



# DISCOURSES OF NATIONAL IDENTITY AND INTEGRATION IN ENGLAND AND IN SCOTLAND

Susan Condor and Mark Faulkner

Department of Psychology,  
Lancaster University,  
Lancaster, UK

## Introduction

A recent study of bureaucratic discourse France and in Britain has pointed to the existence of incommensurable 'public philosophies' of nationhood, citizenship and integration between the two States (Favell, 1998). For present purposes we will simply note a few key features that Favell argues are characteristic of 'public philosophy' concerning nationality, citizenship and ethnicity in Britain.

First is a conception of citizenship in which national status ("being British") is treated as matter of passive of subject-status (cf. Cohen, 1994), and in which the status of the individual as citizen does not depend on political participation, identity or commitment. Second, and relatedly, a particular form of imagined relation between the individual and the State, based on values of negative liberty (a protection of the individual from undue intervention on the part of the State). Third is a conception of Britain as a Multi-racial and multi-cultural society. Ideally (if not always in practice) this involves a "national self-conception unsullied...by any racial or cultural specifics" (p. 102). Fourth is the existence of a ('Whiggish') version of history, which presents the British State as adaptive to changing historical circumstances; a narrative of incremental progress towards the expansion of rights and membership.

Favell argues these assumptions are manifested in a cross-party consensus representing issues pertaining to immigration and ethnicity as (i) matters of public order (e.g. 'race relations'); (ii) matters of negative liberty, and tolerance of diversity, instantiated in assumptions concerning the rights of separate 'ethnic minorities' to retain their cultural identity.

According to Favell, this form of public philosophy differs from the French model, which draws upon Republican ideas of citizenship, often represented in a narrative which locates their origins in the Third Republic. In this form of representation, the nation is understood as a "people", citizenship to involve a subjective sense of commitment, and integration of newcomers is seen to be accomplished through assimilation.

The present paper addresses two questions. First, we shall consider the relationship between the forms of elite discourse considered by Favell, and the everyday discourse (or "commonsense philosophies") of ordinary social actors. That systematic differences may exist between elite and everyday forms of national representation has been illustrated by discourse analytic work in other national contexts (e.g. Wodak et al., 1999). Although some influential discursive approaches to national representation in the UK presume a priori that an analysis of elite (political or media) discourses may substitute for analyses of lay forms of social representation

(e.g. Billig, 1995; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001), it would nevertheless appear necessary to subject everyday accounts of nationhood to independent analytic scrutiny.

Second we shall question whether it is necessarily useful to presuppose the existence of a singular "British" commonsense philosophy of nationhood. Although Favell details differences between (formal) French and British constructions of Statehood and citizenship, he tends to overlook one potentially important difference: the fact that Britain constitutes a multi-national State. Even prior to recent changes in the British constitution, Scotland has always had a semi-autonomous administrative system, including an independent education system, judiciary, local government and church establishment (MacCormick, 1998; Paterson, 1994). The question of whether understandings of nationhood and citizenship may change as a consequence of the process of devolution is likely to become increasingly important over the next few years. For the purposes of this paper, however, we shall consider some data on commonsense constructions of nationhood in England and Scotland collected prior to the setting up of the Scottish Parliament.

### Commonsense philosophies of nationhood in England and in Scotland

#### *The Data*

The data from England were sampled from a database of 210 transcripts from interviews conducted between 1995-8 (see Condor, 2000). The data from Scotland came from a smaller-scale study, conducted in 1997, using similar interviewing techniques to those employed in England. In order to ensure comparability between the two working samples, a sub-sample of 35 respondents was selected from each of the data sets. All of these respondents were white, middle-class, urban-resident, born in their country of residence, and aged 23-55. Care was taken to include respondents who varied in terms of their expressed political party support.

#### *Analysis*

Analysis employed a combination of techniques including frame analysis and a variant of membership categorization analysis, with a view to identifying commonsense philosophies of nationhood. "Commonsense" was understood in two ways, both of which derived from Billig's (e.g. 1987) social psychological account. First, common-sense was understood to pertain to objective regularities in respondents' accounts. Second, common-sense was also seen to be a matter of participants' own orientations to aspects of their accounts as common-knowledge.

