

## **‘Running the country, are you?’: New Scotland and the Adventure of Transatlantic Return**

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In Spring 2000, Tom Nairn argued that Scotland's new Parliament should open a "house of return." At this venue, exiled Scots could gather and offer their wisdom to a recuperated nation. Nairn's vision brings the central trope of post-Jacobite nostalgia to a present day realization through the international descendants of Scottishness. It seems to offer the hope of a globalized Scotland entering modernity through the participation of her most adventurous children.

But identity is no irreducible fact located in place or race, nor can it be unproblematically reconnected and reactivated. Rather it is modular, multiple, flexible, and imaginative. Scottish identity building can be no unproblematic task—particularly when complicated by the dis/connection between Scotland and her emigrants, and the enthusiastic mis/recognitions of Scotland by non Scots.

This article will demonstrate that, in the moment of the new Parliament, when Scots at last find themselves "at home" and are just getting ready to tidy up the place, they are discovering the national hearth has once again become an uncanny home, subject to intimate invasions from uninvited guests, but through previously unimagined spaces. The new Scotland is a creature of the global marketplace. It circulates through accelerating technologies and postmodern sensibilities which welcome, but necessarily shift, revalue, and redirect the ideas of Scottishness articulated by a nation trying to consolidate its sense of self through a Parliament. The twenty-first-century returns of international Scots and others are rearranging Scotland—without any invitation.

'Running the country, are you?' considers the dynamics of Scotland's American outreach through Tartan Day and the World Wide Web. It points out the unpredictability and danger of the Scottish/American liaisons recommended by Nairn and sought by the Scottish Executive for predominantly economic reasons: Trent Lott, erstwhile leader of the Senate and proponent of Tartan Day, aligned Scotland in America with racism; Pat Robertson, onetime business partner to the Bank of Scotland, implicated the bank and the nation in homophobia, racism, sexism. However, if such American Scots may construct the nation against itself, non Scottish Americans may mis-recognize Scotland to the nation's advantage. Here, I turn to the World Wide Web, and the curious connections forged between the gay American right and the Scottish left to oppose Robertson and reconstruct not just Scottish banking but American politics.

Through the post-modern phenomenon of creative identity building, I argue, the selving of Scotland may be taking place elsewhere. In a techno-global age, through world-wide circulation of signs via an electronic web of identification, Scotland may be "now," but not quite "here," and already different from itself. Scotland finds itself in a moment not of cultural consolidation, but of disruption, dispersal, difference. It is a moment whose very danger offers a constructive challenge to a nation that can only, now, be a global formation.