

***'Welfare, Equality and Social Justice:
Scottish Independence and the Dominant Imaginings of the 'New' Scotland'***

Gerry Mooney (The Open University in Scotland)

(Gerry.Mooney@open.ac.uk)

Gill Scott (Glasgow Caledonian University)

(gill.wilmot1@btinternet.com)

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This paper focuses on the extent to which issues of equality, social justice and social welfare have been mobilised in the most prominent imaginings of an independent Scotland. Since 2011 the SNP Scottish Government has repeatedly argued that any future independent Scotland will be characterised by a strong commitment to a distinctively Scottish social welfarism. This paper explores the main tenets of such claims noting that while the myths of Scottish distinctiveness in this respect have long been critiqued, they remain central to the visions of what Scottish society is, and what it could become. Drawing on specific framings and understandings of Scotland's past, leading SNP politicians have made claims that a new Enlightenment in Scotland could act as a 'beacon' for progressive policy making across the rest of the UK and Europe. This new Enlightenment would be underpinned by the ethics of equality and social justice and the market and economic growth would be servants rather than drivers of social change.

In critically exploring these claims to Scottish distinctiveness, this paper focuses on a particular area of social policy, which is childcare. It is argued that policy making in Scotland today, as well as the SNP vision for the future, focus on areas of concern that have a lineage back to Enlightenment ideas – investing in childhood as a means to make a better society. It highlights the challenges of combining a market driven childcare strategy with a social investment approach. The paper aims to promote a critical engagement with the unfolding 'imaginary' of any independent (or more devolved) Scottish society, a society in which a globally competitive economy can deliver important socially just goals.

Keywords: social and public policy; devolution; nationalism; care; neo-liberalism; Scotland

Introduction

The enduring legacies of the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment continue to influence and shape Scottish political debate in the early twenty-first century, even if such legacies are rarely made explicit. Notions of social progress were central to eighteenth – century Enlightenment ideals; a key idea being that 'improvement' and a departure from a society characterised by irrationality were absolutely feasible and desirable. Arguments advancing the development of a new kind of society dominated by reason, rational thinking, social progress and universalism together formed the spine of Enlightenment thinking. In the context of contemporary Scotland – and as has been outlined in the introduction to this themed collection of papers – such ideas continue to circulate and help frame particular ways

of thinking about Scotland, that is the Scotland of yesterday, today and, more importantly, the future.

It is not the task for this paper to revisit ongoing controversies around the exact nature of the Enlightenment legacy, and this is picked up in other papers in this collection. The disputed and contested nature of the Scottish Enlightenment today is reflected in the ongoing attacks on its heritage and on its claim that human beings can transform society for the better. In eighteenth-century Scotland, Enlightenment theorists were generally strong advocates of the development and expansion of capitalist society, and that human agency had the capacity to transform the world in ways that benefited society. In the context of the early twenty-first century, Enlightenment ideals have been under sustained attack, not least that a belief in universal human rights, and in universalism, leads to the suppression of difference and a domination of the oppressed.

The competing interpretations of the legacy of the Enlightenment reflect in some ways that it remains a point of reference in many contemporary forms of political and social thought. While it is not always made explicit or acknowledged as such, Enlightenment-inspired narratives about the shape and direction of society do shape views about what is feasible or possible in the world today. Enlightenment notions of justice likewise retain some potency, not least drawing at times on the thinking of David Hume (Hume 1978). This is particularly true in the heartland of the eighteenth century Enlightenment in Scotland, where, among others, the SNP Scottish Government are not amiss to making claims to the possibility of a 'second' or a 'new' Enlightenment. Is it possible that a modern capitalist society, such as Scotland, could achieve its economic ends, and in particular economic growth, while simultaneously meeting its oft-stated social goals, in relation to equality, fairness and prosperity for all?

The ideas of the 18th century European Enlightenment were, in many ways, a response to the stark challenges posed by moves away from more rural and non-industrialised societies, the growth of towns and cities, challenges to long-held beliefs and ideas and the breakdown of established forms of social order. Reason, rather than tradition, was seen as a means to address these challenges.

