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## Present and Absent Nostalgia in the 2014 Referendum

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# Present and Absent Nostalgia in the 2014 Referendum

Robert Wirth

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2014 was a year positively clogged with significant anniversaries and commemorations, remembrances and tributes.<sup>1</sup> The backward glance was inescapable, but both the Yes and the Better Together campaigns largely avoided the use of nostalgia as a means of influencing the vote. Instead, both official campaigns applied a utopian and future-oriented rhetoric, while accusing each other of instrumentalising sentimental attachments to the past. These charges tended to imply that an unhealthy restorative nostalgia was involved in every appeal to historic belonging, one seeking the comforting certainties of the tribe. Thus, even the most playful forms of reflective nostalgia became taboo by association in the official debate, while flourishing elsewhere. This paper looks back at the several modes of nostalgia present in (and absent from) the independence debate, and considers their political significance.

The debate on Scotland's future, which appears by no means to be concluded, was a passionate but nevertheless very pragmatic one. From a European perspective it is striking to note that, in modern times, violence has not seriously featured in the struggle for Scottish autonomy (or against it). Though the indyref debate became more heated and divisive in its latter stages, chauvinist rhetoric asserting exclusively Scottish or British identity was largely superseded by economic and constitutional matters. As Michael Keating and Malcolm Harvey write, 'visions of the [Scottish] nation have [...] been recast, by politicians of all perspectives, away from a romanticised past and towards a more modern, progressive and forward-looking outlook'.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Marcus Banks' and Andre Gingrich's claim that '[t]oday's neo-nationalist groups use, manipulate and instrumentalise *the past* [...] for purposes and goals

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<sup>1</sup> 2014 saw the 700th anniversary of the Battle of Bannockburn competing with the centenary of the start of the First World War – a year that also witnessed the bicentenary of the publication of Sir Walter Scott's first Waverley novel and Shakespeare's 450th birthday.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Keating and Malcom Harvey, *Small Nations in a Big World: What Scotland Can Learn* (Edinburgh, 2014), 135.

that are rooted in the present<sup>3</sup>, is only partially true in Scotland's case.

Launched just before St Andrew's Day, the independence White Paper *Scotland's Future* focused almost exclusively on economic issues, promising a better time to come rather than settling scores with the past.<sup>4</sup> Alex Massie commented that '[t]he lack of drama – the merciful absence of bagpipes-and-Braveheart-bullshit – at the paper's launch was quite deliberate. This, Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon insisted, is a sober, sensible calculation of the national interest. It's not a romantic romp in the heather or a doomed Jacobite jolly'.<sup>5</sup> And yet there was a restorative dimension to both campaigns: for Yes, resumption not of pre-1707 Scottishness but of post-1945 (British) welfarism. It is not only in name that the White Paper evokes Labour's 1945 manifesto *Let's Face the Future*.<sup>6</sup> Gerry Hassan aptly called the SNP's 'dominant narrative [...] a "Back to the Future" outlook grounded on the allure of the supposed "golden age" of Britain 1945–75 and [a] dream of a "New Jerusalem" Scottish vision'.<sup>7</sup> The Yes campaign's appropriation of welfarist values historically identified with Labour helped to fuel the myth of Scotland being the more egalitarian society. The Pro-UK campaign, while regularly stressing common values and a shared history, likewise tried to appear forward-looking and progressive. Speaking to the Confederation of British Industry, George Osborne insisted there is more to Unionism than 'wallowing in nostalgia',<sup>8</sup> and aimed to make a purely rational and economic case for the preservation of Britain. This theme was repeated like a mantra. Ruth Davidson stressed that 'it is to the future

<sup>3</sup> Marcus Banks and Andre Gingrich, 'Neo-nationalism in Europe and Beyond', in Marcus Banks and Andre Gingrich (eds), *Neo-nationalism in Europe and Beyond: Perspectives from Social Anthropology* (New York, 2006), 1–28, 17, italics mine.

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Government, *Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland*, n.d., <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0043/00439021.pdf>, accessed 25 May 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Alex Massie, 'Scottish Independence Is a Little More Likely Today Than It Was Yesterday', *spectator.co.uk*, 26 November 2013, <http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/alex-massie/2013/11/scottish-independence-is-a-little-more-likely-today-than-it-was-yesterday/>, accessed 29 November 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Labour Party, 'Let us Face the Future: a Declaration of Labour Policy for the Consideration of the Nation', 1945, in *International Labour and Radical History Pamphlet Collection*, <http://collections.mun.ca/cdm/ref/collection/radical/id/9811>, accessed 15 November 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Gerry Hassan, 'Tom Devine, the Indy Ref and the Myths of Modern Scotland', *gerryhassan.com*, 21 August 2014, <http://www.gerryhassan.com/blog/tom-devine-the-indy-ref-and-the-myths-of-modern-scotland/>, accessed 25 August 2014.

