

## Since you mentioned “us” — Nationalism by example of Scottish independence

We oppose nationalism. <sup>1</sup>With this opposition, we are not alone. For many people, nationalism has a bad reputation. For example, in the debate around the referendum for Scottish independence, the “Yes” campaign was repeatedly accused of being nationalist. On the other hand, few take issue with identifying with their home country — they might call this standpoint patriotism. <sup>2</sup> Many take being English, British or Scottish as a self-evident part of their own identity. But they might get a bit annoyed about others waving flags, because they do not want to make a big fuss about nationalism. Some people might even reject mainstream or right-wing nationalism as oppressive but posit the “real nation” <sup>3</sup>or (local) “community” <sup>4</sup>against it. Finally, from left to right, big fuss or not, many protests invoke the greater, national good to make their point: unions calculate how higher wages would benefit the whole economy <sup>5</sup>, students point out that they are a key resource of the nation <sup>6</sup>, bankers and benefit recipients are criticised for putting their interests before the nation (from the left and right respectively) <sup>7</sup>. The word nationalism might have a bad reputation in some places, the appreciation of the nation, however, is undaunted.

Many people who distance themselves from some forms of nationalism oppose the overt racism that often accompanies it. When the Left opposes nationalism, they usually take issue with the nationalist *segmentation* of humankind into peoples. In contrast, we criticise nationalism not just because of a wrong segmentation but also because it posits *unification* of actual people into *the* people. This particular critique is not one which is widely shared. <sup>8</sup>Hence, in this piece, we want to explain what nationalists think, what nationalism claims and wants and why we oppose it in any form. <sup>9</sup>

As a running example, we are going to use the referendum for Scottish independence held in late 2014. While we realise that we are rather late to the party in writing about Scottish independence, we chose this example for three reasons. Firstly, Scottish nationalism did not go away with the referendum. Repeated calls are made for a second referendum. Secondly, the question “Should Scotland be an independent country” <sup>10</sup>asks exactly what any nationalism asserts and hence takes us to the core of the matter. Thirdly, Scottish nationalism — being often more left-wing — prides itself with avoiding some features of nationalism outlined above which many people object to. Scottish nationalism only serves as our example, though, the arguments presented in this article also apply to English, British or German nationalism. <sup>11</sup>

### “We”

Nationalism posits *the* people. This is an assertion of a distinction between a nation’s people and the rest of humanity (“The Scots are Scots and not English, not German, not French”). The starting point of any nationalism is the assertion and appreciation of a particular group: “we”.

“We” is also the assertion of an accordance between the people of the nation (“Scots belong and fit together”). When nationalists speak of “us”, they do not simply mean to describe a group that is somehow distinguished from the rest of humanity like “all people with brown hair” or “all people who like tea”, instead “us” characterises a community. Nationalists think that their personal interests and the interests of other members of the community — and hence of the community in total — are somehow aligned. Not necessarily perfectly so but at some level. Nationalists think that somehow the national community is the place where they fit in, where their purposes have a place, where people accomplish their respective goals somehow with each other. They believe that there is a connection, some accordance, some cohesion even, that “we” are “better together”. [12](#)

## Justification

Nationalists differ in where they see the basis of this accordance. Some see the basis for why “we” fit and belong together in a presumed common biology (“Celtic blood”, “Aryan race”), some in a common culture (language, customs, cultural values) and some even in a common conviction (constitutional patriotism). [13](#) None of these reasons holds water. There is no “Celtic blood”, language does not preform thought but ideas can be expressed in any language, a habit of drinking tea makes for a tea drinking society, not an all-encompassing community.

It is of no use, though, for the critique of nationalism to pick apart these reasons, because nationalists do not ask *if* their people exists. The point of these reasons is not to actually establish *that* a particular people exist. Rather, the existence of their people is the nationalist starting point and conviction. We can see this by looking at how nationalists relate to these reasons. Asking most English nationalists what exactly characterises the English as a nation, typically earns you a blank stare and maybe some half worked out argument. Moreover, without such prompting nationalists hardly ever ask this question. Most nationalists tend not to inquire about each other’s reasons and two typical nationalists would not find anything too worrying about finding out that they do not agree on, say, whether drinking tea is a defining British pastime or not. Similarly, most racist nationalists tend not to be too invested in the particularities of their racist theories. The relationship of most nationalists towards specific foundational arguments for their nation is characterised by a lack of interest: the reasons that nationalists give are not reasons they have. [14](#) Instead, these reasons are *justifications* for some “us” which is presupposed.

Scotland as a nation was taken for granted by all sides arguing over Scottish independence. [15](#) The British State considers Scotland a nation and itself a country of four nations. Consequently, Scottish nationalists did not have to agitate for its recognition as a nation. [16](#) The taken-for-granted starting point for all separatist and unionist agitation was Scotland and the referendum simply presupposed Scotland and the Scots as a collective who now decide on an important aspect of their lives.

In contrast, when nationalists struggle to have their nation recognised, these justifications play a greater role. For example, Cornish nationalists invoke a wide range of historical, political, linguistic and cultural reasons to illustrate that Cornwall does constitute its own nation. But these reasons ought to justify the “us”, not establish it. They do not ask if Cornwall is its own nation, but ask how to demonstrate it.

General differences between justifications, cultural or biological, play a role in political life. For example, people may be more or less relaxed about immigration based on whether they believe in blood and soil or in culture. Yet, here too, the question is not *if* the citizens of the host nation indeed constitute a nation, but they argue about *how* their national bond is characterised.

The indifference of nationalists towards the particular foundational arguments of their nation does not mean that they do not care about justifications. The point of these justifications is to assert cohesion. Asking most nationalists about the particularities of their justifications is met with disinterest. But when they smell that the inquiry seeks to undermine the certainty of their community, they get upset. *How* the community is justified is not that important, *that* it is justified is without an alternative to a nationalist.

