

**PLAYING WITH
COLLECTIVE
MEMORIES: JULIAN
BARNES'S *ENGLAND,
ENGLAND* AND NEW
LABOUR'S
REBRANDING OF
BRITAIN**

Betsabé Navarro Romero
Universidad de Santiago de Compostela

Abstract

In a situation of national identity crisis due to the loss of Empire, globalization and mass migration, Britain has recently been looking for a new orientation of its role in the world. Being an attempt to influence and change the conception of Britishness, New Labour's modernization programme in the 1997 general election illustrates the way national identities, understood as *imagined communities*, are artificially and conveniently constructed by the political elite. Similarly, history writing, essential for the constitution of the national identity, undergoes an analogous process in which historical accounts are manipulated to exhibit convenient versions of the nation's past. In this context, Julian Barnes's novel *England, England* (1998) epitomizes a satirical portrayal of the artful construction of Englishness,

Resumen

Al encontrarse Gran Bretaña en un periodo de crisis de identidad nacional, ha buscado recientemente una nueva orientación a su postura exterior en el mundo. El programa de modernización de New Labour en las elecciones generales de 1997 fue un intento de influir y modificar la concepción de "Britanidad", lo que demuestra que la identidad nacional, entendida como *comunidad imaginada*, es construida artificialmente por la élite política. Asimismo, la construcción de la historia, esencial por otra parte para la formación de la identidad nacional, experimenta un proceso análogo en el que la historia es manipulada para ofrecer una versión idónea del pasado de una nación. En este contexto, la novela de Julian Barnes *England, England* (1998) personifica el retrato satírico de la construcción artificial de "lo inglés", hiperbolizando el proyecto de modernización de New

hyperbolizing New Labour's Labour.
modernization project.

Key Words: National identity, collective memory, artificiality, Britishness, history writing, Julian Barnes, *England, England*.

Palabras Clave: Identidad Nacional, memoria colectiva, artificialidad, Britanidad, historiografía, Julian Barnes, *England, England*.

I emphasize the idea of Britain as *one nation*. Without social justice, there will be no *modernization*, without mutuality and solidarity there will be no prosperity; without shared values there will be no progress; without responsibility there will be no society. A high level of social cohesion is not just urgent in itself; it is essential for an efficient and *prosperous economy*, which is why we have to bring together a drive for *economic efficiency* with that for social justice.¹²¹

(Blair 1996:3-4)

1. INTRODUCTION

The present article exemplifies an interdisciplinary analysis of Julian Barnes's novel *England, England*. This analysis embraces a compound of varied disciplines that help us see, from a theoretical perspective, how the concepts of "nation" and "identity" –and the subsequent construction of "national identity"–, together with the process of the writing of history, are reflected in the novel, bearing in mind a particular historical context in Britain: Tony Blair's premiership (1997-2007). Therefore, I make use of a broad range of disciplines such as Cultural Studies, to analyze the concepts of "nation" and "identity"; Historiography, to emphasize the process of the writing of history; Contemporary British History, to contextualize the novel, and finally Critical Theory and English Literature to argue how literature represents an institutionalized discourse through which we can read and construct history. This multidisciplinary study is essential to relate the literary product, Barnes's novel, with a political project, Blair's modernization programme.

¹²¹ *Emphasis added.*

The article consists of a theoretical section in which discussions of ‘Identity’ and ‘Nation’ are carried out, making reference to some authorized voices such as Stuart Hall, Jean-François Lyotard and Benedict Anderson. I will also deal here with the historical context in which the novel must be placed, New Labour’s Britain. In a final explanatory section a detailed analysis of *England, England* will take place.

As a leader of the Labour Party since 1994, Tony Blair enacted his vision of a new, modern and “young country” (Osgerby 2005:127). An integral renewal, which he expected to implement once in office, had already started in his own party by renaming it “New Labour”. This anticipated a set of reforms which would achieve a better and an improved country. Blair’s nation would represent his own value system: his belief in individuals and society, in social justice, responsibility, solidarity, democracy [...] but also in a more efficient and fair economy, a nation which would display advances in technology and innovation, a renewed education system, an improved NHS and social security, a battle against unemployment, a more decentralized government, a transformation in the hereditary parliamentary system. All in all, it would represent a “radical” political, economic and social renewal (cf. Blair 1997).