<sup>8</sup> George Osborne, 'Speech by the Chancellor of the Exchequer', 6 September 2012, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/speech-by-the-chancellor-of-the-exchequer-rt-hon-george-osborne-mp-at-scotland-cbi>, accessed 16 April 2014.

we must raise our eyes. Scotland in Britain is not an exercise in nostalgia. It is positive and forward-looking – together for good’.<sup>9</sup> George Robertson added: ‘This is not about nostalgia: it is about the United Kingdom today. By any standards, this is a significant country, punching far above its weight politically, economically, militarily, culturally and in sport’.<sup>10</sup> Almost in the same breath, however, Robertson went on to list the British Army’s various achievements ‘from Waterloo to El Alamein and from Goose Green to Helmand’ as reasons for staying in the Union.<sup>11</sup> The Yes campaign also rejected the charge of nostalgia. Joyce McMillan called it a ‘profound political error [...] to think that the current Yes movement in Scotland refers back to Bannockburn or Braveheart’, insisting that it was ‘the No campaign, by and large, who mention Braveheart – or indeed Bannockburn – as if they mattered’.<sup>12</sup>

Each side accused the other of instrumentalising nostalgic sentiment, though such references were generally rare. Emotional pleas to past (separate or united) accomplishments, glorious victories against each other or achieved together, long-held grudges or long-standing grievances, were quickly dismissed as parochial and consigned to the realm of myth. Yes campaigners were constantly charged with Tartan atavism, but largely concentrated on economic, social and constitutional issues, or what Ben Jackson calls their ‘Labourish vision of ameliorist social democracy’.<sup>13</sup> No campaigners were also accused of wistful delusions. Alan Bissett’s popular video-poem *Vote Britain* makes a satirical case for staying in the Union, assuming a patronising English voice to give the Scots unsolicited advice on how to vote.<sup>14</sup> This assumed voice urges the ‘People of Scotland [to] vote with [their] heart’, instead of

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<sup>9</sup> Ruth Davidson, ‘Scottish Conservative Conference Speech’, 24 March 2012, <http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2012/03/ruth-davidson-speech-scottish-conservative-party-conference/>, accessed 5 May 2014.

<sup>10</sup> George Robertson, ‘Independence Essay: George Robertson on the Union’, *scotsman.com*, 24 June 2014, <http://www.scotsman.com/news/independence-essay-george-robertson-on-the-union-1-3455591>, accessed 9 July 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Joyce McMillan, ‘Independence Is Not About the Past’, *scotsman.com*, 26 June 2014, <http://www.scotsman.com/news/joyce-mcmillan-independence-is-not-about-the-past-1-3458621?FID=14377&ISC=1&CTP=ARTICLE&DID=3CCD8E8719EFF6BE308AC8180BE80D6127B2A132>, accessed 2 August 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Ben Jackson, ‘The Political Thought of Scottish Nationalism’, *The Political Quarterly* 85.1 (2014), 50–6, 56.

<sup>14</sup> Alan Bissett, ‘My Contribution to the Debate on Scottish Independence: Vote Britain’, *alanbissett.com*, 13 January 2012, <http://alanbissett.com/2012/01/13/my-contribution-to-the-debate-on-scottish-independence/>, accessed 23 September 2013. All further references to the video-poem cite this text.

their head. This blatantly emotional appeal exhorts the Scots to remember their honoured place in the imperial project: 'First into battle, loyal and true. The enemy's scared of you. / That's why we send you *over the top* with your och-aye-the-noo'. The past looms large as the Scots are invited to 'Vote Empire', to 'Vote tradition' and to 'Vote for our proud shared history of 'Enslaving other nations and stealing their natural resources'. These polemical allusions hint at the tribal mindset often associated with the political use of nostalgia, to which the debate might have given much greater vent. Only a vote for independence, Bissett urges, will put an end to 'strategic references to Braveheart [being deployed] to dismiss you all'; though his own poem makes extensive use of similar chestnuts to illustrate the injustice and humiliation of Scotland's post-1707 history: 'Vote for the Highland Clearances. Baaaaaaaah'; 'Vote God Save the Queen and that bit about us crushing you all'; and – somewhat paradoxically – 'Vote for the absence of your history in our schools'.

