

# ROUNDTABLE

## Rise now and be a nation again? The politics of Englishness

*Michael Kenny's The Politics of English Nationhood (OUP, 2014) supplies the first comprehensive overview of the evidence, research and major arguments relating to the recent revival of English identity, exploring its varied, and often overlooked, political ramifications. It examines the difficulties which the major political parties have encountered in dealing with 'the English question' against the backdrop of the diminishing hold of established ideas of British government and national identity in the final years of the last century. And it explores a range of factors – including insecurities generated by economic change, euro-scepticism, and a growing sense of cultural anxiety – which have helped make the renewal of Englishness appealing and imperative. Renewal gathers here some reflections on the book from Michael Kenny and four commentators.*

### **Taking Englishness seriously**

**Michael Kenny**, Professor of Politics, Queen Mary, University of London

Both how the English feel about their national identity and the political implications of these sentiments have become much more widely and publicly debated issues than they were when I first began conducting research into them. The reasons for this are pretty apparent.

First, there's been the rise to prominence of UKIP, a phenomenon which is overwhelmingly English in character and appears to have tapped into a rich vein of populist nationalism. Second, all the main parties are struggling to respond to heightened levels of euro-scepticism. This, of course, is more prevalent in England than elsewhere in the UK. Third, the imminent Scottish referendum has indirectly raised a question that's been simmering on the back burner of British politics for some time: how does the largest nation within the UK, the English, who make up 87 per cent of its total population, now feel about the union?

This interest in Englishness in the political world is relatively new. Most of the time that I've been working on this, the subject has generally been viewed sceptically. 'What does this have to do with politics?' has been a fairly common response. This query reflects, I think, the enduring idea that Englishness is a cultural identity and ought to be kept separate from the loyalty the English people have shown, for the most part, to the British state.

Among progressives, this is translated into the familiar claim that the English never got around to crafting their own form of modern nationalism, and have been happy to remain the subjects of the antiquated British state. Those who did seek to politicise Englishness, it's long been argued, have done so by offering an insular, regressive and nostalgic fantasy. Many on the left continue to see this form of nationhood as politically conservative at best and xenophobic at worst.

In the course of writing this book, I've become increasingly sceptical about these assumptions. They do little, I think, to help us understand the nature and implications of a gathering sense of English identity or the emergence of England, rather than Britain, as the imagined community with which people are increasingly disposed to identify. There has been a considerable, demonstrable growth in the number of people who identify as solely or primarily English and a fairly marked decline in those who see themselves as British rather than English. There's lots of different polling but the most comprehensive poll of all is the census conducted a few years ago, which reported that, when people were forced to choose, 70 per cent of people in England regarded themselves as English, not British.

Recent polling also suggests that many of the English are increasingly disenchanted with the two unions to which England belongs: the EU and the UK. There has, in addition, been a proliferation of political ideas about, and claims upon, an English identity in the last twenty years. These are couched in a range of different ideological registers: populist and conservative, but also radical, liberal, and even occasionally socialist.

I argue, therefore, that we should consider these as competitive contributors to an emerging English imaginary, a rich and complex field of national meaning which endlessly harks back to long-standing myths, stories, and folkish ideas, as all nationalisms do, but which can also sustain a decidedly modern set of sensibilities and ideas among its subjects. There have always been different ways of expressing Englishness, and these reflect some of the geographically-rooted cultures and regional imbalances that have characterised this country.

A further defining feature of this form of national reimagining is the centrality within it of notions of place, locality, and landscape, the sense that the values and traditions associated with these are under threat, either from the globalised marketplace or from the large bureaucratic state. That sense of threat is a defining impulse within current forms of Englishness and is evoked in a very wide range of writings on the internet, in the media, and in a lot of cultural works. The iconic example of the latter is Jez Butterworth's play *Jerusalem*.

The origins of this complex shift in consciousness, I argue, lie in the years before devolution. Its roots and underlying dynamics stem from a combination of the early wave of euro-scepticism, the early 1990s, the significant forms of dislocation associated with the rapid transition to a post-industrial economy, and a waning of confidence among the political and cultural elites in the economic and political prospects for the UK. These different factors interacted to render England a more organic and resonant identification, a trend that has developed for the most part under the radar of party politics. Taking the even longer view, it becomes clearer that this is a long-running process. The last twenty years look like the latest and most dramatic phase of a process that I would suggest began sixty or seventy years ago, as Britain waned, both as an imperial state and also as a viable state-nation.