Without doubt the Scottish Enlightenment was very much a product of its time and no claim is being implied here that this was in any way similar to the current period. However, Scotland is also today in a period of some significant change and, as in the period of the Enlightenment, there are many challenges thrown-up the need to make sense of these developments. Again without wishing to imply that society has been transformed, or that the breadth of changes today is remotely of the scale that unfolded during the eighteenth-century, since 1999 and the introduction of devolution and the re-convening of a Scottish Parliament for the first time since 1707, the political landscape of Scotland has undergone significant change. Indeed, the pace of change following the first ten years or so of devolution has gathered momentum, not least around Scotland's constitutional future and the independence debate. The case for Scottish independence has, from time to time, invoked some, albeit perhaps vague and ambiguous, claims that Enlightenment ideals can help shape and guide the construction of a new Scotland, founded upon progressive and socially just aspirations.

This paper highlights some of the ways in which the Enlightenment is called upon in shaping the dominant narratives and representations of contemporary Scottish society, in relation to its imagined past, present and future. The paper considers some of the ways in which ideas of social justice and equality have been mobilised to inform debate around Scotland's constitutional future, and in particular in relation to claims as to the guiding principles of any future Scottish welfare state. These debates reflect a contest between two generally opposing (though not unified) 'camps'; one that sees the best prospects as lying in Scotland's continuing membership of the UK (albeit with varying degrees of further devolution and greater autonomy), and the other which posits that it is only through full constitutional independence that another more enlightened Scotland can be possible. In exploring these issues the paper focuses on childcare policy, which has been to the fore in some of the arguments advanced about the guiding philosophy and principles of a Scottish approach to welfare.

Legacies of the Scottish Enlightenment and Contemporary Childcare Policy

Many of the debates during and since the 2014 independence Referendum have been driven by ideas of a more socially just or a 'better' society. Social policy has become key to

the envisioning of a future nation, not least with reference to children and childcare. The Common Weal (Davis et al 2016), for example, recently commented that:

In societies that have high levels of equality, fairness and prosperity, early years learning and care is treated with seriousness. Setting our ambitions low would be a dereliction of our responsibilities to future generations of Scots.

While in 2005, the First Minister (Sturgeon 2015a) stated that:

In my view (Early learning and childcare), is central to any enlightened view of what modern Scotland should look like and that is why it is such a driving priority of my government.

A focus on improving childhood by policy makers is not new, nor unrelated to ideas from the Enlightenment. Indeed Early Learning and quality childcare were central to Enlightenment thinking in the eighteenth century. Philosopher John Locke (1632-1704), for example, was a key voice in promoting ideas of childhood as a 'structured time' where it is 'the parents' duty to help the child learn' (Foyster and Marten 2010 p.4). Locke's insistence that children should be provided with the best possible setting in which to establish their mental processes was pivotal in increasing the cultural attention paid to child development and education. Prior to the Enlightenment, parenting was mainly about disciplining children and pushing them towards adulthood as soon as possible (Ariès 1962). In the Enlightenment, childhood came to be considered a precious time of development and essential to a better society. The post-Enlightenment industrialist and writer, Robert Owen, derived many of his ideas about childhood education and childcare from the Enlightenment but we see with him how they can be connected also to ideas about reducing inequality. He highlighted how the elimination of poverty and creation of better communities needs to focus on children and their education (Donnachie 2003).

We have a very different society now and far better conditions for most children than those even in Owen's enlightened New Lanark community, but inequalities and poor conditions remain for many children (Scott 2016). As a result when a better society is envisioned and evoked by politicians and policymakers in Scotland, early years education and quality childcare becomes a key focus. Thus whilst the context of debate about childhood and

early years education and care today is very different than that of 18th and 19th century debates the debate remains very much alive. We are now, though, more able to reflect critically on the role of the state and ensure that the value to the nation of investing in the early years of childhood is recognised as one that conjures a socially just vision for a future nation. At the same time, however, we are also more aware of complex relationships between public and private provision.