In essence, Bissett accuses the No side of accusing the Yes side of buying into traditional markers and symbols of nostalgic sentiment, and in that accusation he mirrors the actual political debate. Actually weaponising a romanticised past, of which he accuses the No side, was in fact the exception. Trying 'to revive the medieval state of Scotland', as Ken Clarke had accused the SNP of doing, was as unrealistic and exaggerated as some of the notions Bissett set forth to make his subversive case.<sup>15</sup> Both sides seemed to assume in advance that nostalgia is wholly negative and to be condemned, but this is too simplistic.

According to David Cannadine, nostalgia usually follows social upheavals and revolutionary change.<sup>16</sup> The social revolution of Thatcherism led to nostalgia for the protection of the welfare state, and the post-2007 economic crisis can most definitely be seen as a social upheaval. Thus a wish to return to a former, less fraught state or time can be read as both conservative and 'progressive' in the sense described by the Unionist historian Colin Kidd, who writes of 'reluctant Old Labour diehards who see independence – understandably – as a way of rescuing part of the British welfare state from free-marketeering vandals'.<sup>17</sup> A person who is nostalgic is dissatisfied with the

<sup>15</sup> Tom Gordon, 'SNP Want to Revive Medieval State of Scotland, Claims Clarke', *heraldscotland.com*, 23 March 2014, <http://www.heraldscotland.com/politics/referendum-news/snp-want-to-revive-medieval-state-of-scotland-claims-clarke.23758849>, accessed 25 March 2015.

<sup>16</sup> David Cannadine, *The Pleasures of the Past: Reflections on Queens, Kings, Knaves, Stately Homes, Sex, Food, and More in Modern Britain* (New York, 1989), 258–9.

<sup>17</sup> Colin Kidd, 'Reflections on the Independence Referendum', *London Review of Books*

present and thus turns back to more stable, homely and safe moments in the past, in order to find reassurance and confirmation of his or her own identity and self-image. This nostalgic turning back involves a certain form of memory by which we retain information and more or less accurately reconstruct past experiences – usually for present purposes. Our experiences and current actions are influenced by our remembered histories. A nostalgic memory, however, differs from personally experienced memory in that the events need not have happened to us, or even within our lifetime. While memory needs real events to connect to, in nostalgic memory the lines between remembering, perceiving and imagining are blurred. This is particularly the case where collective memory is concerned. Nostalgic remembering is often suffused with emotion and closely involved in socially significant practices such as celebrations and commemorations and thus becomes, finally, political.<sup>18</sup> Bannockburn, Flodden and Culloden are not merely historic battlefields; they are reifications of a Scottish collective memory around which nostalgic notions gather.

Svetlana Boym distinguishes between two kinds of nostalgia, which ‘characteris[e] [our] relationship to the past, to an imagined community, to [our] home, and to [our] own self-perception, [calling them] restorative and reflective nostalgia’.<sup>19</sup> Restorative nostalgia attempts to restore or reconstruct the object of desire in order to be able to return to it, or at least to temporarily escape to it.<sup>20</sup> There is an emotional attachment to the past which also involves sentimentality. ‘[O]nly the positive aspects are recalled, amplified and valorised’<sup>21</sup>, while the negative dimensions of that previous time are suppressed. ‘Restorative nostalgia knows two main narrative plots: the restoration of origins and the conspiracy theory’.<sup>22</sup> While a narrative calling for a return to a medieval, early-modern, or pre-Union situation did not feature in the debate, the Yes side’s selective ideological return to and appropriation of post-war Labour policy could indeed be considered restoratively nostalgic. If the restoration of origins was not prominent in the Scottish debate, Boym’s second narrative plot certainly was. Boym writes: ‘The conspirational world-view reflects [...] a simple pre-modern conception of good and evil’ and ‘is based on a single transhistorical plot, a Manichean battle of good and evil and the inevitable scapegoating of the mythical enemy. [...] “Home”, imagine

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36.17 (11 Sep 2014), 13–15.

<sup>18</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York, 2001), 42.

<sup>19</sup> Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 41.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 41–8.

<sup>21</sup> Jacky Bowring, *A Field Guide to Melancholy* (Harpden, 2008), 102.