In the decade that followed these trends in the 1990s, Labour's championing of a liberal British nationhood may well have accentuated the appeal of forms of Englishness that expressed the sense of recoil against the political elite, increasingly perceived as metropolitan, out of touch, and condescending towards popular sensibilities. There are interesting and, as yet, unexplored parallels between the populist currents that broke into the political systems of numerous European countries in the last few years, and a shift towards a sense of ethnic majority nationalism among sections of the English public.

But there are differences too. While it remains true that most people from ethnic minority backgrounds are much more likely to identify as British than as English, there are intriguing signs that things may be changing in some of these communities too, though much more slowly and partially.

Various studies also suggest that white English people are far more likely to see their non-white neighbours as being co-nationals but are highly unlikely to think in this way of those from Muslim backgrounds. The increasing focus, which I chart in the book, upon the development of a multicultural sense of English nationhood,

carries a particular significance if the challenge of forging a civic English nationhood is ultimately to be embraced.

In order to grasp the kinds of resentment, anxiety, and hope that have been expressed through reference to English identity, I cast my net widely in terms of evidence and data writing the book. Frankly, at times it felt too wide, as this is a topic on which there is a voluminous range of material. While I have charted the endless polling on these issues that's taken place over the last two decades, I've also been drawn to make use of ethnographic and sociological studies and explored expressions of Englishness in many different parts of public culture. I've found that it has been in the worlds of cultural production, the arts, and popular culture that the quest for an English nationhood has been most powerfully expressed and negotiated.

There are clear signs of rising English grievance on such issues as the West Lothian question – the question of the anomalous position of Scottish MPs and their voting rights on English matters in the House of Commons – as well as the question of the distribution of public expenditure across the constituent territories of the UK. Yet it is tempting and I think misleading to overstate the populist cast of Englishness. For most people, being English and British remains an unexceptional fact, but the hyphen between these terms – Anglo-British is a clunky way of describing this form of identification – has come to acquire a much greater weight and significance as the English people are, contrary to expectations, starting to develop the kind of dual identification which has long been observed of, for instance, the Scots.

What then are the implications of these shifts for the political and policy communities that are primarily responsible for the governance of England? This, it seems to me, is an impossible question to answer with any degree of certainty at present. Some see the right answer as a separate parliament for the English; others favour some form of reform to the House of Commons – perhaps 'English votes for English laws'. Others, again, recommend the radical devolution of power within England. You might even extend this into the debate about Europe, where clearly, for some people, the holding of a referendum is one way of registering and responding to the rise of English grievance. There are a growing number of definitive answers to the English question.

My own conclusion is less straightforward and perhaps less satisfying. Before we can identify the most likely or desirable answers to the English question, we need to understand the disparate and fragmented character of contemporary Englishness and consider the prospect for a medley of different kinds of reforms, be these constitutional, cultural, or democratic in kind.

There are, I would suggest, important connections between deepening disenchantment with politicians and the political system in this period, and the growing appeal of an English vernacular. It may well be that reconnecting people with politics may be one part of a larger, complicated, and probably quite messy answer, if there is such a thing, to this question. Above all, policy-makers need to consider whether making the English feel more engaged with the union and allowing them a greater sense of recognition for their own nationhood may actually be the surest way of preserving this entity over the longer term.

## Englishness and the dilemmas of political leadership

**Nick Pearce**, Director of the Institute for Public Policy Research

Michael Kenny has written a very important book. It is clear that there has been a rise in English political identity and a politicisation of English identity in recent years. The work that my colleague Guy Lodge and others have done at IPPR in the Future of England survey shows that very clearly (Lodge et al., 2012).

It's also important because for the first time, a political theorist has integrated perspectives from different disciplines – history, political theory, political science – and brought together reflections on culture and cultural change with an analysis of our political institutions and politics. That's very important, because just examining the politics of Englishness, without recognising these deeper cultural currents, misses many dimensions of the question. Conversely, thinking about cultural identity and the expressive dimensions of political life, without bringing them back into an understanding of politics, leads towards a form of populism.

The first thing I want to draw attention to is the conclusion, where Kenny cites Orwell, and discusses the pessimistic sentiment that you often get in the debate about Englishness – that with the abandonment of empire the English should retreat from broader entanglements and avoid grandiose modern enterprises.