Enlightenment Contestations and the Politics of Independence

That different and competing narratives of Scotland's pasts in general, and of the Scottish Enlightenment in particular, are invoked and mobilised in support of or against Scottish independence today perhaps should come as little surprise given the tendency for nationalisms to call upon specific narratives of the past in advancing nationalist causes today (see Gellner 1983, and Nairn 1977). However, drawing on Enlightenment ideas directly is nevertheless something of a challenge. For Smith (2013), for example, this is captured by the struggle of Scottish nationalists and supporters of Scottish independence to locate the Scottish Enlightenment within a pro-nationalist/independence frame of reference. This is because the main theorists of the Scottish Enlightenment were unionists in that they saw themselves as part and parcel of *'a wider British and European intellectual community, and seemed remarkably free from nostalgia for past ways of life regardless of national origin...'* (Smith 2013: 338).

Here Smith is writing very much from a unionist position himself. But whilst many would disagree that nostalgia is what drives claims for an independent Scotland, arguing, for example, that the ideas and traditions of the Scottish Enlightenment are a strong basis for a more socially just society (see Grant 2015). The Scottish Enlightenment, *does* sit uncomfortably within the popular historical narrative about Scottish independence. This has to do with the perceived connection between the supposedly left-wing political culture of Scotland and the ambivalent place on the left–right spectrum that the Scottish Enlightenment inhabits. One of the central arguments of the 2014 Referendum debate has been that an independent Scotland would be a more progressive and egalitarian society, more social democratic and, for want of a better term, a 'kinder' place. When, as Scottish First Minister and SNP leader, Alex Salmond argued that an independent Scotland would become a 'beacon

for progressive opinion south of the border' (BBC News Scotland 2012), he argued that it would address:

policy challenges in ways which reflect the universal values of fairness – and are capable of being considered, adapted and implemented according to the specific circumstances and wishes within the other jurisdictions of these islands and beyond' (Salmond 2012)

Whilst Salmond was more a populist, pro-business politician than a committed supporter of radical leftish policies, his successor as both SNP leader and First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, presents the SNP's approach as much more distinctly social democratic. At the SNP annual conference in November 2014, she commented that 'My role is to build a Scotland that all those who live and work here can be proud of, a nation both social democratic and socially just' (Sturgeon 2014). In another speech, this time at the London School of Economics in March 2015, her analysis of the state of the UK focused mainly on two policy areas: welfare and the economy. However, in terms of welfare, she argued that the bulk of reform has fallen on the backs of disabled people and women, and, in an implicit attack on work-first approaches to welfare, she highlighted that families with one or more member in paid work are not guaranteed shelter from poverty. Moreover, on the economy, she advocated a shift *away* from the 'austerity' agenda being pursued by the UK Government and, along with John Swinney, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth in the Scottish Government, she has subsequently argued that equality (particularly gender equality) should be recognised as a precondition for a successful economy (Sturgeon 2015b). Here Sturgeon explicitly calls upon concepts from the Enlightenment era to lay-out her vision of a Scottish society that would be shaped by such ideas. Speaking when Deputy First Minister in 2013, Sturgeon sought to move the argument around independence from one of national identity, and ethnicised understandings of nationalism, to a much more 'civic' nationalism. A civic nationalist agenda retains the central commitment of nationalism to self-determination, but is primarily focused on the identity, nature and principles of an independent nation. The SNP seek a fully independent Scotland, outside the UK and free from the policies of a UK government, enabling Scotland to carve out its own path informed by Enlightenment ideals and by notions of Scottish society and Scots as being fairer, more committed to equality and social justice.

These claims are frequently invoked by leading SNP politicians, as evidenced in the following comments from Sturgeon:

But I joined the SNP and supported independence because I thought then, and believe now, that an independent Scotland is the best route to a socially just Scotland. For me, an independent Scotland has never been the goal in itself, but rather the means to deliver the vital objectives of a fair society and dynamic economy. The range of identities in modern Scotland – Scottish, British, Pakistani, Irish, Polish and many more – will be encompassed in an independent country, but they are not dependent on it. In the centuries since the 1707 Union, Scottish identity has endured, evolved and strengthened. In a similar manner, British identity will continue in an independent Scotland. In other words, the case for independence does not rest on identity or nationality, but rather on values of social justice, enterprise and democracy. My concerns are not just about the nation of Scotland – they are principally about the welfare of the people of Scotland.