Blair’s attempts to modernize the country under the renowned slogan “Cool Britannia” pertained to the notion of Britishness and more specifically to Blair’s personal concept of what it meant to be British. While New Labour maintained that the new perception of British qualities was not imposed but was intrinsic to the national character, many others criticised an artificial enforcement of what the British people and the British nation had to be. This debate could perhaps be placed in a global context about how national identities are constructed and how present identities and history are manipulated to exhibit convenient accounts of what we were in order to define what we are now and where we belong. In this respect, historical revisionist practices may question the objectivity of history and raise the need to open up the established version of history to different and complementary discourses that are often ignored and omitted (e.g. Parekh 2000).

In this context, opponents to Blair’s modernization project and “nation rebranding” (Pitcher 2009:46) condemned the artificial influence on the conception of Britishness, an unnatural construction of national identity that, according to different scholars (e.g. Linda Colley), has been practiced throughout history. Here Julian Barnes’s novel *England, England* (1998) points directly to Blair’s New Britain, understanding this not only as the construction of a national identity but also as the creation of a marketable brand that the nation represents. We could, therefore, frame the novel in a Blairian context (Stein 2003) as an attempt to rewrite the conception of national identity and reinterpret British history.

2. DISCUSSIONS OF “IDENTITY” AND “NATION”

In its current situation of national identity crisis due to the loss of Empire, globalization and mass migration (cf. Lunn 1996), Britain has recently been looking for a re-orientation of its external role in the world characterized by a need to re-think its “nation-ness” (cf. Anderson 1991: 4). In this context, voices are raised to define both notions of “identity” and “nation”. Firstly, identity needs to be considered in “collective” terms as “unity” and “sameness” amongst the group members, and as “those commonly shared features of a group with which members self-consciously identify” (Henke 2003:79). Stuart Hall, when arguing about the construction of identity mentions the “question of *identification*” understood as “some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group” (1997:2). Secondly, regarding the concept of nation, we should make reference to the German concept of “*Kulturnation*” which alludes to “‘communities of fate’ bound together by seemingly objective qualities, such as history, language and culture and often, by connotation, blood ties” (Jenkins and Sofos 1996:15). However, beyond the meaning that is associated with a common history, culture, language, and ethnic background, we should consider the idea of an “imagined community” as defined by Benedict Anderson:

My point of departure is that nationality, [...] nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind [...].

In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community- and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.

It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. (1991:4-6)

Therefore, it can be argued that national identity is a man-made construction perpetually forged to instil, in a particular era, an imagined and convenient conception of nationhood adjusted to the current political and social circumstances. That imagined community, unreal and invented, is infused and shared by the members of the group who, despite unknowing the reality and foundation of their shared features, believe in a fabricated commonness.

Taking this concept of nation as a starting point, the construction of “Nationalism” is, according to Ernest Gellner, similarly artificially constructed. He first defines “nationalism” as a proclamation of a particular “high” culture on the whole society. In his own words: “Nationalism is, essentially, the general imposition of a high culture on society, where previously low cultures had taken

up the lives of the majority, and in some cases of the totality, of the population” (Gellner 1983:57). However, he adds that the construction of nationalisms on some occasions has nothing to do with the culture they claim to defend, but on a particular conception of them in which old traditions and languages are recreated artificially:

It is nationalism which engenders nations, and not the other way round. Admittedly, nationalism uses the pre-existing, historically inherited proliferation of cultures or cultural wealth, though it uses them very selectively, and it most often transforms them radically. Dead languages can be revived, traditions invented, quite fictitious pristine purities restored. But this culturally creative, fanciful, positively inventive aspect of nationalist ardour ought not to allow anyone to conclude, erroneously, that nationalism is a contingent, artificial, ideological invention [...]. Nationalism is not what it seems, and above all it is not what it seems to itself. The cultures it claims to defend and revive are often its own inventions, or are modified out of all recognition. (Gellner 1983:55-56)

In this direction, understanding nationalism as an aspiration to construct a particular nation, other authors have proclaimed the politicization of this phenomenon that is detached from the cultural objects on which nations are based, giving nations the “status of a *political subject*” (Jenkins and Sofos 1996:12) which is what defines nationalism:

“Nationalism” is a “political” phenomenon. This is not to dismiss economic, cultural and geographical factors as irrelevant to the subject of enquiry. But it does challenge the view that “nationalism” is somehow the product of pre-existing socio-cultural entities called “nations” [...]. We would thus prefer to invert the relationship and regard nations as “political” artefacts called into being by nationalist ideologies and movements. (Jenkins and Sofos 1996:11)

However, this man-made construction of nations, and by extension of nationalisms, is not only founded on contemporary culture. It is always linked to the history of a people, to the “collective memory” that is presented institutionally by governments or political elites. The current self-conception of nations is rooted in, and depends mostly on, the past, which is what gives us the sense of origins and belonging. But how is history constructed? Traditional historiography seems to be questioned in a postmodern era in which entrenched versions of history appear now unreliable. In other words, postmodernist studies may suggest that historical objectivity is put into question when historical facts are understood under a perceived subjectivity. This subjectivity is intimately linked with the conception of history as a narrative discourse. Jean-François Lyotard, to this effect, understood postmodernism as “incredulity toward metanarratives” (1997:36). Therefore, writing history, from a postmodern perspective, may imply relativizing and interpreting the past, providing an

integrative meaning to a sequence of facts. That is, in Roland Barthes's view, the actual role of the historian:

The historian is not so much a collector of facts as a collector and relater of signifiers; that is to say, he organizes them with the purpose of establishing positive meaning and filling the vacuum of pure, meaningless series [...]. Historical discourse is in its essence a form of ideological elaboration, or to put it more precisely, an *imaginary* elaboration. (1997:121)

History writing, as Barthes suggested, understood as an *imaginary* elaboration, could be interpreted in its dichotomy between the reality (or the reality of historical facts) and the text (the historical narrative or discourse), meaning that the latter does not reflect only the objectivity of events but also an "elaboration" of reality that has to do more with what Hayden White called the "poetic and rhetorical elements": "Narrative accounts do not consist only of factual statements (singular existential propositions) and arguments; they consist as well of poetic and rhetorical elements by which what would otherwise be a list of facts is transformed into a story" (1997:393). Therefore, (historical) narrative discourse, in its process of elaboration, involves omitting and forgetting, the so-called "selective amnesia" (Weedon 2008:84) which has often been condemned by some scholars for its sometimes unfair and partial view of history. Such is the case of Bhikhu Parekh, who, in relation to the concept of national identity, notes that "a sense of national identity is based on generalizations and involves a selective and simplified account of a complex history. Much that is important is ignored, disavowed or simply forgotten" (2000:16). Therefore, those accounts represent a desired and "imagined" version of the past that is needed to advocate a particular present and reinforce a certain future nation.

Hence, national identity and collective memory, as interdisciplinary practices, are frequently analyzed from a psychological perspective, comparing them to the individual and personal identity that is invented by human beings in order to construct and fulfill idealized personalities as a way of becoming what we really want or need to be. In this process, "individuals tell others about themselves, [...] the 'inner story' undergoes continual rewriting and editing; some experiences are forgotten, others are suppressed if they are disagreeable or painful to the ego" (Henke 2003:80), or in other words, "what doesn't fit the selected image is omitted" (Berberich 2008:170).

By extension, national historiographic narratives are equally constructed and edited to tell ourselves an idealized collective identity and a coherent collective memory in relation to the present that has been built and the future that is expected. Chris Weedon mentions New Labour's modernization project as an example of this identity creation by resorting to specific versions of history to validate their project: "Constructions of identity are always

historically specific, for example, the much maligned attempt by New Labour in Britain to rebrand the country as ‘Cool Britannia’” (2008:20).

Narrativization of history constitutes, therefore, another kind of discourse to report former facts, whose aim, on some occasions, is to compensate for the official accounts that people have access to. There are reasons to suggest, in this historical relativisation, that literature plays an important role, for it seems to be a step to institutionalize the different versions of a people’s past, the different stories in the construction of a nation’s history. In this respect, postmodern “historiographic metafiction”¹²² and literary practices may converge in the process of reading history, national identity and collective memory, applying subjectivity and partiality to the interpretation of events.