<sup>22</sup> Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 43.

extremist conspiracy adherents, is forever under siege, requiring defence against the plotting enemy'.<sup>23</sup> The simplistic clear-cut dichotomies of us and them, good and evil, Scots and English, independence or subservience, Yes or No, are notions that played a significant role in the public debate. For the Better Together campaign, the *home* was most certainly under threat; for Yes it was to be both secured (from 'alien' Tory or quasi-Tory policy) and remade on terms reflective of Scotland's supposedly social-democratic character: calls for re-nationalisation of the Royal Mail and the prevention of further privatisation of the NHS could indeed be classified as being restoratively nostalgic. Restorative 'nostalgics do not think of themselves as nostalgic', Boym argues: 'they believe that their project is about truth'.<sup>24</sup> Outwith the political discourse, not conforming to either *truth* quickly led to being termed un-Scottish or un-British, a quisling, a traitor or a turncoat, as the reactions to Chris Hoy's and Andy Murray's endorsement of opposing sides exemplify.<sup>25</sup> As restorative nostalgia is closely linked to invented tradition, it 'can also be politically manipulated through newly recreated practices of national commemoration with the aim of re-establishing social cohesion, a sense of security and an obedient relationship to authority'.<sup>26</sup> The choice of date for the referendum itself was often interpreted as a subliminal reminder of the victorious culmination of the medieval wars of independence. While politicians attending the Bannockburn Live and UK Armed Forces Day celebrations of 28 June 2014 insisted on their un-political nature, the covert nostalgic undertone was palpable at both events.<sup>27</sup>

Reflective nostalgia, by contrast, is not concerned with a return to or reconstruction of a lost place or time, but rather it meditates on history and the passing of time, revelling in the feeling of longing itself.<sup>28</sup> Reflective nostalgia

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 41.

<sup>25</sup> Simon Johnson, 'Chris Hoy Called a Traitor to Scotland by Nationalists', *telegraph.co.uk*, 30 May 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/scotland/10087642/Nationalists-call-Sir-Chris-Hoy-a-traitor-to-Scotland.html>, accessed 24 March 2015; Matthew Norman, 'Insulting "Disloyal" Andy Murray Is Disgusting', *telegraph.co.uk*, 19 September 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/tennis/andymurray/11109227/Insulting-disloyal-Andy-Murray-is-disgusting.html>, accessed 24 March 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 42.

<sup>27</sup> James Millar, 'Political Battles as Stirling Celebrates Armed Forces Day', *sundaypost.com*, 22 June 2014, <http://www.sundaypost.com/news-views/politics/political-battles-as-stirling-celebrates-armed-forces-day-1.434954>, accessed on 3 July 2014.

<sup>28</sup> Svetlana Boym, 'Nostalgia and Its Discontents', *Hedgehog Review*, 9.2 (2007) 7–18, 13.

can be playfully ironic and humorous, and it certainly shares conceptual traits with melancholy.<sup>29</sup> Harking back to places or times one remembers as being more desirable than the present state of things also has a bitter-sweet connotation to it, as those days are sadly past; yet, the memory of them continues to evoke pleasure. This melancholic backward-looking is certainly ascertainable in the collective psyche of Scotland and is closely linked to the idea of 'political and cultural miserablism, and [...] a sense of powerlessness and fatalism, both collectively and individually'.<sup>30</sup> Melancholy differs from mere sadness in that it is 'culturally inflected'<sup>31</sup>; and as such, unlike in other forms of grieving or mourning, 'the wound is kept open'.<sup>32</sup> This perceived or imagined national wound is ubiquitous in Scottish culture, to the extent that Scottish culture revels in the sense of loss, and paradoxically celebrates its defeats. 'Scottish culture encompasses a profound, deeply embedded sense of loss, and because of this, of melancholy and pessimism'.<sup>33</sup> The long-tailed legacy of the military defeats on the fields of Flodden, Killiecrankie, Glencoe, Glen Shiel and Culloden as well as the economic disaster of the Darien expeditions have historically contributed to this sense of defeatism that is nowadays continued in the 'too small, too poor, too divided' narrative Scots tell themselves, even if the historical complexities are much less clear-cut than retrospective perception suggests.<sup>34</sup> This passive longing and melancholic yearning usually harks back to times or places that are *sadly* past, without a real desire to return to or restore those times and places. It is a rich source for generating national narratives and in Scotland this becomes especially apparent. Traditional as well as relatively contemporary Scottish folk songs in particular manifest this reflective and melancholic tone. The campaign soundtrack itself, to be frequently heard at Yes events, was redolent of sentimental attachment to Caledonia, and its hills and glens. For instance, the purely reflective nostalgic sentiment of Dougie MacLean's Homecoming ballad *Caledonia* was employed as a toned-down rallying call for the troops of the Yes campaign, devoid of accusation, blame and any anti-English sentiment. It merely displays a romantic longing for place, much in the sense of the original conceptual characteristics

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<sup>29</sup> Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 49.