(Sturgeon 2013)

Narratives and ideas of social justice and progressive forms of social welfare have also been harnessed by those on the side of Scotland remaining within the UK. Politicians on both sides of the independence debate claimed social justice was a defining feature of Scotland's future. During the period of the independence debate, ex-Prime Minister and Labour Leader Gordon Brown (2014a) argued that social justice lies at the heart of Scottish political values but commended the current UK union as 'a union of social justice'. By contrast, the Scottish Government's vision for Independence, *Scotland's Future: your guide to an Independent Scotland*, published in November 2013, asserted the centrality of social justice, but within the context of an independent Scottish state:

The Scottish Government's vision is of a Scotland, fit for the 21st century and beyond, which is founded on the fundamental principles of equality and human rights and characterised by our economic success and social justice and the ability of our people to have control over the decisions which affect them: the opportunity for all Scotland's people to play a part in our future.

(Nicola Sturgeon, Deputy First Minister, Scottish Government 2013)

That notions of social justice, equality and fairness are not only ambiguous, but can be invoked by contrasting ideologies and perspectives is illustrated by the debates that ensued during the period of the Scottish independence campaign.

Scottish Independence and the Imaginings of Welfare Futures – and Welfare Pasts

The debate around Scotland's constitutional future has rarely been in isolation from arguments around the shape and future trajectory of social welfare. Broadly defined social welfare issues were also an important part of the demand for devolution in the late 1970s. The debate before and after the 2014 referendum, and specifically around 'more' devolution, takes Scotland down a path that few could have predicted in the early years of devolution. However, narratives and principles informing social welfare are not solely mobilised in relation to the question of which additional powers could or should be devolved. Perhaps more significantly, social welfare is playing a key role in the imaginings and visions of what an independent Scotland would be like.

However, these visions also invoke the past. Nairn's (1997) argument about the 'Janus face of nationalism', simultaneously looking backwards and forwards in 'a nationalist double time', is relevant in that the vision of a welfarist future, tends also to be a nostalgic vision of a welfare past; a pre-1979, pre-Thatcherite 'golden era' in which the 'classic' UK welfare state was built on fairness, universalism and social democracy (Wincott 2011, 2013). The romanticisation of a welfare system that never was, transcends both sides of the argument in the Scottish Independence debate, but it also seriously limits the vision of the kind of society Scotland could become.

Transforming childcare: Towards a Distinctive and Socially Just Policy

Since the early days of devolution, Scotland's capacity to develop increasingly distinctive policy in already devolved areas such as education, criminal justice and housing has been seen as evidence of political commitment in Scotland to social justice and equality and divergence from the rolling back of welfare preferred by the successive UK governments (Mooney and Scott 2012). Early childhood education and care (ECEC) may not have had the

same high intensity of profile as other areas of policy but since the 1998 there has been a distinct approach in Scotland. The 1998 *Meeting the Childcare Challenge: A Childcare Strategy for Scotland* was presented at the same time as the Green Paper *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (DfES 1998) in England. Both highlighted the need to address affordability, quality, accessibility and diversity issues but stressed that local integrated solutions were needed and that the new Scottish Parliament would have the main responsibility to implement strategy in Scotland. So although there is a complex picture of UK wide public spending on families involving cash benefits and tax credits that significantly affect the mixed economy of childcare, the provision and regulation of early years education and childcare in Scotland has long been a matter reserved to Scottish Government.