3. NEW LABOUR’S BRITAIN

Blair’s project of the definition of Britishness that has so often been debated in the recent times could be interpreted as part of this “artificial” construction and re-construction of the national identity; it is commonly said that politicians, governments and society leaders contribute to the discussion of what it means to be British, and those in power seem to take great pains to implement their ideals and their interpretation of history in their fabrication of what they believe a better society could be. In this respect, Kenneth Lunn pointed out the need to re-think the past in order to understand our present, who we are now, and who we want to be: “Responses to the political crisis have sought to draw upon a specific version of the past in order to attempt to make sense of the present” (Lunn 1996:87). Subsequently, their particular narrativization of history, through images and symbols, influence citizens’ understanding of Britishness, this is, the imagined community that is imposed and shared by the nation (Bentley 2007:488).

New Labour contributed to this nationalist tribute when Tony Blair and his “spirit of national renewal” (Blair 1996:4) transformed the principles of the party, and, by extension, his expectations about what Britain, as a great nation, would become: “I didn’t come into politics to change the Labour Party. I came into politics to change the country” (Blair 1997:62). Labour’s modernisation programme was intimately linked with nationhood, with what it meant to be

¹²² Historiographic Metafiction: A term first coined by Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), (in Janik 1995).

British in the twenty-first century, denouncing the notion that British national identity was “stuck” in the past instead of open to new and fresher ideas (Driver and Martell 2004:462).

New Labour’s notion of Britishness seemed to be an attempt to stimulate a modern nationalism characterized by a dynamic, multicultural, innovative and young country (Osgerby 2005:127), able to lead and set the example of a twenty-first century nation. Blair, in his definition of New Britain stated:

I believe few would disagree with the qualities that go towards that British identity: qualities of creativity built on tolerance, openness and adaptability, work and self-improvement, strong communities and families and fair play, rights and responsibilities and an outward looking approach to the world that all flow from our unique island geography and history. (Blair 2000)

Blair, at the beginning of his premiership, was increasingly convinced that there was a need to change the national image, a need to promote a new multicultural society. This modernized and open-minded model of a nation was still rooted in British values such as tolerance, democracy, equality, liberty, fairness and justice; in British institutions like the Monarchy, the Parliament, the common law, the BBC, the NHS [...] (Hazell 2009:104), and in responsibilities, rights and duties that distinguished British citizens. Additionally, New Labour’s view of the role of history in national identity represented a progressive evolution from a tepid commitment to the significance of history towards a veneration of Britain’s past. Brown’s celebration of British history illustrates it: ‘I think the days of Britain having to apologise for our history are over. I think we should move forward. I think we should celebrate much of our past rather than apologise for it and we should talk, rightly so, about British values’ (in Kearney 2005).

However, Blair’s renewed Britain as an attempt to change the national image is sometimes thought to have been unsuccessful. Britain is seen as a multicultural nation with too many racial tensions, a modern and “young country” (Osgerby 2005:127) excessively rooted in traditional values and traditions. All these factors, together with an ambiguous position regarding the relevance of history in the construction of national identity, put into question the authenticity of the modernization project that New Labour hoped to administer.

At the beginning of the New Labour government there existed the conviction of a need to reconsider and reinterpret the past from a renewed perspective. Nonetheless, as Blair’s time in office evolved, and after a perceived failure of the project of a multicultural Britain, efforts were made to constitute a “cohesive society”, which was entrenched in strictly British terms, causing British values and institutions, which promoted a unified national identity, to be celebrated. Blair’s nation rebranding was condemned by voices that argued the

plan was a mere window-dressing and that Britain was still “old wine in new bottles” (Hyland 2000). In this direction, Driver and Martell pointed out that “New Labour is too traditional, too conservative, too white, too male, paying lip-service to the cultural diversity of Britain” (2004:468).