## Identity

Nationalists *identify* with their nation. [17](#)

Nationalism not only asserts the existence of a group but being part of that group is an identity of its members.

If people have a shared interest in drinking fine wine they may decide to find others who share this particular interest and decide to form a wine tasting club. The people in this wine tasting club might also have different interests outside of wine tasting, but they are an affinity group based on their mutual interest in wine tasting. The membership in a wine tasting club is both conscious — they decide to join and leave — as well as based on a shared activity or interest.

The nation is no such collection of people based on some particular shared interest. To nationalists, being Scottish or English is not something you *decide to do*, but it is something which claims to define your *being*. For an English nationalist when 11 English players win a world cup, *we* won the world cup, not just someone from our group. Also, this is something for the whole nation, not only for football fans. *Our* green valleys are a feast to look at. If the British economy does well, *we* grew our Gdp. If the British State goes to war, *we* go to war and its soldiers are fighting for *us*. [18](#) Some people even say that *we* won World War I, despite all the people who fought in that war having died now. When nationalists appreciate something about their country, it is somehow also partially themselves who did it and it fills them with pride. When they accept that atrocities were committed by their people (usually in the name of the nation), it fills them with shame. Both of these reactions presuppose identification.

The criteria employed to decide who gets to be Scottish, English, Us American or German differ, in some cases the criteria might be lower than in others, sometimes it might be possible to be a member of two nations, but nationalists assert that belonging to a certain nation is not a lifestyle choice, a conscious, calculated decision or a particular interest, it is an identity.

However, nationalists do not rely just on self-evident and immediate identity. Where they can, they foster traditions, customs, national language and national culture. In established nation states, a lot of energy is spent by professional nationalists — politicians, journalists, teachers, etc. — on educating the population about “their” national customs, culture and history. Students learn the national language, learn about national history, about their “cultural heritage” and to respect other cultures. Cultural institutions and museums provide the population with national culture and history. National holidays encourage the celebration of the nation. Scottish, German, British might be something you *are* in the eyes of nationalists, it is certainly also something whose

performance is encouraged and maintained — no nationalist movement trusts in self-evident essence alone.

## “State”

Nationalists hold that a national community requires actualisation in a state. There are many ideologies which claim that certain (ostensible) criteria would establish some group and the identities of group members: racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. Nationalism is distinguished from all these essentialist ideologies in that the group it is concerned with is a community and requires some form of stately authority. [19](#)

Nationality — in the eyes of nationalists — is an identity which requires a political authority. The nationalist proposition is “the right of nations to self-determination”. Or rather the right of *their* nation to self-determination, e.g. “Scotland should be an independent country”. That is, nationalists posit the nation which then finds its actualisation in its own state. For example, the Scottish Government wrote:

If we vote for independence, the eyes of the world will be on Scotland as our ancient nation emerges — again — as an independent country. [20](#)

In established nation states this idea often finds expressions in the preamble of constitutional documents where it is claimed that it is the people who establish a state of law. [21](#)

The true relationship between state power and nation is the other way around. A state does not make itself dependent on the nationalism of its human resources, it subjugates them and the territory they live on. Borders of states, and therefore what is and is not a people, are results of wars between states, a question of power. When most European states were established, the respective nationalisms were ideas amongst small groups of intellectuals. It was only through the subjugation of “the people of ...” by their state that the unity which nationalists posit was produced. When the United States were founded, it was not “the people of the United States” who founded them but some people with enough power bent on subjugating their fellow countrymen to a new democratic state. Despite what preambles in constitutional documents might claim, “the people” have never given themselves a state.

Even if the “Yes” campaign had won the independence referendum, it would not have been “the Scottish people” who would have given themselves a state. The Scottish independence referendum was an attempt of a nationalist movement — around the Scottish Government — to subjugate Scottish people under a new state. If the “Yes” agitation had been successful, then the Scottish Government would have subjugated those it defined as Scottish under a new Scottish state, regardless of whether they voted “Yes” or “No”. It would have been able to do this because it was tactically backed by the existing monopolist of force — the British State. The referendum could happen because the British State, which asserts absolute authority over its citizens, gave a part of itself — the Scottish Government — permission to subjugate a part of the British population in the case of “Yes” vote. [22](#) Usually, separatist movements are not met with tactic approval from the state they seek to separate from. In this case, the question of violence is posited

directly: who can assert power over those defined as the chosen people against the contender also claiming to represent them.

## Foreign rule

A demand for political autonomy is a rejection of rule from outside of the national community. Foreign rule is not simply rejected because of what it wants and does, but because it is foreign. In the words of the Snp :

Today, we have a Tory government in Westminster that most of us did not vote for, and yet that government is able to take decisions that cause real harm to families and communities in Scotland. [23](#)

The Snp notes that the Westminster Government rules over a majority of people in Scotland who did not vote for it, just as it rules over many people in England who did not vote for it. This is a feature of every democratic election, elections the Snp stands in and wants to happen in an independent Scotland: in some part of the country or in some strata of society there usually will be some majority who did not vote for the government.

Hence, one could be tempted to accuse the Snp of hypocrisy, but this is not fair. By making a distinction between Labour voters in the North of England and in Scotland, both of which are ruled by a government they did not vote for, the Snp expresses what standard it applies. If Scottish people are ruled over by a party in Westminster they did not vote for, this is a problem. For people in England not so much. The Snp does not propose to split up the UK along voting lines or interests. The problem for the Snp is not rule but that it is exercised by people from the wrong community. Westminster is wrong because it is not Scottish; that it is Tory is just an additional sin. Put differently, if a Scottish government voted in by the Scottish people would do “real harm to families and communities”, then it would at least be home rule. The rejection of foreign rule on the grounds that it is foreign is an affirmation of home rule. [24](#)

## Self-determination

A demand for political autonomy wants rule by a nation state over those who belong to its nation. The self-determination of a nation means that the members of the national community are subjugated to their national political authority. Practically, a people realises itself by its people being subjugated under their nation state.