It is an area of public provision that certainly needs addressing. Despite the 1998 Strategy and the expansion of free entitlement to part time early education for 3 and 4 year olds, too many children and families cannot access the good quality early education and care they want. In fact expansion slowed during between 2000 and 2008 (Campbell-Barr and Garnham 2010). A 2015 estimate suggests an extra 45000 places are needed across Scotland by 2020 if the current policy of expanding hours for 3 and 4 year olds to 30 hours per week is to be achieved. There are simply insufficient number of full day places in childcare centres, even if all childcare centres operate to full capacity (Davis et al 2016). Scotland has also experienced problems with short term funding streams that come to an end, resulting in a lack of continuity in the provision of services leaving the most vulnerable without quality services (Wolfson and King 2008). Costs of pre-school childcare and out-of- school clubs have also increased in Scotland. According to a Daycare Trust's Childcare Cost Survey (2010) nursery costs in Scotland rose by 8.3 per cent per year between 2004 and 2008 (compared to an inflation rate of 2.9 per cent). The same survey showed just over a quarter of parents (27 per cent) reported some difficulty in coping with the costs of childcare: unsurprisingly, those with lower incomes found childcare costs hardest to meet. The annual cost of a typical nursery place for children under 2 is now over £4500 for 25 hours of nursery care per week – twice that for a full-time place (Daycare Trust 2010). Interestingly the same childcare cost survey showed parents in Scotland are more likely to report a lack of childcare than in England.

The Scottish Government's current early childhood education and care strategy could address some of these problems. The strategy includes a commitment to delivering 30 hours

free childcare per week (1,140 per year) for all 3-4 year olds and 'vulnerable' two year olds by 2020. The commitment is a doubling of current policy of 15 hours a week (600 hours per year) free early education, with the ambition that Scotland will be "the best place in the world to bring up children". They are commitments that have been reaffirmed despite the 'No' vote in 2014 and the language used suggests that childcare has once more moved to a more central position in welfare debates. If we examine recent arguments in Scotland, moreover, we identify a significant shift in the basic ideas that could drive change. Quality integrated provision with a stress on child centred learning that mirrors Scandinavian approaches lies at the centre of debate. So whilst US President Barak Obama, in his State of the Nation address 2015, argued that childcare needed to be treated 'like the national economic priority that it is for all of us' (Obama 2015) and previous New Labour and now Conservative UK Government approach to ECEC policy is much the same - constructing childcare policy as an economic issue and as part of the welfare-to-work agenda (Lewis and Giullari 2005) the SNP government approach is avowedly more child centred. The arguments for early childhood education and care in Scotland made by the Scottish government are, by contrast, ones that draw more on a Nordic model of children's and parents' rights and investment in a nation's future through its children.

In February 2015 in a speech to the David Hume Institute in Edinburgh, Sturgeon claimed that:

Spending on childcare is one of the best investments any government can possibly make. Early learning is central to any enlightened view of what modern Scotland should look like. Childcare isn't just about enabling parents to return to work. It's about providing the caring and learning environment that every child needs in order to flourish.

(Sturgeon 2015a)

These are bold and valuable intentions and it is important to examine whether the expressed values of gender equality, social justice and children's rights are leading to the sort of policy that many want to see in Scotland. Are the makers of childcare policy in Scotland actually creating something that is distinctive and meets the needs of mothers, fathers and children? During 2014-15 two independent reviews looked at the strengths and weaknesses of current and planned policy in Scotland and identified a number of issues that needed to be

addressed to achieve a socially just and achievable childcare strategy. The Commission for Childcare Reform (Children in Scotland 2015) and the Scottish Early Learning Childcare Workforce Review (Siraj 2015) consulted with all the major service providers and users in Scotland to see, inter alia, whether current and proposed policy changes from Scottish and Westminster governments could really *transform* childcare into quality provision that could address the needs of children, redress the impact of poverty on families and develop a sector of employment that would retain and develop a quality workforce. The reviews were important because more and more families today face challenges associated with precarious, part-time work, dismal social assistance rates, limited access to training, and shortages of affordable housing, poor access to quality ECEC is yet another obstacle to overcome in finding a route out of poverty (Citizens Advice Bureau 2014).