You may remember Enoch Powell famously argued, when his beloved India became independent, that 'the Anglo-Saxon people' had to retreat to England, to the homeland, and take up the baton of their sovereignty there. Orwell says, in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, that the retreat of imperial England – though he approved of it – would inevitably reduce England 'to a cold and unimportant little island, where we shall all have to work very hard and live mainly on herrings and potatoes.'

The sense that the English can only be true to themselves and their culture by resisting the forces of, causes of, and entanglements with the wider world, as Kenny argues, remains a powerful cultural impulse. I think that at the heart of this is the sense of sovereignty which animates the English. It's noticeable that in much of continental Europe in the post-war period, precisely to prevent a retreat to fascism and authoritarianism, the executive governments of the emergent post-war democracies were overlaid with checks and balances. That wasn't the case here; we emerged from the war with a unified sense of popular sovereignty expressed in parliamentary sovereignty. We, and our political elites in particular, found it very hard to come to terms with the loss of that sovereignty. This, I think, explains a great deal about euro-scepticism: we can't adjust ourselves to the notion of some sharing of our sovereignty with other European partners, or to the sense that we are not, as it were, kings in our own land. You see this sentiment a lot in conservative and populist discourse about Englishness. The response is not, of course, to argue that you should seek to restore a unified sovereignty, but to try to respond to the democratic deficit that it also expresses. The sense of democratic disempowerment of the English, I think, is an important and powerful one and needs to be addressed.

The second issue that's very important in Kenny's book is that he evokes a capacious Englishness for this imagined community. It is one with many different currents; he talks about 'a prospective civic nationality among the English' being 'likely to emanate from conservative, as well as liberal, sources' (Kenny, 2014, 241). That's a crucial point; if you want to respond to this rise of cultural and political Englishness by recognising it has many different dimensions and seeking to take it in directions which are more open, and tolerant, and progressive, then understanding that many of its co-ordinates will be conservative, as well as liberal, is very important, particularly for people on the left. It implies that some of the hostility to and denigration of Little England has to be reassessed.

I think there are some big implications for the future in what Kenny argues, firstly for political leadership. Cultural politics and the expressive dimension of politics are very hard for political leaders and politicians to get their heads round. I've also enjoyed Jez Butterworth's plays, *Dr Dee* at the English National Opera, the folk revival, PJ Harvey's albums and so forth. These trends are very important, but they're hard for politicians to respond to: what does it mean to be a political leader who can understand those cultural shifts and harness them?

Of course, populist politicians can claim an authenticity precisely by *not* being responsible politicians. They can say, 'we are responsive, we claim to speak for the people', but in so doing eschew the difficult business of responsible government.

Politicians today are increasingly caught in this tension between wanting to be responsive to the populations that they seek to serve and at the same time fiscally responsible, responsible in how they govern, responsible to their partners, responsible to other multi-national agencies and alliances to which they belong. This tension between responsiveness and responsibility is a very difficult one for them to navigate and implies a very different kind of political leadership, one that is better able to work with civil society, is more open to other political traditions, is more aware of its limitations, and more aware of how it might share power with others.

Populists can ignore all that, precisely because they claim not to be responsible. For example, in the case of the Five Star Movement in Italy, standing on a manifesto and then refusing to serve in the government on the basis of that manifesto, offers the paradigmatic example of authenticity bought at a price of irresponsibility. The challenge for politicians today of being both responsive and responsible is a very important one.

Kenny examines the implications of Englishness for the state in great detail. I don't share Tom Nairn's and Perry Anderson's dismissal of 'Ukania', the notion that the British state is irredeemably antiquated and has no future. The United Kingdom is very important, but the dynamics of reform are now unstoppable. The UK needs reshaping and that will have to take, in some part, federal dimensions, although that raises a very difficult set of questions. Certainly for the English, it must involve all Englishmen and women; we need, as they used to say at the beginning of the twentieth century, 'home rule all round'. I don't think that means an English parliament, because of the problematic nature of such a parliament co-existing with others in the union, but I do think it means more English devolution to our cities and counties. There needs to be a much firmer push towards responding to the rise in English sentiment by devolving more power.