On the one hand, nationalists want an authority which objectively subjugates the people. The people *are* its *objects* . On the other hand, those people are assumed to want this authority and their collective will is thought to find actualisation in this authority. To a nationalist, the people *is* the *subject* . [25](#)

To a nationalist, this is no contradiction as she posits the state not as a force of domination but *instead* as an administrator of the community. This is not because she does not understand what a state does, but because she considers this as an adequate actualisation and administration of the community she wants. Nationalists know that laws passed in Parliament apply to everyone regardless of whether they like them or not and they know that states have coppers, judges and

prisons to enforce those laws. But to them, this means us taking care of ourselves. In the words of the Scottish Government:

Independence means that the people of Scotland will take responsibility for our future into our own hands. [26](#)

The Scottish Government wants to rule over those who it called to the polls, but this demand for subjugation is understood as the Scottish people taking matters into their own hands to do what they want. Nationalism is consent to *domination* , which is understood as a people's *freedom* , *self-determination* and *self-actualisation* .

As with any other nationalism, Scottish people are invited to think of acts done to them by the state as actualisations of themselves. If an imagined Scottish government bans nuclear energy, this is done by *our* government, *we* are banning nuclear energy. If a Scottish government guarantees the right of my boss to cut my breaks, this is an act of *our* government. If a Scottish government institutes a maximum working day, this is an act of *our* government. The order of policy and rule is so that identification with and affirmation of rule comes first, then come questions of policy which may affect me positively or negatively. [27](#)In the words of a Scottish nationalist:

There is widespread confusion among some politicians and media pundits regarding the independence referendum planned for Autumn 2014 and the Scottish general election scheduled for May 2016. Many pundits are treating the two events as if they are the same thing. They are not. This cannot be stressed, underlined, or shouted from the rooftops loud enough. 2014 is a referendum on relocating power, relocating the tools of democratic governance, from London to Scotland. 2016 is about the people of Scotland picking up these tools and using them in any damned way we choose. I'll say it again: 2014 is about Democracy . 2016 is about Policy . [28](#)

The “Yes” campaign and the Radical Independence Campaign argued for independence by listing many nice things which could be done in an independent Scotland: better health care, higher benefits, greener energy ... None of these policies were actually on the ballot. The ballot did not ask voters what they think of the welfare state, citizenship laws or where government spending should be directed. The question was if the authority ruling over Scotland should be Scottish and this is the first standard by which nationalists judge it. [29](#)

However, the rule these people appreciate does not make itself dependent on their appreciation. While nation states want and encourage the appreciation of their populations (hence the referendum), if consent is absent then time after time the question of rule is settled by force. This does not make consent to domination a harmless private matter, though, with no effect on the world. Rule over people is easier if they accept and appreciate it. When, for example, people argue if this or that politician is fit to rule over them, the question what purpose the rule over them serves is not one to worry about. Furthermore, if people think of what is done to them as their own doing, it not only saves costs on coppers and prisons, but also mobilises their energy and creativity for the rule over them.

## Opposition and cohesion

Nationalists demand self-determination in the form of a state and seek to subordinate their people to their nation state. Their national community must be enforced by superior force; the same

community which they hold to be a self-evident part of their being. Therewith nationalists practically acknowledge that their community is not as self-evident and matter-of-fact as they claim, it does not simply flow from their essence but needs a nudge or two from the state. Nationalists posit their community as self-evident *and* — in insisting on a stately authority over it — as frail. In other words, to them, the members of the community are drawn together and apart. While Scottish nationalists posit a self-evident ancient nation which has to find actualisation in a state yet again, they find this status quo untenable: to them the Scottish *need* a state. They do not merely seek to drive out Westminster, but to establish a rule over Scottish people for Scottish people because they are Scottish people. The unquestionable essence in them which they believe to bind them together — being Scottish — is not firm enough to bind them together — this the Scottish state ought to provide. Amongst all claimed unity and accordance, nationalists also presume divisions within the nation. The interests and actions of the individuals are not simply assumed to be aligned with the interests of the community and, hence, each other.

Thereby, nationalists address the objective divisions that exist in their community. Democratic nationalists know of and do not deny the many little and big divisions that characterise life in a capitalist society. Workers know of the pressure to work harder and longer, they know of the threat of unemployment, tenants know that their landlord hikes the rent when she can, they know that they struggle to make ends meet. The economy — how a society produces, distributes and consumes — is a continuous source of conflict. <sup>30</sup>At the same time, nationalists posit a common interest with those on the other side of their disputes. In the words of a British nationalist:

Whatever happened to that post-election stuff about “one nation”? It is clear that David Cameron and some of his ministers genuinely believe in the Disraelian ideal of social cohesion at some important level. Yet in the wake of the government’s latest move against trade unions, the commitment will look to many like mere hypocrisy. Part of the essence of any kind of one-nation politics, whether from the left or the right, must be an effort to reconcile old antagonisms. But these new measures to make it more difficult to join a union are only designed to provoke this antagonism still further. <sup>31</sup>

The author acknowledges the continued necessity for workers to organise in unions against their employers and calls for a reconciliation of “old antagonisms”: opposition and cohesion.

To nationalists, oppositions are, in principle, not in opposition to their community. Instead, oppositions amongst the members of the community fit in with their community, are accepted and filed as part of how it functions. Life in their community is no easy, harmonic life. Oppositions and their consequences are, in principle, to be expected, accepted and endured. Indeed, democratic nationalists appreciate “everyone for herself” in the economic sphere as a contribution to their community. This way, they think, the community becomes more productive, this way all give their best, this way the community prospers. Collateral damage and benefit is part of community life. <sup>32</sup>

However, nationalists distinguish between opposition and antagonism. The accepted and presumed conflicts ought to have their limits. They notice the expressions of oppositions around them, but would deny that systematic, fundamental antagonisms are produced from the way their community functions. Amongst all divisions they seek cohesion and call for restrictions on the pursuit of opposing goals; they seek a balance.