<sup>30</sup> Gerry Hassan, *Caledonian Dreaming: the Quest for a Different Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2014), 39.

<sup>31</sup> Bowring, *Melancholy*, 32.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 79.

<sup>33</sup> Hassan, *Caledonian Dreaming*, 39.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Ibid. 39–41.



of nostalgia as homesickness<sup>35</sup>, and as such, its selection adds weight to the assumption that an open restorative nostalgia was perhaps purposely bypassed. Although still devoid of open anti-English sentiment, the use of Hamish Henderson's song *Freedom Come All Ye* attempted to nostalgically evoke the spirit of the anti-nuclear and anti-war movements of earlier decades; indeed, its internationalist outlook tallied with the Yes side's inclusive civic approach while at the same time criticising Britain's recent involvement in foreign wars and, by extension, the stationing of Trident nuclear weapons on the Clyde. While the instrumentalisation of *Caledonia* and *Freedom Come All Ye* appear to be a rather benign expression of sentiment and love for a nation and a cause, and therefore more reflective, another popular independence rallying song, The Proclaimers' *Cap in Hand*, toys with a restorative nostalgia for a specific time, the heyday of Scottish heavy industry: a time when dignity was supposedly intact without having to 'beg / For a piece of / What's already [...] ours'.<sup>36</sup> The attempt by Yes supporters to send *Cap in Hand* to the top of the pop charts – in order to trump a rumoured ban from BBC radio playlists – suggests that a widespread drive existed to evoke sentiment by means of a selective past.<sup>37</sup> At nationalist gatherings, marches and demonstrations renditions of *Flower of Scotland*, with its warlike and anti-English resonances, were perhaps inevitable as well. Scotland's unofficial anthem, reverently sung at Rugby and Football events, embodies both elements of the nostalgia Boym speaks of: the lines 'those days are past now, / And in the past / they must remain' are clearly reflective nostalgic, but are immediately followed by 'But we can still rise now, / And be the nation again' – a restorative notion.<sup>38</sup> While both restorative and reflective nostalgia can be evoked by the same 'memorative signs' and might intersect at certain points, they diverge greatly in their effects.<sup>39</sup> The Better Together campaign was less demonstrative in the musical field: just as the *Flower of Scotland* was at times deemed too provocative, so was *God Save the Queen* due to the infamous verses noted by Alan Bissett. On 13 September, just before the votes were cast, the Last Night of the Proms on Glasgow Green was significant in this regard. Usually known for its abundant flag-waving and jingoistic displays, the event in Scotland significantly 'tactfully eschew[ed] Rule,

<sup>35</sup> Jean Starobinski, 'The Idea of Nostalgia', *Diogenes* 54 (1966): 81–103, 84.

<sup>36</sup> The Proclaimers, 'Cap in Hand', *Sunshine on Leith*, 1988.

<sup>37</sup> Scott MacNab, 'Scottish independence: Proclaimers song tops chart', *scotsman.com*, 2 September 2014, <http://www.scotsman.com/what-s-on/music/scottish-independence-proclaimers-song-tops-chart-1-3527999>, accessed 28 March 2015.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flower\\_of\\_Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flower_of_Scotland), accessed 27 March 2015.

<sup>39</sup> Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 12.

Britannia!, Land of Hope and Glory and Jerusalem'.<sup>40</sup> While clear caution was applied in regard to music, symbolism of the various forms of nostalgia was ubiquitous throughout the debate in the form of flags. The respective markers of belonging, the Union Flag and the Saltire, were openly paraded, as they are recognised and established, and are representative of banal nationalism. The Yes campaign had another badge, however, that was more controversial. Andrew Marr points out that: '[t]he historian winces at the popularized use of tartan as a general symbol of Scottish patriotism. But there may be more to this than meets the eye: some young nationalists wear the kilt with a kind of defiant mockery, responding to a century of music-hall and *Punch* caricature'.<sup>41</sup> It is this parodic element that David Torrance failed to recognise when he deplored the September 2013 Calton Hill independence rally as 'ostentatiously ethnic, with a plethora of kilts, face paint, frayed banners and unsavoury characters from fringe European secessionist movements'.<sup>42</sup> The individual reasons for dressing up in this manner are hard to discern, some informed by restorative, others by reflective nostalgia. What is noteworthy in this regard, however, is that the speeches given at the rally were conspicuously devoid of rhetoric that matched the 'ethnic' outfits.