Finally, for the left, I think Kenny very convincingly shows that the attempt to create a civic British identity, by my former boss at Number 10, Gordon Brown, and others, was a failure. It was too thin and didn't attach itself to any real currents in society. We need to rethink these issues on the left, and responding to Englishness must be part of that. It is to the credit of the Blue Labour group in the Labour Party that they have tried to register these concerns, and to renew an attachment to English

socialist and Labour traditions. My concern about how they do that is that they exclude many of the liberal and other parts of that tradition. I think in order fully to respond to Englishness, an appreciation of the interweaving of liberal and social democratic or Labour traditions is very important. That is something that has to be taken forward by the centre-left as a project. People like Jon Cruddas, John Denham and others who raise these concerns are onto something important.

The danger for the Labour Party if it remains the defender of a status quo settlement, whether it's in Scotland, Wales, or in England, is that the bastions of that settlement will crumble, just as they did for the post-war Keynesian settlement in the 1980s. Unless they attach themselves to some rising forces in our society, including the rising sense of Englishness, they will, I'm afraid, be on the wrong side of history. It's therefore a very important theme for people on the left to get right.

## **An opportunity for the left?**

**Matthew d'Ancona**, columnist for the *Evening Standard*

It's quite rare that you can say not only that you enjoyed a book but that it changed your thinking on a subject. The reason this book did that is that I have a reflex response to the concept or category of Englishness, which, if I'm brutally honest, has a lot to do with my personal background as much as any rational thinking. I'm Maltese by background; my father came here and settled. I think of myself as a Londoner and as a Briton. Growing up in South London, the English flag was very rarely seen, except, I remember, vividly brandished by the League of St George, a variant on the National Front and one of the many fascist organisations that arose then.

I'd always thought that English was a much less attractive way of denoting the identity of the country I lived in than Britishness. Englishness was associated with, it seemed to me, an exclusive identity, and tended to be an angry reflex against change. It tended to have a smallness about it; it was pinched and quite Lenten, whereas Britishness I associated with porousness, with confidence, with pluralism, things that I liked about living here.

Also, whenever England was discussed, it was discussed in elegiac terms, whether it was the Sex Pistols singing, 'there's no future in England's dreaming', or a fewer decibels lower, Roger Scruton, whose book, which Michael Kenny references, suggests that England is fit only for elegiac treatment.

I think, therefore, that there was a strong cultural dimension to this. I've mentioned the Sex Pistols, but I think that The Smiths also contributed to the idea that England was not only miserable but dying, whereas Britain, co-terminously, seemed to be doing the opposite. Naturally, one wanted to be part of the bit that was growing, prosperous, and open-minded, which was Britain and Britishness.

Nick Pearce mentioned his former boss's attempt to corral these ideas into some sort of format, and I have to put my cards on the table and say that I was part of that enterprise. Gordon Brown asked me to edit a book on Britishness, which I did. It certainly illustrated the problem that arose for all of those who were doing what I and many others were trying to do, which was to capture Britishness in a sense that didn't just end up with a series of, frankly, meaningless bromides: being nice to people and believing in the NHS, which is admirable but doesn't get you very far.

I'd reached, before reading Michael Kenny's book, something of an impasse on this subject. So it's a well-timed book, and a very distinguished contribution to a debate that's been fermenting for some time. We needed a book like this, because in all sorts of ways and at all sorts of levels of intellectual and emotional engagement we are, I think, interrogating our identity on these islands.

There is, straightforwardly, the Scottish referendum; there may be an EU referendum; I tend to the view actually that that is more likely than not. My understanding of the Miliband pledge is that if you look at the legal niceties within it, it is probable that it will, at the very least, trigger judicial review and we might well end up with a referendum almost by accident. That is yet another aspect to all this, but more immediately we have had the unlikely scenario of Nick Clegg and Nigel Farage debating Europe, but of course debating really what we're talking about on this roundtable as well. These are prisms through which we are looking at the same questions about who we are and what we are in different forms.

Nick Pearce raised the issue of identity politics and the importance of the left not being left behind. I think that's true, in fact, across the spectrum. In the same way as in the late 1970s and early 1980s it was quite clear that there were a series of tectonic economic and geo-political issues that you either were aware of or you weren't, I think that much the same is going on at the moment in terms of identity.

There are a number of reasons why this is so. One is that globalisation has lost its capacity to trigger deference. That's not to say that it's about to end, as some would wish, but the background noise of globalisation as a reliable source of democratisa-

tion and growing prosperity has gone because of the crash. We are increasingly unsure what to do with it or about it, and that in turn makes us wonder what role the nation state or unions of nation states have in contributing to our lives and shaping our daily existence.