## Decency

Nationalists do not ignore that they have to follow the rules of the community (cf. “State”), that their community does not allow them to do whatever they want. In the nationalist perspective, though, the restrictions placed on them are *for them*, not an external constraint: this community is their community, where they can pursue their interests, it is the place and premise for their “pursuit of happiness” (cf. “We”).

They appreciate the community for allowing opportunities for its members — they can try to get that job, apply for that loan to start a business, win the lottery — and think of moderation as an exchange relation: if each of us moderates herself, lives by the rules of the community then the community prospers which means that we get to pursue our respective goals in this community. They moderate their goals in the hope that this allows these goals to be realised: voluntary compulsion or worthwhile renunciation. <sup>33</sup> They expect this imagined relation of exchange to be honoured, expect what is *fair* and what is *deserved*: a fair wage for a fair day’s work, a just minimum level of sustenance as a member of the national community, a just reward for providing jobs etc. In the words of a Radical Independence campaigner:

We believe the success of a country comes from the hard work and commitment of all. We believe that a good country is one in which all share fairly the success of good times and all share fairly the burdens of bad times. <sup>34</sup>

In the nationalist ideal, if everybody takes a step back from their respective interests, if all work hard and commit, if all interests are moderated in the name of the common good, then they all get the fair share they deserve.

They demand the national community to be a community of the decent, a community where participants *want* the restrictions placed on them, a community where the participants are willing to a step back in the interest of the greater, national, collective good. The Radical Independence Campaign version of this ideal goes like this:

Scotland can be a moral nation. Where mutuality, cooperation and fellowship define our relationships. Where we are good stewards of our country and hand it on to the next generation in a better state than we inherit it. Where our values are not dominated by greed, selfishness and disregard for others but by patience, generosity, creativity, peacefulness and a determination to be better. <sup>35</sup>

Different nationalists address their calls for “determination to be better” towards different groups. Some ask for jobs and payment of taxes from companies, some demand wage moderation from workers, some demand decency and guidance from politicians. But they all demand decency.

## Essence

For nationalists, cohesion, decency, the will to the nation, — “we” — is not a calculated, rational decision but a natural part of them.

The assertion of a self-evident unity of the nation is not merely a mistake that could be rectified by educating a nationalist about differing interests in a capitalist society. They know of them,



which is why they want to moderate them. The assertion “we” is as much an invitation as it is a demand. Firstly, “we” is an invitation to look beyond the day-to-day competition and to recognise the needs of the community as being greater than mere individual materialism and calculated decisions for personal gain. <sup>36</sup> Secondly, “we” is also a demand that this unity is not up for debate, it is an invitation you cannot refuse, it is essential.

For a biological racist nationalist, it is a natural essence which guarantees the national bond, which is not only self-evident but natural. She asserts that the will to the nation is not a product of volition but of a biological essence. To her, this founds a strong, irrefutable bond because the members of the community have it in their bones. They cannot but stand for their community and act decently for the benefit of their community. This is an uncompromising demand against the members of the nation.

Nationalists who invoke culture (language, customs, values, etc.) seek the same result but without a recourse to biology. They, too, found the will to the nation in a pre-voluntary essence of the members of the community but an essence which is produced by society — which is why they can be more open to the idea of others being *integrated* into the collective. They disagree that biology can account for a will but seek the same, firm result from a source outside of the will, beyond decisions.

Here, too, the demand against the members of the community is expressed as the assertion that these members have their national bond in their being. <sup>37</sup> They have no choice in the matter, they *are* English, Scottish, German and so on. For example, “National Collective”, a group of artists campaigning for Scottish independence, offered their view on a progressive civic nationalism in Scotland:

In Scotland, we make a lot of noise about our ‘civic nationalism’ — an open, inclusive brand of national pride based on shared goals, values and institutions, summed up by the late Bashir Ahmed, Scotland’s first Asian Msp : “It is not important where we have come from; it’s where we’re going together, as a nation.”

<sup>38</sup>

Civic nationalists claim that sharing certain liberal values is part of a particular national identity and they are proud of these values: freedom, equality, democracy, the rule of law — the accomplishments of modern democratic rule. People who criticise nationalism for excluding others from the national community might read statements like these as an open invitation to everyone who shares Scottish values. However, this is a misunderstanding. Who would get to be Scottish is not some individual choice of sharing a certain set of values, but up to the Scottish Government to decide in the interest of the nation. <sup>39</sup> Civic nationalism posits that the members of the nation share certain values, not that sharing certain values makes you a member of the nation.

When civic nationalists speak of shared “goals, values, and institutions” this expresses that they expect those who are part of the national collective to share these. Especially, when a politician says “It is not important where we have come from; it’s where we’re going together, as a nation” this is not merely a true or false analysis of what constitutes the nation, but a demand to get in line. When someone in power tells you “this is how we do things”, this is an imperative indicative: a demand against you to follow through. When someone who shapes the values and

goals of the nation tells you that you share those defined goals and values, this is the demand to want what they want for the nation.

The same applies to other pictures that nationalists draw of their respective peoples. Nationalists will not shy away from statements like “Germans are punctual” or “British are polite” when confronted with a disorganised resp. rude person. These statements are not intended as statements of fact but expectations and demands against the members of the national collective. “We” is a demand.

## Force

Nationalists think of the national community as a moral community, a community with just rights and responsibilities, a community formed by and for decent people. This is a peculiar view towards their actual social relations.