This is also where we recognise a difference between the official and unofficial debates on Scottish independence. In the official discourse, overt reflective nostalgia was not prominent; nor was the more dangerous restorative form, though, competing for the 'progressive' mantle, each side took the other to task for arguments rooted in a superior past. Likewise, apart from very emotional expressions of tribalism, for instance at football matches (international and national), Orange Order marches, or at the clashes on Glasgow's George Square (or Freedom Square as it was briefly known by Yes supporters), the unofficial debate that took place on the internet, in pubs and on the street, was, on the whole, also devoid of unashamed restoratively nostalgic sentiment. Calls to re-erect Hadrian's Wall or to return to or evoke a medieval independent Scotland were the exception.<sup>43</sup> It appears that a certain

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<sup>40</sup> Charlotte Higgins, 'Britannia Won't Be Ruling the Waves on the Last Night of the Proms in Glasgow', *theguardian.com*, 12 September 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/sep/12/last-night-proms-glasgow-britannia-union>, accessed 28 March 2015.

<sup>41</sup> Andrew Marr, *The Battle for Scotland* (London, 2013), 31.

<sup>42</sup> David Torrance, 'Curious Case of SNP's Shift from Ethnic Nationalism', *The Glasgow Herald*, 14 April 2014, <http://www.heraldsotland.com/comment/columnists/curious-case-of-snps-shift-from-ethnic-nationalism.23932995>, accessed 9 June 2014.

<sup>43</sup> Teresa Rumsey, 'We'll Have to Rebuild Hadrian's Wall to Keep the Scottish

degree of political correctness also prevailed in the popular domain: not least because politicians and campaigners from both sides constantly reminded and cautioned the electorate to keep the debate civil.<sup>44</sup> The official Better Together campaign, for instance, tried to distance itself from a sectarian version of Unionism and repeated calls for restraint were to be heard by both sides in response to online abuse and issued threats.<sup>45</sup> So, while restoratively nostalgic conspiracy theories and one-sided versions of *truth* did feature in the unofficial debate, the type of restorative nostalgia that usually ‘characterizes national and nationalist revivals all over the world, which engage in the antimodern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths’ was largely absent in Scotland’s debate – in both the political realm and most of the popular debate.<sup>46</sup> And despite the fact that, as Gerry Mooney points out, ‘the media, not least the media based in England (and at times in Scotland too), have sought to portray the entire Independence debate and the September Referendum as issues of Scottish national identity’<sup>47</sup>, national identity was not at the core of the debate. However, it was not entirely absent. The popular movements both for and against independence, at times displaying traits of restorative nostalgia, have been fostered by a more reflective nostalgia that can also inform national identity. Scottish society has been sensitised to myriad aspects of Scottish history and culture, especially since the 1990s and Devolution. This has been fed by an explosion of academic and popular writing; for instance Arthur Herman’s popular books on *How the Scots Invented*

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Out’, *dailyecho.co.uk*, 10 December 2013, [http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/yoursay/letters/10867949.We\\_ll\\_have\\_to\\_rebuild\\_Hadrian\\_s\\_Wall\\_to\\_keep\\_the\\_Scottish\\_out/](http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/yoursay/letters/10867949.We_ll_have_to_rebuild_Hadrian_s_Wall_to_keep_the_Scottish_out/), accessed 25 November 2014.

<sup>44</sup> Ian Macwhirter, ‘The Cybernats Are Playing into Labour’s Hands’, *heraldscotland.com*, 16 December 2014, <http://www.heraldscotland.com/comment/columnists/the-cybernats-are-playing-into-labours-hands.114657748>, accessed 24 March 2015.

<sup>45</sup> Jonathan Brown, ‘Scottish Independence: Sectarianism Fears as Orange Order to March in Edinburgh Against Yes Vote’, *independent.co.uk*, 11 May 2014, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/scottish-independence-sectarianism-fears-as-orange-order-to-march-in-edinburgh-against-yes-vote-9352562.html>, accessed 30 March 2015; Magnus Gardham, ‘Yes Campaigners Launch Bid to Silence Cybernats’, *heraldscotland.com*, 2 February 2013, <http://www.heraldscotland.com/politics/referendum-news/yes-campaigners-launch-bid-to-silence-cybernats.20084686>, accessed 30 March 2015.

<sup>46</sup> Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 41.

<sup>47</sup> Gerry Mooney, ‘The 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum – Competing nationalisms?’, *open.edu*, 2 March 2015, <http://www.open.edu/openlearn/people-politics-law/the-2014-scottish-independence-referendum-competing-nationalisms>, accessed 27 March 2015.