The findings of both reviews were not particularly positive. According to the Commission there are major problems that need to be addressed in Scotland if young children are to be offered the type of care and early learning opportunities that enable them to develop and a stronger vision than that offered by the current SNP government is essential. The Report states that funding of childcare in Scotland is ‘complicated, confusing, unfair and lacking in transparency’. It also identifies that 79% of councils report that there are insufficient childcare facilities or places to meet demand and that without more free or subsidized places, childcare is too costly for many. All the major parties in the Scottish Parliament, and in local authorities, may have recognised that the expansion of childcare is necessary to achieve a more socially just environment for children but the Commission argues there is no realistic or overall vision or agreed strategy at local or Scottish level that could meet the needs of parents and address issues of poverty.

The Scottish Early Learning Childcare Workforce Review in 2014 also identified problems. The report concluded that the quality and availability of a workforce that could deliver the type of childcare and early years education that parents and politicians want is lacking. The review examined skills and qualifications, recruitment and retention as well as workforce planning across local authority, private and non-profit sectors. Whilst commending the change in commitment to developing the quality and availability of childcare in Scotland, the report also identifies concerns over the content of qualifications for childcare workers,

poor integration of services and significant inequalities in working conditions, pay and opportunities across public and private sectors with workers in the private sector particularly experiencing poor pay and prospects.

The SNP's much vaunted aspiration to get a generation of mothers back into the workplace through the provision of universal, good quality, free childcare is an aim worthy of a modern enlightened nation. However, there is much that still needs to be done and it is not an easy objective to achieve amid current fiscal cutbacks. Delivering the extra hours for staff qualified to deliver it, paid at the level of at least a living wage, requires funding and agreement across different workers' unions. Avoiding the privatization of provision is also essential if childcare workers' conditions are to be improved, or at least maintained, and the prioritization of profits over families' well-being is to be avoided.

Lessons, both positive and negative, can be learnt from elsewhere. In Australia publicly funded child-care services were once the most comprehensive and integrated provided by any liberal welfare system but with a change to a more neo-liberal government in the mid-1990s childcare provision moved from a system which supported inclusive non-profit, community-based services, geared towards children's needs towards a free market approach with a tax rebate system similar to that proposed by the 2015 UK Conservative Government (Michel and Mahon 2002). This resulted in the privatization and corporatization of child care services which, according to one analysis, has had devastating consequences for parents, families and staff in the form of rapidly increasing fees, poorer quality services and poorer working conditions, as well as closures as the corporate sector lost interest in low profit service provision (Brennan and Oloman 2009). This is one response that, hopefully, will be avoided by the Scottish Government. The expansion of childcare developed by the Parti Quebecois in Quebec since 1997 offers a more positive model. This involves a low-fee childcare programme for all children between the age of 0 and 12. Highly subsidised by the province, it offers affordable, accessible childcare, which in turn played a key role in reducing poverty by 50 per cent in its first ten years. It also saw increased labour market participation and annual earnings amongst families, who in turn became less dependent on welfare. There is no doubt that the programme makes it easier for parents to achieve a better work-family life balance. Its rapid growth has meant demand for subsidised spaces still considerably

exceeds the supply. However the development of new facilities has slowed, and there is some evidence that the quality of educational services tends to be poorer for children from low-income backgrounds. The rate of investment in staff training remains a regular topic of debate (St-Cerny et al 2012). But the approach is progressive in so far as it offers increased access and it is socially just insofar as it extends opportunity to poor and excluded groups.

In Scotland it is essential that a realistic vision of childcare that is child and family centred and fully integrates education and care is pursued. Increased reliance on for-profit providers will no doubt take place but continued attention to early years' education needs to be sustained alongside the expansion of care. This appears to be emerging in the Scottish Government's plans for childcare growth, but is essential if early childhood education and care is to contribute to a better future for children from all classes and a future where gender equality is more easily achieved. The notion that childcare can be 'transformative' for Scotland's economy, gender equality and children's future, was highlighted during the pre-2014 Referendum debates by Salmond as a marker of what would be achievable in an Independent Scotland. It was reaffirmed as a way to create a better, fairer society even without independence by his successor Nicola Sturgeon in 2015. But if a truly Enlightened ideas-driven approach is to be attained then four things need to be considered. Firstly attention must be paid to the real impact of working tax credit cuts on low income families to purchase the flexible childcare they need, secondly local authorities must be helped financially to fund the expansion of formal ECEC expansion, thirdly if the non-state sector is to become a more significant provider of non-parental care then attention must be paid to redressing social inequality by paying full attention to the needs of all children and; finally integrated training for staff and recognition of early years and childcare workers as professionals is needed. Only then will Scotland be able to pursue its hopes of providing a childhood that can lead to a better society.