In their daily lives, the subjects of a democratic state are endowed with rights and responsibilities by the state; it provides its subjects with general rules which they have to follow. There is much to regulate, permit, prohibit and sanction when people who are dependent on each other compete against each other. For their interactions in the economy, the actors make contracts. These are agreed upon because each party expects to gain from them but this does not extinguish the economic opposition of the contracting parties. A low or no price is better for the buyer and worse for the seller. More concretely, a low wage is a means for profit and a detriment to workers sustenance. Capitalists have reasons to squeeze more out of their workers and workers have reasons to resist this through collective action. [40](#)

The capitalist economy needs an arbiter to decide who prevails when the members’ interests collide and to provide general restrictions keeping competition from eating itself, to make the unity of competition and mutual dependency feasible. This feat is not accomplished without force: when everybody’s goals are pursued against the others, under rules which restrict the means of success of each party, then it makes sense to bend or break the rules here and there to realise these goals — theft and fraud are ways to take part in competition with other means. Therefore, a capitalist economy requires a state ruling over it with force. Capitalist states happily oblige because they rely on their capitalist economies as the basis of their might. They guarantee private property and provide the rule of law, infrastructure, the welfare state and economy policy to facilitate accumulation of their national capital which they count as the growth of the gross domestic product ( Gdp ) and which provides their rule with means.

Where the state in its laws defines the conditions under which its subjects *must* pursue their own interests, nationalists see conditions under which they *can* pursue their own interests. Conditions become opportunities. Where the state excludes the mass of its citizens from the wealth around them, where it ensures their continued existence as human resources for the accumulation of capital, they see general regulations being implemented which ensure that their decent community — and hence them — can function and consider the rights provided by the state as their means to

participate justly in their moral community. They treat conditions, which they do not decide about, as their own, as expressions of themselves and of their morality.

## Escalation

This reversal — that the objects of rule think themselves as the subjects — does not mean nationalists are content. When they interpret law as a realisation of their morality, not as the form in which the state organises its society for its own might, they also judge it this way. Hence, as much as they are one with their nation and its state in principle, they always tend to find some transgression, some violation of decency, some instance where someone receives what is not deserved and where those who deserve do not.

Nationalist criticism detects deviations from decency, identify culprits and demand a correction from the state: more crack down on benefit scroungers, more restrictions on strike action, a tighter tax regime for corporations, restrictions on banker bonuses etc. Left-wing and right-wing nationalists often target different groups with their criticisms, but both want to mobilise the guardian of the national community against “excessive” self-interest.

However, because the state’s purpose is not to realise the often conflicting moralistic national ideals of its subjects but its own might and a strong capitalist economy, it often fails to live up to the expectations of its nationalist critics. What they imagine as decent and fair is not on the agenda. Most nationalists are content with airing their complaints down at the pub, armed with the righteousness of their respective standpoints of justice. Some of them, though, become critical of the government, which they accuse of having lost sight of what is important and seek more grounded alternatives. Some become even critical of the form of the state in general and become disciples of a fascist state which ruthlessly cracks down on vested interests everywhere. <sup>41</sup>Some turn the claim of national identity around and seek culprits amongst those they do not consider the right kind of English, Scottish or German. They extend the idea that identity ensures national cohesion to the idea that the wrong kind of identity undermines it — just as firm and unchangeable as the former.

Not every nationalist takes these last steps. In fact, many do not. But what they all share when they say “we” is plenty: appreciation for a community which requires force over its members to make their relationships passable, acceptance of the antagonisms produced by the capitalist economy which ought to be endured, identification with the conditions we are confronted with by the democratic state and moralistic demands to submit to these conditions.

## Postscript: Into the world

Nationalists judge all and sundry from their nationalist standpoint, also other nations and their states. On the world stage, nation states confront each other with their demands and compete for power. They compete economically, threaten each other with their military might and engage in open war. Nationalists observe these conflicts in a peculiar way. To nationalists, their own nation is the home of the decent and universal, the guarantor of everything that is good in the world. In contrast, other nations are merely French, Russian, Us American etc. The respective national standpoints are merely *their* particular standpoints. This does not necessarily make them foes, but every nationalist can identify base motives driving other nation states’ policies. Reading any British newspaper’s reporting on Russia or watching an hour of Russia Today provides ample material of this kind. From this perspective then, it only makes sense for nationalists to wish their

own the best of luck in every endeavour, even base ones because this is the basis of success for everything that is decent in the world.

## Appendix: Economy

The arguments in this text rely on how the capitalist economy works, that it is a continuous source of conflicts while being a strange form of cooperation, outlined in the following.

Any act of sale or purchase — i.e. exchange, the fundamental economic social relation in a capitalist economy — contains within itself an opposition between the two involved parties: the lower the price the better for the buyer and the worse for the seller. The advantage of one party is the disadvantage of the other and vice versa.

On the other hand, every exchange is also some form of cooperation. A commodity producer does not produce immediately for herself, but her products ought to be consumed by others such that she can exploit the need of others to realise her own interests, i.e. get paid. Only through others can she realise her own goals. Commodity-owners exclude each other from their respective property so that they can pursue their respective interests *using* each other. Moreover, not only do they need each other when they confront each other directly, but they also need each others success in their economic endeavours elsewhere. If someone wants to sell, the buyer must previously have earned her money somehow. The success of others is the premise for using them. Exchange is characterised by both a *with* each other and an *against* each other.

The opposition contained within sale and purchase is rather abstract. While a high price is better for the seller, there is no general reason why the relation cannot work out satisfactory for everybody involved. Buyer and seller could *in principle* arrive at a deal which allows each side to get what they want, enough money to fulfil their needs and desires. However, money is the one thing which allows them to gain access to the world of commodities from which they otherwise exclude each other: all material wealth is the private property of someone, under their exclusive right of disposal. With money everything is available — storms can be weathered, obstacles overcome, previously unknown desires fulfilled — without money nothing is available. As a consequence, the pursuit of money is the dominant economic purpose of this society.