Across the Atlantic, the American magazine *Newsweek*, following the rise of modernizer Tony Blair, published an article satirizing the efforts of the Prime Minister to transform the image of the country. Some authorised voices, including magazine editor Stryker McGuire, criticised Britain’s new image as very “London-based”, extending the capital’s idiosyncrasy to the rest of the national geography. A burlesque tone is evident when it is recounted how a historical city like Birmingham, the birthplace of the Industrial revolution, with a “lovely old style” (McGuire and Underhill in Oakland 2001:48), was artificially dressed up in an aura of modernism, popular culture and technology:

So when the city hosted the G-8 summit in May, the prime minister brought new Britain to Birmingham. [...] He treated the world’s press to a sleek, high-tech media centre. He took his fellow heads of government and their wives to a glitzy concert led by the pop group All Saints. If only for those few days, Blair swaddled a bastion of very old Britain in the shiny foil of ‘Cool Britannia.’ (McGuire and Underhill in Oakland 2001:48)

The Labour Party’s unintentional slogan “Cool Britannia” became the catchphrase that symbolized the new Britain of popular culture in which young consumerist society was going to be the economic driving force of the late nineties. Blair’s conception of a “young country” (Osgerby 2005:127), the country of Britart and Britpop, connected both with youth culture and business culture, turning this social movement into an economic device. Bill Osgerby explains the importance that youth culture had as a valuable financial resource for the new government and the new era: “with the rise of media and culture industries as economic mainstays, the youth market had developed into a key business sector, with British pop music and style exerting a global cultural influence” (2005:127).

However, the artificial construction of a renewed British national image, being additionally a commercial advantage, has been considered a bogus façade, for Britain’s first and foremost touristic profit comes from that traditional, idyllically rural and stereotyped representation of the country. Despite the endeavour of offering consumers a modern product, Britain is still defined for the weight of its history and traditions that are rooted not only in the self-conception of the British people themselves, but in the external image that is projected:

Ask a businessman in Ohio, a housewife in Gdansk or a rickshaw wallah in Delhi what they think of Britain and you will get a picture that is stuck in the past: a sort of heritage theme park with bad food, worse weather and arcane

traditions. [...] To many outsiders, Britain may be fun to visit- if you want to step into the 19th century. (Leonard in Oakland 2001:43-44)

The tourist industry is co-responsible, together with the political elite, for the construction of the national image, as it has pragmatic, economical and political benefits. Nationhood as a man-made creation may psychologically influence the collective identity, forging the previously mentioned “imagined community”, yet with political and economical interests behind that manipulation.

4. ENGLAND, ENGLAND

Despite governmental interests in raising nationhood, other mechanisms like literature appear to construct or deconstruct the official patterns of history, contributing to the debate and reinterpretation of collective memory, as well as the rendering of national identity. Many authors have dealt with these questions, such is the case of Philip Larkin’s “Here”, Graham Swift’s *Waterland*, Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight Children*, and others such as Peter Ackroyd, Kazuo Ishiguro and particularly Julian Barnes. All these authors have explored, in different ways, aspects of National Identity, Britishness/Englishness, questions of historical consciousness, the construction of identity in its relation with history, and the process of history writing understood as a narrative discourse (cf. Janik 1995; Ingelbien 1999; Finney 2003). In this respect, Barnes has specially been interested in the relationship between history (or past) and fiction in many of his novels such as *Metroland* (1980), *Before She Met Me* (1982), *Flaubert’s Parrot* (1984), *A History of the World in 10^{1/2} Chapters* (1989), and *The Porcupine* (1992), as we can see in the thorough study by Bruce Sesto *Language, History and Metanarrative in the Fiction of Julian Barnes* (2001). Perhaps the most clearly typified as historiographic may be *A History of the World in 10^{1/2} Chapters* where Barnes’s “A” history of the world represents “merely a history among many possible histories of the world” (Finney 2003: 49) highlighting a possible historical relativism. Barnes, consequently, wisely interweaves different genres, apart from the purely literary and manages to explore historiography and the metanarrative in his novels (cf. Ingelbien 1999; Janik 1995). As Keith Wilson stated, “Barnes is unusual among contemporary novelists in blurring distinctions between the imagined and the experienced, between fiction and nonfiction (including journalistic and biographical)” (2006: 363).

Barnes therefore explores the construction-of-history theme in *England, England*, focusing moreover on the invention of national identity: the man-made creation of Englishness in the novel reproduces the systematic construction of “nation-ness” in Britain, as in other contemporary societies, through the collection of national stereotypes that are so economically profitable in the tourist industry. Here we can come back to the possible reading of the novel in a Blairian context (Stein 2003) connecting the Prime Minister’s rebranding of the nation, the encouragement of a new and modern national identity that becomes a marketable product, to Sir Jack Pitman’s “England, England”, a theme park located in the Isle of Wight that gathers the essence of England: all the typically English monuments and the English character are reproduced in the living performance that this tourist attraction is.