The data were originally approached as a single set. However, in the course of analysis, clear patterns of similarity within and difference between the data collected in Scotland and in England emerged. Specifically, analysis indicated that the respondents from England tended to orient to issues of nationhood in a manner broadly similar to those forms of representation which Favell outlined as features of British public philosophy. In contrast, respondents from Scotland often produced accounts which had more in common with Favell's account of French (civic Republican) public philosophies.

#### *Nationality and national identity*

In England, respondents typically oriented to nationality or citizenship as a given. Speakers often presented their own nationality as a matter of simple

recognition of an objective status. Other aspects of nationhood as an aspect of subjective identity (such as a sense of being like or being for other nationals) tended to be treated as normatively accountable. Hence, for example, respondents would often qualify a claim to national self-identity, by treating this as a matter of simple recognition of objective ontological status, and by disclaiming any subjective sense of salience, pride or chauvinism:

**Extract 1**

I Would you call yourself English?

R I suppose I would also say British too

I Why English?

R I suppose because I was born here and my Mum and Dad and back as far as I know. In fact, my Dad's family even all came from the same village. I think I've got a great Aunt or someone who's Irish, but that's about all. I wouldn't say, like, that's something that I particularly identify with or even think about and it's not 'whah, English! that's me!' or anything

In total, of the 29 examples of self-identification as British or English identified in the England data, 11 included some attempt to warrant the claim with reference to external authority and 12 involved a downgrading of the claim as a technical matter-of-birth. In addition, we identified 22 instances in which a claim to a status as English or British was immediately preceded by an attempt to disclaim any further national sentiment or commitment.

In Scotland, nationality was more usually treated as a question of identity, commitment, and culture. In particular, it was unusual for a speaker to attempt to soften a claim to a status as Scottish by suggesting that this was merely a statement of fact (three instances in 35 interviews). In fact, it was more usual for respondents to attempt to work up a claim to Scottish identity with an display of national sentiment and commitment:

**Extract 2**

I'm Scottish, I'm proud to be Scottish. I'd never call myself British because to my mind Scottish is more than just being English [...] we have a different outlook, a different way of seeing things, different values. I'm happy that we have such a strong identity

*Nation and culture*

In England, notions of singular national culture were treated as accountable, and all of the respondents at some stage oriented to values of cultural diversity. People with liberal-left political affiliations often treated ethnic diversity as symbolic of a progressive society:

**Extract 3**

It just doesn't make much sense nowadays to talk about a British national character. What is a British national character? And who is British for that matter? Maybe there was a time in the past when, OK, that may have made

sense, but not any more. We're a complete mixture now, a multi-cultural society, and we should be thinking about the modern world, the world we live in now, and not some stereotype of the past. We've moved on since then.

Six of the 13 respondents who supported the Conservative party also articulated views of this type, although they were more inclined to focus on the ways in which ethnic diversity contributed to an interesting environment (see extract 6, below). In addition, people espousing a variety of different political attitudes often invoked the fact and value of individualism in such a way as to undermine assumptions and values of a singular national culture (17 instances from 13 respondents):

**Extract 4**

I'm British, but at the end of the day we're all individuals, and nationality tells you very little. You'll find as many types of British people as there are people living here. To my mind, yes I'm British, but that's not what matters. I'm an individual, and my own person, and that's what matters, not where I happened to be born.

In Scotland, respondents were much more inclined to orient to values of community and commonality. Although respondents occasionally qualified their accounts of common national character with statements such as "of course, one must not generalise", it was usual for the gist of these accounts to involve an assertion of a common (usually Scottish) character or way of life.

References to a common national heritage were also more common in the interviews conducted in Scotland. In the England interviews, only 5 references to a shared cultural heritage were identified. In contrast, 22 of the 35 respondents in the Scotland sample spontaneously used images of a national people sharing a common history:

**Extract 5**

I'm proud of a lot of things. I suppose I'm proud of our history. I'm proud of the influence that Scots have had over the world. I'm proud of the fact that we have always had a good reputation as innovators and leaders. Some of the tartanry I can do without. But I do like the idea that we have inherited a culture and a way of doing things which means we have a different outlook, a different way of doing things.