Those who can use money to make more money: they invest to make profits. Companies produce commodities in order to sell them for more money than invested and are successful if they earn more selling their products than what they pay for wages, materials, machines etc. Their suppliers have the same measure of success — buy cheap, sell dear, make profits — which means in their transactions a company and its suppliers confront each other with opposing interests. The suppliers want to sell dear, the company wants to buy cheap, both trying to maximise their respective bottom line. When a company comes to sell its own commodities, it confronts its customers in the same way. When a company asks for a loan from a bank, the bank and the company also oppose each other, for example about how much interest the bank charges — a source of profit for the bank.

The examples so far spoke of opponents which both pursue and realise a profit. The advantage of one is the disadvantage of the other, but both might still realise a profit. Workers, in contrast, do not have the means to buy cheap in order to sell dear. They have no choice but to rent themselves out to employers. Their interest is a liveable wage while minimising the damage (time, exhaustion, stress, Rsi ) they incur for it. Their employers, in contrast, want to maximise the difference between what they pay e.g. on wages and what they earn — their profit. The result can

be observed all around us, companies make profits while workers work long hours and remain excluded from the vast wealth accumulated in this society. Any success workers achieve against their employers such as longer breaks or higher wages is to the detriment of the expressed purpose of their employment: profit. In this relation, the opposition between the involved parties is anything but abstract, because one interests — more profit — is hostile in its nature towards the other and undermines it. It undermines it to such an extent that the state intervenes to provide workers with basic necessities. <sup>42</sup>

Yet, even this relation is not *only* characterised by opposition: capitalist companies rely on workers to produce and sell their products. At the same time, workers cannot earn a wage without the success of capitalist companies in this society. *As workers*, they need the success of their opponent. Only if their company realises its purpose of making profits — which entails low wages compared to output — they can take home a wage at all. Thus, even the antagonistic relationship between capital and labour is also characterised by mutual dependency.

However, mutual dependency in competition against each other does not mean the involved parties share a common interest, that their respective purposes fit together and are realised through each other.

As long as business is good, the goods provided by a supplier are the means to do business and hence her success is the premise of the buyer's success. Moreover, the participants of a capitalist economy might consider even their competitors as helpful means and their success as a means of their own. For example, one manufacturer successfully raising prices might enable other manufacturers of the same good to raise their prices, too. But as soon as business hits a slump, the price asked by a supplier becomes an obstacle to success. Similarly, one seller lowering prices undermines the ability of his competitors to sell their goods. Unity quickly comes apart.

The mistake of identifying dependency with a common goal is particularly crass when workers make it. Workers go to work for a wage, the money they need to pay for necessities, to reproduce themselves. This is *their* reason. Capital, on the other hand, needs workers for its production of profits. It will only hire workers insofar their employment is deemed productive in this sense. The reason why workers have a job is not so that they can make a living, but to be useful for the production of profits. This is *the* reason for their employment. <sup>43</sup> Only insofar they are useful for profit can they realise their purposes, after a fashion. When they are not, their purposes count little and they have to make do with less.

- 
1. This text is not quite finished. For example, is the relationship between nationalism, law and the standpoint of rights correctly characterised or should more be said? However, because we had to send Kittens #5 off to the printers, we did not find enough time to finalise our discussions. We might provide a revised and updated version of this text later at <https://antinational.org/en>. ↵
  2. “I know my fellow Scots are, like me, patriotic and proud of our country. [...] But I say this to the Snp . Don't equate our patriotism with your nationalism.” — Gordon Brown. *We Will Not Stop Fighting for Scotland and Social Justice*, speech 5 May 2015, full text available at <http://www.scottishlabour.org.uk/blog/entry/we-will-not-stop-fighting-for-scotland-and-social-justice-gordon-brown>, 2015 ↵

3. “Ralph Miliband was not a patriot because he served in the navy. He was a lover of this country and its people precisely because he understood that institutions like the monarchy and the House of Lords symbolise and perpetuate inequality, and that militarism usually encourages the poor to die defending the interests of the privileged. His patriotism has more in common with long progressive patriotic traditions in Britain, from the Diggers and Levellers to the Chartists and anti-privatisation campaigners. It was about claiming land and country for the majority of its labouring denizens rather than the plutocrats and the powerful who live off the fat of the land while spouting an insincere ‘nationalism’ which serves less to create collective wellbeing than to prevent their privileges being questioned.”  
— Priyamvada Gopal. *The Daily Mail may not realise, but Marxists are patriots* , <http://gu.com/p/3j8yx/stw> ↵
4. It is not uncommon for antifascists in the UK to call on the local “community” to oppose fascists who are portrayed as external invaders. For example, Anti-Fascist Network had a call-out for “Community Self-Defence” against an EdL splinter group, cf. <https://www.facebook.com/events/669927613109443> . ↵
5. We criticised this idea in *Jobs, Growth, Justice — an alternative that isn’t* available at <http://antinational.org/en/jobs-growth-justice-an-alternative-that-isnt> and in *A poor future* available at <http://antinational.org/en/poor-future> . ↵
6. See our critique *Education is a duty* available at <http://antinational.org/en/education-is-a-duty> . ↵
7. We criticised this idea in *Benefit envy without benefit* available at <http://antinational.org/en/benefit-envy-without-benefit> . ↵
8. A notable exception is the Anarchist Federation which recognises that national community is not something to be cherished in any form: “Anarchist communists do not simply oppose nationalism because it is bound up in racism and parochial bigotry. It undoubtedly fosters these things, and mobilised them through history. Organising against them is a key part of anarchist politics. But nationalism does not require them to function. Nationalism can be liberal, cosmopolitan and tolerant, defining the ‘common interest’ of ‘the people’ in ways which do not require a single ‘race’. [...] In many western countries, official multiculturalism is a key part of civic policy and a corresponding multicultural nationalism has developed alongside it. The shared ‘national culture’ comes to be official multiculturalism itself, allowing for the integration of ‘citizens’ into the state without recourse to crude monoculturalism. If the nationalist rhetoric of the capitalist state was of the most open, tolerant and anti-racist kind, anarchists would still oppose it. This is because, at heart, nationalism is an ideology of class collaboration.” — Anarchist Federation. *Against Nationalism* , <https://afed.org.uk/against-nationalism/> ↵
9. In *Why anti-national?* available at <http://antinational.org/en/why-anti-national> we already set out to answer what nationalism is. Many of the arguments in this article can also be found in that previous article, but this piece proceeds differently. In *Why anti-national?* , we first debunked false explanations of the national community (nature, language, culture, civic nationalism) and then tried to answer the question why nationalism is so successful (regardless) by giving an account of how bourgeois subjects require the state above them in order to pursue their own private interests. The private antagonistic interests of competitors necessitates an interest in the institution which limits

their own “pursuit of happiness”.