Reframing Scotland: Welfare Nation and Welfare Society

The discussion in this paper has focused on some of the ways in which issues and questions of social welfare have become central to debates about Scotland's constitutional future. However, it is not only a matter of policy making, and the dominant narratives and

rhetoric around which that is couched which is of interest, but the significant ways in which the imaginings and visions of an Independent Scotland also come to be heavily reliant and premised upon particular claims about the kind of social welfare system that would or could be developed with Independence. To a lesser extent, but it is also evident therein nonetheless, such visions are also mobilised in arguments for greater devolution for a Scotland remaining within the UK. Here the claim is that only the 'social union' of the UK guarantees the pooling of resources, that is some of the remaining redistributive aspects of the UK welfare state on a pan-UK basis and a basis for solidarity, 'the bonds of common social citizenship', which is stronger than appeals to nation and nationalism (McLean, Gallagher and Lodge 2013).

In turn these visions open-up a series of other issues for critical scrutiny, not least the long standing claims that underpin and surround narratives of Scottishness and Scottish national identity. Taken together, these narratives also fuel ideas that any Independent Scottish nation state would be a progressive state delivering on social justice aspirations and goals. This has been used, as was noted above, to distance Scotland – and the approach of the current Scottish Government – from the punitivism that increasingly characterises UK social welfare politics.

Debates around devolution and independence have opened-up a space for the kinds of discussions around welfare and social policy making more generally which have not been evident for some considerable time, and it would be reasonable to argue that this marks a distinctive policy and political Scottish landscape. It is, however, one thing to accept that there are differences in politics and policy between Scotland and the rest of the UK, most notably England, but quite another to assume that this means that an independent Scotland would necessarily be progressive in relation to social welfare.

Throughout the constitutional debate, many voices in the pro-independence movement have proclaimed Scotland as a socially progressive nation. The Scottish Government's 2013 Independence Report, *Scotland's Future* (Scottish Government 2013), echoing the language of the Scottish Enlightenment, refers to Scotland as imbued by a 'spirit of progress'. Speaking in London, but addressing the wider non-Conservative UK audience outside Scotland, Alex Salmond's 2012 Hugo Young Lecture (Salmond 2012; see also Salmond 2014) focuses on Scotland's place in the world and again claims that an independent Scotland would be 'a beacon for progressive opinion'. While very light on the detail, the vision is that

Scotland would be progressive in relation to equalities, welfare, the environment, poverty and wealth redistribution, and across social policy making more generally, the myth of Scottish progressiveness, fairness, egalitarianism and collectiveness comes to occupy an even more privileged position within politics and across public discourse in Scotland. That the evidence for such idealist claims is severely lacking, though this appears to matter little, as the political potency of these myths comes to be even more consolidated. These myths are hardly damaged either when critics point to the sharp disjuncture between the rhetoric and the reality of inequality and disadvantage in Scottish society, though it is important not to deny that the absence of fees for Scottish students, or plans for universal childcare or the Scottish Government's policy to ameliorate the impact of the bedroom tax by compensating those affected are socially progressive in as far as they go.

There has been much debate as to the influences on the SNP general approach to welfare and on sections of the wider Independence movement. Suggestions that the Scottish Government is seeking to emulate Scandinavian and Nordic welfare systems are among the most commonly referred to factors, not least by leading nationalist politicians. This contributes to the forging and remaking of Scotland as a particular national social policy or social welfare space. However, the oft idealised perception of the Nordic countries is itself increasingly out of step with developments therein. In their study of nationalism and the reframing of Finnish and Swedish welfare states by far-right political parties, Nordensvard and Ketola (2015) explore the different ways in which nationalism and social policy has come to be reframed in terms of a 'welfare nation state'. The key aspect of this is the focus on *nation* by such parties, which is used to delineate an exclusive and bounded national community threat by immigration which is undermining state social welfare. This is not an anti-welfarist narrative and indeed it remains hugely supportive of widespread redistribution – but the beneficiaries should be members of the respective national communities.