*Dealing with differences: Norms of accommodation vs assimilation*

In the data collected in England, the normative response to questions of ethnic diversity and immigration was one of "tolerance" and accommodation (and possibly even of adaptation on the part of the majority). As illustrated in extract 3, cultural diversity could be oriented to as a marker of liberty, modernity and progress. More generally, values of accommodation of difference could be articulated in conjunction with values of individualism and negative liberty:

**Extract 6**

It's a question of live and let live, as far as I'm concerned. At the end of the day it's not for anyone to tell anyone else how to live their life. I think that there can be an issue if people come here and start telling us what to do. But as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else, then it adds to the quality of life, I think. Personally, I like to see people wearing different clothes, and to have all the different sorts of foods and smells, and to hear people speaking different languages. It makes things more interesting, I think.

Respondents with liberal-left political views in particular tended to view assimilationist discourses as indicative of "racism"

**Extract 7**

Then you get people like my Dad going on about Sheikhs not wearing crash helmets or whatever, as if that makes a difference to him. And complaining about people not speaking English, but when he lived in Spain for a couple of years he never spoke a word of Spanish, never ate Spanish food, nothing. So why he can't see that other people might be similarly attached to their own cultures, and not want to have to give them up just because they're living here, I don't know. Just racism I suppose.

In contrast, many of the respondents in Scotland argued for the assimilation of newcomers and their families into an existing Scottish culture. The fact that these statements were generally made without hedging or qualification suggests that they were being oriented to as normative by the speakers concerned:

**Extract 8**

I think it's also something you see when people come to live here [...] they are envious of our strong culture and they want to become part of the culture. And that I think is a good thing, because I think if someone comes into a country and takes an interest in it, learns about its history, I think they integrate more quickly and find [sic] it easier to fit in with the way of life here.

Twenty of the Scotland respondents suggested that incomers generally needed to "adapt" and try to "fit in" with established ways of life. Twelve mentioned this with respect to English "incomers" and ten mentioned this explicitly in relation to ethnic minority "immigrants". Four respondents specifically mentioned the "problems" potentially caused by people from Moslem cultures attempting to "hang on" to their own customs:

**Extract 9**

What can sometimes cause problems, I think, is when people from Pakistan encourage their children to keep to their traditional culture. On the one hand, you can't say everyone should be protestant, but Islam does bring with it various cultural demands, it includes strictures which means that it can make it difficult for people to really integrate. And I think when people can integrate, that's fine. But when they can't, then it is hard for them to work out exactly who they are, and how they can contribute to society.

One interesting finding pertained to the way in which some of the respondents in Scotland represented ethnic relations “South of the Border”. Five respondents noted how ethnic minorities in England tended to be less integrated than those in Scotland, and glossed this as a marker of a greater (racist) social distance between ethnic groups in England:

**Extract 10**

Pakistanis here, it’s like they’re more integrated, you know. It’s like there’s less racism, because here you’ll hear someone speaking with a Glasgow accent, and you’ll look up, and they’ll be Asian or Black. But in England that doesn’t happen. Asian people there keep their accents, they don’t have cockney accents or Yorkshire. And they live more in ghettos, and keep with their own traditions, rather than being fully accepted into the community.

...Divided by a common language

Associated with these different orientations to issues pertaining to nationality, culture, history and diversity there were marked differences in the use of vocabulary between the two samples. For reasons of economy of expression we shall simply summarize some of the main differences:

*Nation/culture/race/racism*

In the England interviews, the terms “nation” and “culture” were often treated as references to race. No examples of this tendency were found in the data collected in Scotland. In England, the term “racism” was usually used to refer to ethnocentrism or an insensitivity to ethnic difference (cf. “cultural nationalism”). In Scotland, the term “racism” was used mainly to refer to discrimination based on skin-colour, and “ethnic prejudice” was understood to refer to discrimination on the basis of “blood” rather than culture.

*Britain/British*

It is widely recognized that the term “British” has been (Samuel, 1998) and continues to be (Parekh, 2000) associated with a range of different connotations. What has been less widely recognized is that the term may have very different connotations for people living in Scotland and in England.

In England, when defined explicitly, the category “Britain” was used to indicate the four component territories of the UK. “British” was generally construed as a category capable of accommodating cultural [both national and ethnic] diversity, and its use was seen as consistent with normative concerns over multiculturalism:

**Extract 11**

I Why? [do you prefer to use the term British rather than English]  
R British is more inclusive, whereas English isn’t everyone, it’s just some people and not others. But everyone is British, it doesn’t matter what colour you are, or where you were born. We’re all British.