Hence, *Why anti-national?* actually explains the appreciation of the state by its citizens. In this perspective, fellow citizens appear as competitors whom the state ought to tame. In contrast, here we emphasise that nationalism is an ideology which posits nations as communities. For a nationalist, other citizens also appear as fellow members of the decent community. They make a *positive* reference to them, think of them as the community which finds actualisation in the state, and do not merely see them *negatively* as competitors against whom the state provides protection. ↵

10. We know that this question is not the question the Scottish National Party wanted at that time. We also know that restricting the choice to “Yes” or “No” — with no option for maximal devolution — is also not what the Snp wanted at that time. Regardless of the reasons how this particular referendum came about, it is the question “Should Scotland be an independent country” which the “Yes” campaign and the Radical Independence Campaign mobilised around. ↵
11. Our object is nationalism in capitalist, democratic countries. We do not discuss nationalism in state-socialist or Fascist countries (but we briefly touch on Fascist nationalism towards the end of this piece). Across capitalist, democratic countries there are also differences in how nationalism presents itself. For example, in the Us there is a much stronger emphasis on the competing individual and its calculations than in European countries. Despite these differences, we set out to explain and criticise the common core of democratic nationalism. ↵
12. “Better Together” was the name of the main Unionist campaign against Scottish Independence, trying to convince the Scottish electorate that the “we” is British. ↵
13. Constitutional patriotism plays almost no role in political life even in Germany where it originated. It is, however, sometimes referenced in the context of the Eu whenever its institutions are mainly justified with respect to a certain set of values — freedom, justice, etc. — and not necessarily with respect to some European heritage. In this text, we will only deal with it in footnotes. For those, however, who want to understand how liberal democrats formulate their demands against the subjects of liberal-democratic states, the constitutional patriotic literature provides some interesting reading material. ↵
14. To avoid a potential misunderstanding, the argument here is that nationalist justifications of the nation are not reasons because nationalists seem rather disinterested in the particularities of these justifications. We are not saying that these justifications cannot be reasons because they are wrong like “this is obvious nonsense, let’s move on”. Just because we recognise them as wrong does not mean that nationalists must do so, too. ↵
15. This is not something that just happens. Rather, this is a result of political agitation and policies by the British State. The Anarchist Federation have written a good account of the history of Scottish nationalism in *The Snp , Scottish Nationalism, and the Class Struggle: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* available at <https://afed.org.uk/the-snp-scottish-nationalism-and-the-class-struggle-yesterday-today-and-tomorrow/> ↵
16. Yet, what British patriots mean when they refer to it as a union of four nations is something rather different from what Scottish nationalists want. To the former “four nations” has no more significance than perhaps the federal structure of Germany or the Usa . The political

- self-actualisation of these “four nations” to them is the UK and this was the kernel of the disagreement. [↵](#)
17. “83% of the Scottish population feel they have a Scottish national identity” — Scottish Government, *Scotland's Future* , November 2013, p.2 [↵](#)
  18. Anti-war protests in turn like to point out that a particular war is fought “not in our name”. With this, some might simply and sensibly want to point out that this war indeed is not their project, while others want to assert that it is not in the name of the “true nation”. [↵](#)
  19. Some nationalisms seem to be content with some limited form of autonomy within another state. This might be a tactical admission that their national collective fares better (for now) within a larger structure or that full autonomy is currently not on the table. It might also express that when these people speak of nation, they mean something else than what most people mean. Regional identities are, for example, not unheard of in Germany, but the idea of regional autonomy has virtually no support, most Germans are German nationalists. These regional ideologies deserve critique in their own right, but they are not the object of this piece. [↵](#)
  20. Scottish Government, *Scotland's Future* , p.3 [↵](#)
  21. “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” — Preamble to *Constitution of the United States of America*  
“Conscious of their responsibility before God and man, Inspired by the determination to promote world peace as an equal partner in a united Europe, the German people, in the exercise of their constituent power, have adopted this Basic Law.” — Preamble to *Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany* [↵](#)
  22. The point of this referendum in the eyes of Westminster was for it to fail and thus to reaffirm British unity. This did not quite work as expected, but that is another story. [↵](#)
  23. Scottish National Party. *What is in it for me?* , <http://www.snp.org/referendum/whats-in-it-for-me> [↵](#)
  24. The same logic shows in anti- EU agitation by British nationalists such as UKIP . Sure, they also tend to find something wrong with the specific regulations passed down from Brussels. But they make it clear that their qualms are a lot bigger, that they are concerned about sovereignty. For example, UKIP agitates for home rule against perceived foreign rule: “If you believe that we are big enough to make our own laws, in our own parliament; if you believe we should have the sovereign right to control our own borders; [...] then we are the party for you.” — Nigel Farage. *The UKIP Manifesto 2015* , <http://www.ukip.org/manifesto2015> [↵](#)
  25. This sentiment is not a monopoly of democratic nationalists. For the Nazis, the Führer was the immediate expression of the German people, executing its will. [↵](#)
  26. Scottish Government, *Scotland's Future* , p.40 [↵](#)



