

## **English nationalism and Brexit**

### **Aufgaben**

Der vorliegende Vorschlag enthält in Aufgabe 3 alternative Arbeitsanweisungen.

- 1 Outline the author's view on Brexit and English nationalism. (Material) **(30 BE)**

- 2 Analyse how the author's view on Brexit and English nationalism is presented in the article.  
Focus on structure and language. (Material) **(40 BE)**

- 3 Choose one of the following tasks:

- 3.1 "[I]f ever there was a country that learned what disunity could do to itself, Ireland is that country". (Material)

Taking the quotation as a starting point, assess the validity of this statement, also referring to other English-speaking countries dealt with in class.

**or**

- 3.2 "Every country has its own unique myths, in which the ghosts of the past are present but mostly benign." (Material)

You are participating in an international online project on national identities in English-speaking countries and you have been invited to contribute to the project's website.

Write a blog post commenting on the quotation, also referring to material dealt with in class.

**(30 BE)**

**Material****Sheridan Flynn: The Re-Emergence of English Nationalism Defines Brexit (2019)**

I grew up in Dublin in the 1980s, when Ireland was slowly emerging from decades of economic and cultural stagnation.

A violent civil war in the 1920s had traumatised individuals and fractured families. The Catholic Church and state took over from the toppled British institutions and merged to form a new abusive authoritarian regime. The Industrial Revolution and the cultural revolution of the 1960s had largely bypassed the country.

Ireland was characterised by the jagged ancient wet stone of the Skellig islands. It was the land of saints and scholars. And the land of ghosts and migration.

We lived on the east coast, around 60 miles from the British mainland and within broadcast distance of Britain's terrestrial television masts. This meant that the BBC, ITV and Channel 4 were beamed right into our living rooms, directly into our consciousness.

On a clear day, you could look across the water, see north Wales and hear John Peel<sup>1</sup> on the radio. Because of this, we understood British culture very well and, despite our historical differences, admired many aspects of British and English life. [...] For generations of Irish people stuck in a bleak state, British television was an escape of intelligent thought, laughter, liberalism and pure entertainment.

Every country has its own unique myths, in which the ghosts of the past are present but mostly benign. But, during the 2016 EU Referendum, the Leave campaign's strategy was to exhume long-buried divisions and breathe new life into them through the dark alchemy of social media.

Migrants invading our shores. Foreigners stealing our resources. Germans humiliating us. Breaking point.

The British public were bombarded by propaganda on a scale never seen before. The myths quickly gave birth to conspiracy theories. Lies travelled unchallenged at lightning speed across the internet. Before the dust of the referendum settled, a new dark English nationalism had emerged.

There's an odd contradiction about the re-emergence of the insular English nationalism of the hard right – especially when you consider that much of modern England was built on foreign labour and financed through the wealth of other countries.

England is a country of migrants, yet English nationalism harbours prejudice, stokes resentments, and provides shelter for violent fanatics. Look at Irish, Scottish or Welsh nationalism and you'll quickly find bigotry of some description. The problem with English [n]ationalism is that the fanatics aren't on the periphery any more – they are running the country and control large swathes of private and public media.

In an age of social media, where extreme views are rewarded by clicks and engagements, the middle ground has been swept away by the tsunami of the Brexit referendum. Looking back to mid-2016, we can almost see the high watermark where the wave crashed and the political moderates were dragged out to sea – to be replaced by comical blowhards whose extreme views had historically confined them to the back benches. [...]

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<sup>1</sup> John Peel – popular British DJ and radio presenter

Type “English Nationalism” into any online search engine and see what you get: a fever dream of rabid English Defence League<sup>2</sup> flag-bearers, Nigel Farage<sup>3</sup> smiling through clenched teeth, middle-aged bald men sporting faded bulldog tattoos, a guy in a Saint George<sup>4</sup> costume slaying a pantomime dragon.

With an Irish border poll<sup>5</sup> and Scottish independence on the cards<sup>6</sup>, the United Kingdom suddenly doesn’t look all that united. For now, one thing is certain, Brexit hasn’t strengthened Britain’s role in the world, it has severely diminished it. It’s not hard to envisage England alone, out of Europe and its special relationship with the US gone for the little country’s lack of strength.

I was recently back in Ireland working on a short documentary about borders and identity for *Byline Times*. While there, we interviewed people from the north and the south. We spoke about the border, about The Troubles, division, Brexit and dealing with the legacy of violence.

The playwright Frank McGuinness eloquently pointed out that “if ever there was a country that learned what disunity could do to itself, Ireland is that country”. History has repeatedly shown us that it doesn’t take much for resentment to spill out onto the streets as barbarity. And, when it does, it’s very hard to go back. [...]

If Brexit is anything, it has been a festival of resentment led by privileged, class-driven fanatics, who are attempting to re-define what it means to be British – and especially what it means to be English. They are cultivating hate and prejudice into a new nationalism and there’s very little standing in their way. As the core pillar of the Union, England is now at a crossroads and we’re all critically short on time.

Britain cannot simply return to the heyday of the past, but the last four years have shown us that we can no longer rely on politics to forge a way forward. In other words, the cavalry isn’t coming to save us. If the values of fair play, liberty and democracy are ever to return, ordinary working-class and middle-class people will need to take responsibility to define that change – and define what it means to be English. Because if they don’t, the chancers<sup>7</sup> and cheats will.

British culture, arguably the UK’s greatest export, helped shape Ireland into the young, broadly outward-looking country it is today. Unless England can begin to face its problems of class, race and identity, it looks like the dark days are set to return.

(894 Wörter)

Sheridan Flynn: The Re-Emergence of English Nationalism Defines Brexit, in: *Byline Times*, 10.12.2019, URL: <https://bylinetimes.com/2019/12/10/the-re-emergence-of-english-nationalism-defines-brexit/> (abgerufen am 09.12.2021).

<sup>2</sup> English Defence League – far-right Islamophobic organisation in the UK

<sup>3</sup> Nigel Farage – British broadcaster and former politician; Leader of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) from 2006 to 2016 and Leader of the Brexit Party from 2019 to 2021

<sup>4</sup> Saint George – Saint George, the “dragon-slayer”, is considered the patron saint of England.

<sup>5</sup> Irish border poll – a poll on the possibility of Irish reunification

<sup>6</sup> on the cards – very likely to happen

<sup>7</sup> chancers – people who use opportunities for their own advantage and often pretend to have skills they do not have