In Scotland, when defined explicitly, the term “Britain” was used primarily to signify the (Scotland-England) Union. Respondents often presented an identity as Scottish in explicit contrast to an identity as British (see extract 2). Even when respondents did not do this, they often oriented to the possibility that such a distinction might be inferred:

**Extract 12**

I’m Scottish, but I’m also British, and I’m proud to be British. I don’t see the two things as in conflict in any way. I’m Scottish because I was born here, as were my parents and their parents before them. But I’m also proud to be British, because to me that has good associations, it has a strong image, we are the people that made the Empire, the Scots with the rest of Britain.

Amongst the respondents in Scotland, “Britain” was often treated as a functional synonym for “England” (see extract 2). Amongst respondents with liberal-left political affiliations in particular, there was a tendency to read the terms Britain/British as ideological devices used to absorb the minority UK nations into an hegemonic “Englishness”.

Respondents with conservative political affiliations were more likely to self-label as “British” without hedging or qualification. However, their warrants for so doing were different from those used by people in England. Of the eight respondents who asserted a relatively strong sense of British identity, six warranted this with reference to a sense of pride in the achievements of Empire, or the Second World war (see extract 12).

Amongst respondents on the liberal-left, the terms Britain/British were often treated as potential linguistic markers of political conservatism, colonialism and resistance to constitutional reform. Consequently respondents in Scotland often glossed the tendency of people in England to self-categorize as British (rather than English) as a marker of their political conservatism and colonial mentality.

*England/English*

In England the term “English” (when referring to human beings) was often used as an ethnic/racial referent (to denote the otherwise unmarked majority). Respondents seemed to be particularly disinclined strongly to self-identify as “English”, a reluctance which they often explained with recourse to the idea that “Englishness” was associated with racism and colonialism. The use of the adjective “English” was often oriented to as a potential marker of extreme right-wing political beliefs.

In Scotland the term “English” was used to refer to the residents of England or to people coming from there. Respondents who noted the reluctance of people in England to call themselves English (which they often glossed as a problem) typically interpreted this as evidence of an anachronistic throwback to the age of Imperialism.

Concluding comments

These findings from a small study with a clearly limited sample are obviously not sufficient to support definitive conclusions. However, the pattern of results that we have reported is too systematic to be dismissed simply as artefactual. At the very

least, these findings point to the possibility that even before the existence of a devolved Scottish Parliament there may have existed some differences between modes of national representation in England and in Scotland. Specifically: notions of (national) cultural homogeneity, heritage and identity were generally treated as empirically and morally problematic in England, but as facts and values in Scotland. In England the normative response to ethnic diversity and immigration was one of “tolerance” and accommodation, in Scotland the dominant norm was of assimilation of “newcomers” and/or their families into an existing “Scottish” culture.

These different forms of national representation existed alongside different understandings of the significance of the category “Britain/British”. In Scotland this was widely understood as a means by which other UK nations are absorbed within a hegemonic Englishness; in England it was understood as a category capable of accommodating cultural [both national and ethnic] diversity. In particular we might note the existence of divergent uses of the term “racism” (in Scotland largely understood as prejudice based on biologically-defined categories of persons, in England, virtually synonymous with ethnocentrism or cultural nationalism).

Even within this relatively restricted data set there was some evidence of mutual misunderstanding: for example, people in Scotland failed to appreciate the fact that the category “British” might have connotations of post-colonialism in England, whereas people in England failed to appreciate the potential for the category to be interpreted as resonant of Imperialism. The potential for mutual misunderstanding is even greater when we consider how particular forms of representations may have had quite different political significations on the two sides of the Border. Whereas Nationalism was often associated with the political Left in Scotland, it was only ever associated with the (extreme) Right in England. Talk about national culture, values, heritage and identity which were treated as neutral topics in Scotland, were typically oriented to as potentially indicative of far right (racist) politics in England. Arguments for the assimilation of ‘minorities’ were regarded as potentially racist in England, but the absence of assimilation was regarded as a marker of racism in Scotland.

Hence, it appears that, at the time Favell (1998) was writing, divergent understandings and values of nationhood, citizenship and culture, may also have existed within the British State. That such divergent uses of apparently shared political symbols might exist between the residents of two countries within a single State is, of course, an interesting observation in its own right. However, in the present case the differences between the two forms of commonsense philosophy, and the possibilities for mutual misunderstanding that they afford, may come to have practical ramifications in the context of constitutional change. Whether or not these perspectives prove to be “incommensurable” remains to be seen.

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