*the Modern World* and *The Scottish Enlightenment*, and Tom Devine's books on *Scotland's Empire* and *The Scottish Nation*, have reached an audience above and beyond a mere limited academic readership. This renaissance and flowering of Scottish themes and issues has been both the result and to some degree the cause of the Scottish debate. This debate has been informed by a plethora of work on Scotland ranging from TV documentaries, autobiographies, popular bestselling novels and political monographs (making a distinct case for either side). Reflective nostalgia has been a catalyst for all kinds of fresh interpretations of the distant and recent past, the striking of new directions in policy and informed reflection on what it means to be Scottish.

It would appear that both official campaigns hoped to profit from voters' historical awareness without overtly appealing to it, or being seen to manipulate it. The question remains why, in such promising conditions, so little overt use was made of powerful nostalgic attachments? One reason, perhaps, was the fear of ferocious scrutiny by media and supporters of both campaigns, particularly online, which would have seized upon any historical, racial or social fallacy. The referendum debate galvanised people from all walks of life into critically assessing the flood of information they were provided with. Both in the traditional media and in innumerable blog postings and Twitterstorms, every claim and assertion was answered with intense partisan scepticism.<sup>48</sup> This widespread public and media vigilance made it very difficult to 'get away' with even the slightest historical allusion or proposed equivalence.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, there was that fear of ridicule by association with simplistic national icons, tacky 'tartanry' and specious historical comparisons. Godwin's Law, otherwise known as the *reductio ad Hitlerum* applied on a large scale in its very own Scottish guise.<sup>50</sup> Anyone who mentions *Braveheart* or Bannockburn

<sup>48</sup> The reactions in the comments section of this article are somewhat representative, I would assert. Cf. Mick Hume, 'The 'Yes' Campaign's Version of History Is Scotch Mist', *spiked-online.com*, 20 August 2014, <http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/the-yes-campaigns-version-of-history-is-scotch-mist/15645#.VITpZmOwSAI>, accessed 21 November 2014.

<sup>49</sup> Mark Aitken, 'Ecklaration of Arbroath: Alex Salmond Invokes Spirit of Robert the Bruce as He Unveils His Own Declaration in Independence Push', *dailyrecord.co.uk*, 17 August 2014, <http://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/politics/ecklaration-arbroath-alex-salmond-invokes-4063547>, accessed 25 November 2014.

<sup>50</sup> Katie Wiles, for instance, likened children at a pro-independence rally to the Hitler Youth and subsequent to the outrage withdrew her candidacy for the Angus constituency. Cf. Scott Macnab, 'Labour Candidate Resigns over Hitler Youth Tweet', *scotsman.com*, 2 July 2014, <http://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/top-stories/labour-candidate-resigns-over-hitler-youth-tweet-1-3462378>, accessed 25 October 2014. David Starkey famously called Alex Salmond a 'Caledonian Hitler'. Cf. Simon

in an online discussion is immediately disqualified.<sup>51</sup> There was also a fear of being accused of fascism by association with ethnic nationalisms that openly instrumentalise restorative nostalgia (for instance those of Serbia, Ukraine, and Nazi Germany). The Yes campaign's repeated emphasis on its non-ethnic and inclusive civic nationalism, and the No campaign's recurring emphasis on multinational and multicultural unity, attest to that. As already securely established nations, Scotland and the UK can draw from their respective Scottish or British forms of banal nationalism. A 'continual "flagging", or reminding, of nationhood' has long been in place and thus there was no need to openly instrumentalise those 'ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced'.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, there was an unwillingness to refer to a glorious military past in a world disillusioned with military solutions, particularly when thinking of Britain's involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. George Galloway's ill-received closing remarks on a panel discussion addressed at young voters in Glasgow, in which he based his case for unity and union on the common struggle their grandparents endured to overthrow the evils of Nazism, showed two things: firstly that this sort of rhetoric is now largely perceived to be unacceptable, and secondly that this particular version and narrative of Britishness no longer holds the same sway over the Scots as it once did.<sup>53</sup> The extent of the seemingly ubiquitous Great War anniversary celebrations, however, constantly reminded the people of that imperial past. The question as to whether it was intentionally orchestrated and was thus politically motivated, or whether it had a great impact on the eventual vote, will perhaps never be answered conclusively. There was a fear of accusations of nationalistic English-bashing on the one side or Scot-bashing on the other, as well as an anxiety at possibly being associated with UKIP and racist bigotry. And in connection with this, both factions recognised that

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Johnson, 'David Starkey: Alex Salmond is a "Caledonian Hitler"', *telegraph.co.uk*, 19 April 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/9214792/David-Starkey-Alex-Salmond-is-a-Caledonian-Hitler.html>, accessed 25. October 2014.