At the same time, just as globalisation is – I’m not going to say, ‘in crisis’, because people always say everything is ‘in crisis’ – under scrutiny, we’re witnessing a radical localisation of daily life. By that, I’m not referring to town halls but to the way in which people exist, to widespread individualisation, and also to changes in the formation of communities, whether virtual or real, and the way that they take decisions. That ranges from Academies and Free Schools, to the way that people shop. These are extremely important changes in the way that we live and they affect not only consumer behaviour but behaviour full stop. If one is trying to assess what a country is now, and how it shapes its future, you have to take account of all these forces.

We live in a world of porous identities; the role of nationhood isn’t clear, but it’s obviously undergoing change. What was most uplifting about the book was the positive clarion call to reclaim Englishness. There’s been a bit of this in popular culture since Euro ’96: that, really, was the moment when the St George’s flag started to be decontaminated, to be hung in windows or in taxicabs. That may sound a cosmetic and trivial example, but I actually think quite the opposite; it’s very important.

This has led to the Blue Labour phenomenon – which Nick Pearce has already alluded to – an attempt on the left to get somewhere in the debate over what Englishness is. Jon Cruddas is an extremely important part of that. Ed Miliband made an attempt in a speech at the Royal Festival Hall a couple of years ago, which I think could fairly be described as ‘a work in progress’. It wasn’t clear to me that any of the values that he identified as ‘English’ could not also be described as ‘British’, but one has to give him credit for trying, because this is an issue that I think the Conservatives won’t go within a million miles of, for the simple reason that in their hearts they think of themselves as the English party but cannot possibly advertise the fact. There is, perhaps, an opportunity for the left to fill that vacuum.

I want to finish with, again, my personal response to the book; I think the reason I found it uplifting (not something you can honestly say often about a scholarly book), is that it made me think that perhaps I’d been looking at it the wrong way round: that the British identity of, as Michael Kenny puts it, ‘clubs, codes, and commerce’ has actually been underpinned all along by an English ideal of generosity, diversity

and, as he put it, 'Arcadianism' that is rooted in place, but not in some Teutonic notion of *Heimat* or ethnicity, but something much more open.

That's a tantalising way to approach Englishness. It is, by definition, a question rather than an answer, but that doesn't mean it's not worth asking; quite the opposite. Towards the end, Kenny says that 'Englishness is open to political appropriation.' That is a challenge and a warning. You only need to look at the flourishing of groups on the right to realise that it's very important for the centre-right and the left to weigh into the debate on Englishness, because the worst possible thing to happen would be for the debate, which is undoubtedly going to continue, to happen by default. I am persuaded, then, that what used to be called 'Little England' could be big.

## The British question

**Andrew Gamble**, Professor of Politics, Queen's College, Cambridge

There's a lot to say about this book; reclaiming Englishness is a very interesting project. I gather that when David Cameron rang Vladimir Putin to remonstrate about Crimea, all that Putin would talk about was Scotland!

I was pleased to see on the BBC website recently that a movement has been launched in Donetsk to return Donetsk to England, on the grounds apparently that it was founded by someone from Wales. We are confused, so it's understandable that people in Donetsk might be confused as well. But there is a serious point here, that the problems of post-imperial unions do sometimes take much uglier forms than we're seeing in Britain.

Michael Kenny's insistence that the revival of Englishness is more than just a response to devolution is very important. As he emphasises, the response to the European Union has clearly been one of the main drivers of a new sense of Englishness: think of the famous Metric Martyrs, who said, 'I am English; I am not European.'

Some of the most interesting material in the book relates to culture and the way that cultural shifts have occurred: flags, sport, and national myths. Kenny highlights the number of people who have said, 'the English have no national myths', when actually the problem is that the English are dripping with national myths! So the book, it seems to me, is a series of correctives to a whole lot of misconceptions about England and the English.

In theoretical terms, for me the central point is Kenny's critique of Tom Nairn. It's

very important, because Nairn's view did acquire an authority, particularly in academic treatments of Englishness and of the British state, and whilst I still feel it has many insights, there is also a very important critique to be made of it. Kenny makes that critique, drawing on his previous work on the first New Left; he uses E. P. Thompson very interestingly and also draws on Pocock's critique of Nairn. This gives you a much more interesting view of that whole debate rather than just assuming that Nairn is the final word to say about England and Englishness.