27. This does not mean that nationalists would find nothing to criticise. On the contrary, they busy themselves with accusing the state of not living up to its responsibility. See below. [↪](#)
28. <http://www.yesscotland.net/news/referendum-2014-about-democracy-scottish-general-election-2016-about-policy> [↪](#)
29. The connection drawn between social democratic policies and Scottish independence was that Scottish people tend to vote more left wing. Hope for social democratic policies was premised on an assertion about the national character of Scotland. When people argue that they expect better chances for winning this or that fight under different social conditions, this is one thing. When people, however, argue that social democracy is a better actualisation of Scottishness they switched means and end. [↪](#)
30. The capitalist economy is characterised by opposition and mutual dependency. We explain how in *Appendix: Economy* . [↪](#)
31. Martin Kettle. *Wake up, unions: there will be no Prime Minister Corbyn* ”, [↪](#)
32. The point here is not that democratic nationalists are people who also appreciate competition in the economic sphere. Instead, the point here is that they appreciate this competition *as nationalists* , i.e. as a means for their community. [↪](#)
33. In *Why anti-national?* we referred to this as “virtuous materialism”, i.e. materialism which is restricted in order to be realised in its restricted, permitted and decent form. [↪](#)
34. Robin McAlpine, *Declaration for Radical Independence* , <http://radicalindependence.org/2012/11/26/declaration-for-radical-independence> . [↪](#)
35. Robin McAlpine, op. cit. [↪](#)
36. Constitutional patriots are rather explicit about their invitation being a demand against citizens: “However, constitutional patriotism is decidedly not a theory of self-determination: it does not start with a picture of unattached individuals asking themselves the question: ‘Where do I belong? Where do I find the best liberal-democratic constitution?’ Rather, it asks how citizens within existing political communities should think about their allegiances, and also what they might do to improve the kinds of political arrangements with which they find themselves confronted. It is not so much *foundational* (motivating a choice of political allegiances or constructing political order *ex nihilo* ) as *transformative* (moving existing political cultures in a more universalist direction).” The same author then also responds to the charge against constitutional patriotism of not providing enough reasons to sacrifice for the community by insisting that it does: “As for the alleged motivational deficit: it cannot simply be taken as an obviously correct empirical observation that something like ‘national culture’ inspires quite large sacrifices of resources — at the limit: life itself — while norms and values do not. While clearly family and friendship are special in this regard, nothing justifies an analogy between family and nation as somehow both a matter of kinship and therefore equally capable of motivating loyalty, even if it is very costly. Charles Taylor is undoubtedly right when he points out that attachment ‘has to motivate a degree of giving’: serving in the armed services, paying taxes to enable large income transfers, but ideally also a willingness to invest in civic activities and political participation.” — Jan-Werner Müller. *Seven Ways to Misunderstand Constitutional*

*Patriotism* , notizie di Politeia (96): 20–24.

↵

37. At first glance constitutional patriotism bases the will to the nation and its state on a decision. However, a denial usually follows immediately and it is pointed out that those decisions are grounded in a national culture themselves: “[C]onstitutional patriotism can neither take shape in social practices nor become the driving force for the dynamic project of creating an association of free and equal persons until they are situated in the historical context of a nation of citizens in a way that they link up with those citizens’ motives and attitudes” — Jürgen Habermas. *Between Facts and Norms: Contribution to a Theory of Law and Democracy* , Mit Press, 1996, p. 499 ↵
38. National Collective,  
*Editorial: Finally, Britain is beginning to understand civic nationalism* , <http://nationalcollective.com/2012/08/05/editorial-finally-britain-is-beginning-to-understand-civic-nationalism> ↵
39. For instance, the “Yes Scotland” campaign answered the question “Who will be eligible for Scottish citizenship on independence and in the future?” as follows: “The current Scottish Government has set out detailed plans for citizenship on independence. British citizens habitually resident in Scotland on independence will be considered Scottish citizens ... Following independence, other people will be able to apply for Scottish citizenship. For example, citizenship by descent will be available to those who have a parent or grandparent who qualifies for Scottish citizenship. Those who have a demonstrable connection to Scotland and have spent at least ten years living here at some stage, whether as a child or an adult, will also have the opportunity to apply for citizenship. ... Procedures will also be put in place to allow certain migrants lawfully resident in Scotland to apply for naturalisation as a Scottish citizen. ... Future changes to citizenship laws would be a matter for Scottish governments elected in 2016 and beyond.” — <http://www.yesscotland.net/answers/who-will-be-eligible-scottish-citizenship-independence-and-future>  
That is, in addition to receiving Scottish nationality at birth as stipulated by most countries, people who would have managed to live in Scotland for at least 10 years with the consent of the Scottish state, would also be given the chance to apply for citizenship. If anyone should have any illusions about what standard would be applied to permitting migrants to live lawfully in Scotland, the Scottish Government clarifies that Scotland’s needs — and not some shared values — would set those standards: “Scotland’s differing demographic and migration needs mean that the current Uk immigration system has not served our interests. ... Historically Scotland’s population has grown at a lower rate compared to the rest of the Uk . The latest population projections suggest that Scotland’s workforce will not grow as rapidly as the Uk as a whole. Scotland’s population needs are therefore different to the rest of the Uk and Scotland has a clear economic rationale for growing our population — in particular our working age population.” (Scottish Government, *Scotland’s Future* , p.268)  
The proposed rules for citizenship might be more permeable than other states, the standard in any case is the same: can these migrants be useful human resources for the nation. ↵
40. See *Appendix: Economy* . ↵
41. When the German National Socialists accused the Jews of being the driving force behind communism and finance capital this expresses their nationalist criticism: both are criticised for being egoistical — one for being the egoistical pursuit of workers interests, one for being the egoistical pursuit of capital’s interest. ↵

42. See *What is wrong with free money* available at <https://antinational.org/en/what-wrong-free-money> and in this issue of Kittens. ↵
43. The capitalist process of production produces a constant surplus of workers over jobs, such that workers cannot usually successfully assert their reasons for employment against the reasons of capital. See *What is wrong with free money* . ↵