<sup>51</sup> Paul Kavanagh, 'The A to Z of Independence - Sorting Myth from Fact: Braveheart the Woad to Independence', *newsnetscotland.com*, 14 February 2014, <http://www.newsnetscotland.scot/index.php/scottish-opinion/4341-a-unionist-lexicon-an-a-z-of-unionist-scare-stories-myths-and-misinformation#braveheart>, accessed 12 May 2014.

<sup>52</sup> Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (1995; London, 2013), 6.

<sup>53</sup> Asa Bennett, 'Scottish Independence: George Galloway Denies Calling SNP Nazis', *huffingtonpost.co.uk*, 12 September 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2014/09/12/george-galloway-snp-nazis-independence-denial\\_n\\_5809260.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2014/09/12/george-galloway-snp-nazis-independence-denial_n_5809260.html), accessed 12 September 2014.

they had to include in the new Scotland the large immigrant population of English, Irish, Indian, Pakistani and Eastern European origin who were also voters. A further reason is that, as the debate developed, there was also a certain pride to be felt throughout Scotland that the campaign was mostly conducted in an informed, civil and forward-thinking manner, so that Scotland's 'national pastime' of old, nostalgia, had become inappropriate for the debate, as this past was exactly what was to be left behind.<sup>54</sup> And finally there was no need to politically instrumentalise nostalgia to generate votes, when the independence debate had developed a future-oriented dynamic of its own. As the Unionist case was in defence of the status quo, this dynamic was mainly determined by the Yes side and the pro-UK campaign was obliged to follow suit.

Although seldom openly invoked, the past hung over the entire independence debate like a Damoclean sword. For a number of reasons considered here, it would have been extremely difficult for either sides to overtly instrumentalise restorative nostalgia, and by extension a less extreme reflective nostalgia. What has also been shown is that nostalgia in its various forms was only used sparingly, and was most notable for its absence. When it did surface, it was met with acute scepticism and often treated as irrelevant or unduly manipulative. I would also claim that the official Yes side (and their unofficial following) was slightly more cautious with regard to exploiting nostalgic sentiment than the official Better Together campaign. The imminent threat to Unionist identity, and preservationist character of the campaign, explains the more emotive and direct appeals to British heritage (especially by 'unofficial' pro-UK voices). An exclusively Scottish identity, on the other hand, was in no way threatened by the referendum: on the contrary, it has been energised and reinforced, and likewise its 'heritage' precursors. The 'cultural' strand of the debate was dominated by the unofficial part of the Yes side: in fora such as the National Collective and the Bus Party, with (mainly young) artists and activists conducting an informed and open debate that was, when at all nostalgic, reflective in character. In general, the Yes campaign seems to have profited by heeding Stephen Maxwell's 1981 advice that 'to succeed left wing nationalism must look to Scotland's future, not her past'.<sup>55</sup> The tendency not to '[bring] back the old life that comes not again'<sup>56</sup> has done more to counter

<sup>54</sup> Liz Lochhead, *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off and Dracula* (Harmondsworth, 1989), I.1.14.

<sup>55</sup> Stephen Maxwell, *The Case For Left Wing Nationalism: Essays and Articles* (Edinburgh, 2013), 143.

<sup>56</sup> Andrew Lang, 'Culloden', in Mrs (sic) Lang (ed.), *The Poetical Works of Andrew Lang*, vol. 1 (London et al., 1923) 52–3, 53.

and debunk myths of Scottish history than to capitalize on their emotional – and political – resonances.

In the weeks following the referendum outcome, the pro-independence playwright David Greig pondered ‘what sweeter way to spend a lifetime than drinking to the memory of a glorious future that never happened’.<sup>57</sup> But this is highly unlikely. Whatever Scotland’s constitutional future might hold, the reflective side of nostalgia has certainly prevailed over the restorative thus far. The legacy of the debate will remain a valuable re-assessment of the entire Scottish relationship to England, a re-arranging of the United Kingdom, and a re-invention and coming-of-age of a Scotland that looks to the future instead of to a mythical past.

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<sup>57</sup> David Greig, ‘Back to Work’, *front-step.co.uk*, 24 September 2014, <http://www.front-step.co.uk/2014/09/24/back-to-work/>, accessed 1 October 2014.