A third point relates to the project of reclaiming Englishness and showing its diversity. The book is extraordinarily rich in that way, showing the conservative and progressive traditions of Englishness. Many different strands have gone into our understanding of what Englishness is, but many of them we are hardly aware of. That's because, as Kenny says, too often our notions of Englishness have been refracted through things like the English Defence League. Englishness has often been pigeonholed in a particular way, which has blotted out its much richer heritage. I'm thoroughly persuaded by this argument about the flexibility of Englishness, about the experimental character of this identity, and about the potential for its development.

Finally, I want to raise a couple of questions. In the conclusion there's a great quotation from John Fowles, who said 'we have to be British and we want to be English' (Kenny, 2014, 235). I thought that was a really interesting formulation, because you could also say, 'the question for the Scots is: do they have to be British but want to be Scottish?' That question goes to the heart of whether alongside reclaiming Englishness there is also still a space for Britain, even at this late stage of the referendum campaign with the polls tightening.

The problem is that so much of the discourse still treats England as the exceptional nation. So long as that is the case and so long as there is, particularly amongst the political elites across the political spectrum, an all-too-easy identification of England with Britain, it makes it very difficult to reinvent Britishness in a form which is likely to hold the United Kingdom together. In some ways the worst possible result in the referendum looks like the one we're heading for – a narrow victory for either the 'Yes' campaign or for the 'No' campaign – which raises huge problems about the legitimacy of the result for the future.

The other point that comes out of the book, which I think is a huge problem for the future, is the way that the political elite – again, across the political spectrum – have lost a certain empathy with ordinary forms of Englishness and so liberal, cosmopolitan ideas and values tend to predominate. I think the wedge which has appeared

between the elites and large numbers of ordinary voters is a worrying feature of our politics. It's something which Nigel Farage is exploiting for all he can get, although of course he is partly, in a sense, of the liberal cosmopolitan elite – but that's how populists always play it.

A lot of the problems, moving forward, come down to the size of England. This is such an unbalanced union that actually the move to devolution caused major problems. We can now see that both John Major and Tam Dalyell were right: if you begin tinkering with this very delicate system of governance, you unleash forces that are very difficult to control. The implications of giving devolution to parts of the United Kingdom and not to the whole, in particular not to England, has now come back to haunt us.

For me, the question of Englishness is also the question of Britain. Britain, for me, stands for broader engagement with the world. The two unions, within the United Kingdom and the union which we're members of in Europe, are at its heart. We're now facing potentially two referendums, and there's a curious symmetry about them. In the Scottish referendum, the Scots are asking to leave the United Kingdom in order to be independent. The people backing a referendum on the European Union want the same thing: independence for the United Kingdom from the rest of Europe. The great difficulty is finding another language in which the different ideas of national identity of Englishness, Scottishness, and Welshness can also co-exist in larger co-operative entities. I think the world is the poorer if we can't sustain unions, if we contract. Michael Kenny's book is an absolutely essential read for everyone grappling with these issues.

## Keeping pace with identity politics

**Judith Bara**, Senior Lecturer in Politics, Queen Mary, University of London

The main aims of Michael Kenny's book are, first, to reveal the limited and/or partisan approach to Englishness that's generally been taken in both academic and public discourse, and, second, to seek insights from other disciplines. He reaches, as he puts it, 'beyond the specialist communities of scholarship' (Kenny, 2014, 3). This is set around, in part, what Kenny dubs (following Anthony Barnett) 'the strange half diffusion of Englishness with Britishness' (Kenny, 2014, 11). It's this incestuous relationship between the two concepts and between the two identities that the book is so successful in addressing.

Furthermore, the analysis shows the limitations of a number of stereotypical views that we find in public discourse: first, that Englishness is the prerogative of the right, which of course it isn't; second, that it's a focus for identity that's meaningful only for white people – the empirical evidence here shows that it clearly isn't that – and, third, that populist Anglo-nationalism is a uni-dimensional phenomenon, as exhibited by its followers in the likes of the EDL, English Democrats, BNP, etc.

In academic inquiry, nationalism is often seen as related to class, or ethnicity, or culture, rather than as the product of a rich mixture of factors that vary across space and time. Moreover, academics have often seen nationalism as falling mainly within the purview of political theorists. Where it is treated empirically, it's often discussed in rather uni-dimensional terms relating to class, to ethnicity, or even geography. Kenny has been very successful in bringing these two traditions within political science together, as well as going beyond them.