The idea of a welfare nation state and the links between nation, nationalism and social policy are not new. However, the work of Nordensvard and Ketola has relevant insights for our understanding of developments in Scotland. As with the Nordic societies Scotland is also a place in which strong connections are made between nation and social welfare, and indeed a left-wing version of the notion of a 'welfare nation state', which is not premised on any sense of an ethnic national community, was put forward during the Independence debate (see

McInally 2013). While there are enduring legacies of the post-1945 UK/British welfare state, the overriding focus is on Scotland as a national community and social welfare policy. The reframing of welfare in Scotland, increasingly imagined in terms that stress Scottish progressiveness is, as argued above, is a key plank in the envisioning of an Independent Scotland. As in Finland and Sweden, the symbolic role and vision of the welfare state strongly tugs at ideas and feelings of inclusion, belonging, collectiveness and community. In this regard it is highly seductive and through this the attractiveness of social welfare for small countries or regions which have strong nationalist movements is clear. Campaigns for national autonomy and processes of nation-building have long been fuelled by the rhetoric of progressive and inclusive social welfare.

In Scotland, however, while we can clearly identify a nationalist framing and reframing of an Independent *Scottish* welfare state, which speaks to ideas of a nation and social solidarity built on nationalist terms, there is no sense of Scotland, the Scots, as an ethnically bounded national community. In the language deployed by SNP politicians, Scotland is open to all and each and every person migrating to Scotland can be a fully Scottish citizen. Yet there are two important issues that emerge here that merit further attention: while the elites of Scotland tend not to racialise these kinds of debates, they sometimes move in the other direction where they simply tend to erase both the history of racism in Scotland and the actual existence of minorities today. Through this, the structures that help to reproduce institutional racism unchallenged which in turn can produce unequal outcomes (see Meer 2015; Virdee 2014).

Second, in seeking to distinguish Scottishness as essentially progressive, recent Conservative UK government policy making, the emphasis of the necessity of austerity are presented as being alien to Scotland. The UK welfare state is viewed as out of step with *Scottish* needs and fails to deal with social problems which are often presented as being uniquely *Scottish*. While this was evident from the early years of devolution, reflected in the oft-used phrase, 'Scottish policies for Scottish problems', it has come to take on a much more potent representation of the UK welfare state as out of kilter with 'Scotland' and with the attitudes and values of the people of Scotland.

Conclusion

Since the onset of devolution in 1999 there has been a continuing debate around the extent to which we actually talk about a uniquely Scottish approach to social welfare. This paper has explored some of the key ways in which this is regarded as progressive and more in tune with assumed Scottish values. However, the development of a fully-fledged Scottish welfare system that provides for the whole of Scottish society through universal provision requires national autonomy – an independent Scotland.

There are strong echoes of the Scottish Enlightenment here. There is a Scottish approach to democracy, to politics and to policy-making which, increasingly, is putting Scotland on a different path from that pursued elsewhere in the UK – not least by Westminster Governments. An independent Scotland would be a progressive society and the rejection of austerity, anti-welfarism and neoliberal-driven policies would have no part in an Enlightened and Independent Scotland.

The imagining of this new Scotland is powerful, and it almost led to victory for the pro-independence movement in 2014. On many levels however, it is problematic, not so much for what it says, but for its absences and omissions. The claim of an essential progressiveness and a uniquely *Scottish* commitment to fairness and social justice, has understandably been heavily criticised. While much is made of Enlightenment ideas of progress, universality and rationality, in the context of a hugely unequal, polarised and class, gender and ethnically divided Scotland, such ideas will remain simply as rhetoric if these social inequalities are not challenged. However, a debate that is informed by such ideals is surely to be welcomed, given the residualising and punitive approaches to welfare policy making that are to the fore in other parts of the UK.

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