Among the important theoretical discussions of national identity is Benedict Anderson's seminal work on imagined communities (1983). In this regard, the imagined community of English nationalists has often been seen as perpetually regressing, based on skewed misperceptions of or a desire to re-establish a former glory, whether real or mythical. Going beyond political science, the work of the sociologist Robin Cohen is commended by Kenny for not adopting a narrow perspective on nationalism. Cohen's work, which was published in 1994, includes several dimensions: class, territoriality, situation, and so on. He suggests very strongly that individual contexts provide a mix of factors and these lead individuals to their own particular interpretation of what it means to be British. Experience of relationships with other people is, thus, a crucial variable in our own consideration of how we see ourselves. Despite providing much-needed breadth to the discussion of what constitutes national identity in principle, Cohen's contribution to this debate nevertheless retains a strong focus on ethnicity and he doesn't stray much beyond talking about Britishness; he doesn't address English national identity. I looked at his index, and the only reference to 'English' is actually to the company 'English Electric'.

From an empirical perspective, many studies have concentrated not simply on discovering how people view themselves in terms of their national identity, but have tried to analyse this in terms of class and/or race and ethnicity. A very interesting subset of such empirical studies is the degree to which race and ethnicity interacts with national identity. For example, between 1997 and 2007, the British Social Attitudes Survey reported that the percentage of white people favouring the descrip-

tion of themselves as ‘English’ has risen from 35 per cent to 44 per cent, whereas the figure for black ethnic minorities was exactly the same in 1997 as it was in 2007, and that was 5 per cent.

The danger – and I speak as an empiricist here – of focusing too much on statistics lies in what this comparison doesn’t show, because if you look at moments in between 1997 and 2007, you find that in 1999 the proportion of black ethnic minorities describing themselves as ‘English’ rather than ‘British’ went up to 15 per cent, only to drop back again to 7 per cent in 2003. It doesn’t take much imagination to discover why this might have been the case. At least 50 per cent of black ethnic minority people favoured ‘British’ identity throughout the decade investigated, but both empirical and anecdotal evidence suggests that there has been a change of sorts here. When asked about attachment to England in the British Social Attitudes Survey, for example, in 2006 75 per cent of Black Caribbeans identified with or had an attachment to England and over 85 per cent of Asians did. Kenny cites the broadcaster George Alagiah giving voice to this sort of sentiment, when Alagiah stated that he and his family, ‘now called England home, because this is the place where we grew up and where we are most comfortable’ (Kenny, 2014, 104). That’s still some way from saying that they are English, or that England is the focus of their national identity.

Another observation to emerge from Kenny’s work is the absence of England from some of the key discussions of national identity within the UK which focus essentially on the nature of Britishness. We’ve already heard that it’s a feature which seems to have infected efforts by prominent politicians and governments over the years; in addition to Brown’s Britishness we had Blair’s Cool Britannia. That might not have been seen as quite such a failure, but it wasn’t a roaring success either.

Many years ago, I attended a seminar on the subject of national identity given by the former Plaid Cymru MP, now a member of the Welsh Assembly and the House of Lords, Dafydd Elis-Thomas. He argued that national identity was akin to an onion. An onion is composed of different layers, and he took out his passport to illustrate this. He said: ‘I have three national identities.’ There was no devolution at that time, but he was born in Wales, so that was his evidence for a Welsh identity. The fact that he was a citizen of the United Kingdom was attested by the fact that the United Kingdom authorities had issued the passport, and he was also a citizen of Europe, because this was one of the – at the time, fairly new – ‘European’ passports that we are all able now to enjoy.

In the light of the establishment of the devolved assemblies, a number of questions have emerged, although obviously Englishness, Britishness, and identity are not confined to the post-1990 or post-1999 period. The West Lothian question, or the English question, indeed, depending on how you look at it, has become much more pressing since the establishment of the devolved assemblies.

Personal identity politics, particularly in a post-materialist or post-modern culture, are seen increasingly as a basis for shaping views on a number of issues. These same views are also undoubtedly still shaped by factors such as class, race, or ethnicity, education, place of residence and so on. The field of play here increasingly encompasses culture in both its artistic and social anthropological senses. The exponential growth in the incursion of media, new and old, into people's lives informs the shaping of their views on their national identity. Often politicians, as well as academic observers, have not kept up with the pace at which this change has impacted on people, nor, as has been already pointed out, the pace that it might impact on frontline politics. Mainstream parties have certainly appeared disinclined to get to grips with such changes, be they a function of devolution or shifts in terms of how people view politicians and gauge their own sense of political efficacy. One thing is certain: after the referendum on Scottish independence, the parties will have to take stock, as things will not return to the status quo ante, whatever the outcome.

Michael Kenny has done us an enormous service: he has provided a scholarly, reflective and readable discussion, which serves well as a basis for the development of new types of study, encompassing both theoretical and empirical approaches. Of course, many questions remain unanswered and we don't necessarily have sufficient material available with which to answer them yet. Sometime in the future, when we do have that information, hopefully it will present him with an opportunity to look at this again.

## Reply

### Michael Kenny

First, I want to say how grateful I am to all four commentators, particularly for the range of issues that they have raised. I will pick up on one issue that arose in each of these four contributions.

Nick Pearce makes a really important point about political leadership. Thinking about these issues in relation to political leadership opens up a different, crucial set of questions. The so-called English question is not just about providing a new

settlement at the level of constitutional policy. Whilst the general thrust of the argument in the book is to say, 'there's been too little engagement from Westminster parties on this issue', I also think it needs to be said that it is incredibly difficult to do so because it's very easy to be perceived as inauthentic. It's so easy to get identity politics wrong. One of the real problems here is how to construct a politics that engages with Englishness that is not just about gestures, or things that feel showy or patronising. Nick Pearce's question, about what kind of political leadership is appropriate here, seems to me very pertinent therefore.

My sense is that leadership on this is going to have to come from beyond Westminster. England still has an extremely rich and dense civil society. We have lots of public institutions that exist at a certain distance from government. There is also the question of the role of the media and of institutions like the BBC in shaping cultural policy. There are lots of different forms of leadership that might well be shown in this area.

Matthew D'Ancona offered a fascinating set of reflections and I empathise with the biographical points he made. I want to underline one thing he said: it's very tempting to get lost in the exceptionalism in which Englishness is often shrouded – so perhaps we ought to be thinking about the degree to which Englishness is more typical than exceptional. The growth in English identity is, in fact, an instance of a wider trend towards people wanting to identify with communities of sentiment below the level of the state. They're doing so in part because of the shift in attitudes to globalisation, and on account of growing insecurity and inequality, at the same time as political elites seem evermore tied to the projects of multi-national alliances, and to forms of co-operation which require actions that go beyond the nation-state. I'm just stating a problem here: this is a fantastically difficult trend at this juncture for policy-makers to deal with.

Andrew Gamble raises a question that I leave hanging in the book but which I've wondered about a lot since writing it: what does this mean for Britain? What kind of British identity reflects the development in policy terms of a more decentralised union? What sort of collective identity might bind us together in a remodelled UK? My own view is that emphasising Englishness in the way I have leads me to think that we need to consider these questions of Britishness too. There are very few people who actually want England and Englishness recognised in a way that splits us up from the union. That view may grow, but I would estimate that it's only about 20 per cent of the English public who hold it now.

What this suggests is a double movement to address Englishness, but also to reform the union *and* to think about what it is that we have in common and how we capture that and express it in institutional terms, and in a sense of common purpose.

Finally, Judith Bara mentions ethnicity. She is quite right to pick out the problematic nature of polling in this area. I'm pretty convinced that the polling data is useful, but its uses are limited. That's one of the reasons I tried to draw upon qualitative work, looking much more at the meanings of English nationhood for different groups of people. On ethnicity particularly, I think it is clearly true that the headline figure here is that there hasn't been any major surge towards this form of identification. But there are all sorts of interesting signs that within particular communities, especially amongst younger generations of some ethnic communities, people are more likely to identify with England as a place to which they belong.

So I am grateful to all four commentators for these contributions. As they have well illustrated, there are some major questions that need to be asked about English identity – what it means for people, why it has become more salient in recent years and whether there has emerged a common understanding of Englishness – before we proceed towards potential answers to the English question. The more that I have myself studied this topic, the more I am convinced that our rather weak levels of understanding of it constitute one of the major obstacles to the development of the kind of flexible and imaginative responses that policy-makers and politicians will need when they come – as they inevitably will – to engage these issues.

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