The first section of the novel, entitled “England”, describes how the central character Martha Cochrane is trying to remember and reconstruct her first memories. She believes, with some uncertainty, that her first childhood memory goes back to the kitchen floor where she used to do a Counties of England jigsaw puzzle with her mother’s help. One day her father left the family home and he would not come back for years, which would affect Martha’s life-long emotional life and relations with men, making her always feel unsatisfied.

The second part, “England, England”, introduces the business tycoon Sir Jack Pitman who is scheming a way of executing his last great idea: under the belief that Britain is a great nation and has a great history, he is planning the construction of a theme park that encapsulates the essence of Englishness; it is an attempt to condense time perpetually and preserve the authentic nature of England, a replica of its most significant tourist attractions, its gastronomic variety, its character, and its emblematic and representative worldwide famous people.

Finally, “Anglia”, the last part of the novel, recounts how Miss Cochrane, already in her old age lonely and single, is settled back in a quiet village in Old England, where she expects to be buried one day. Anglia has moved back into a rural state with an agrarian production system where people live relatively peacefully. There Martha is still emotionally unsatisfied, and adopts an indifferent attitude towards life.

Julian Barnes’s *England, England* exemplifies a parody of the postmodern theory of Simulacra by Jean Baudrillard, in which contemporary society values more the artificial and the unreal than the original. In the book, Pitman’s replication project of the typically English attractions is more successful than the originals on the mainland Old England and at some point the old country decays. According to Baudrillard’s theory virtual representations become even more real than the authentic ones:

Aujourd'hui l'abstraction n'est plus celle de la carte, du double, du miroir ou du concept. La simulation n'est plus celle d'un territoire, d'un être référentiel, d'une substance. Elle est la génération par les modèles d'un réel sans origine ni réalité: hyperréel. Le territoire ne précède plus la carte, ni ne lui survit.

C'est désormais la carte qui précède le territoire –précession des simulacres– c'est elle qui engendre le territoire et s'il fallait reprendre la fable, c'est aujourd'hui le territoire dont les lambeaux pourrissent lentement sur l'étendue de la carte. C'est le réel, et non la carte, dont les vestiges subsistent çà et là, dans les déserts qui ne sont plus ceux de l'Empire, mais le nôtre. Le désert du réel lui-même. (1981: 10)

Moreover, the novel provides an example analysis of the construction of national identity, and more specifically the constitution of Englishness, satirizing the artificial invention of nationhood; yet stating that despite its inauthenticity there exists a human need to construct the collective memory, the history that holds up identity's stability. Furthermore, it could be argued there is a direct connection between Barnes's analysis of national identity constructedness and the fabrication of Labour's New Britain, understanding the latter as a bogus invention and a marketable product for consumerism as is Jack Pitman's theme park.

Barnes's central message in *England, England* deals with the artificial construction of identity and history, by creating an analogy with the formation of personal and individual identity in the principal character Martha Cochrane. In the first section of the novel she is trying to remember her first memories, but is aware of the impossibility of providing a logical and authentic sequence to them: "What's your first memory?" someone would ask. And she would reply 'I don't remember'" (Barnes 2008:3). As memories are not a 'solid, seizable thing' (*ibid.*:3) she concludes that it did not exist a single memory that was not a lie, so she lied too when determining that her first memory was sitting on the kitchen floor trying to complete an England puzzle: "Yes, that was it, her first memory, her first artfully, innocently arranged lie" (*ibid.*:4). Through Martha's attempt to reconstruct her past and her memories, Barnes expresses the idea of the unreliability of memories, stating that the past is not simply a "solid, seizable thing" but it becomes an object of change, variation and artful manipulation: "And there was another reason for mistrust. If a memory wasn't a thing but a memory of a memory of a memory, mirrors set in parallel, then what the brain told you now about what it claimed had happened then would be coloured by what had happened in between" (*ibid.*:6). The author establishes a metaphorical parallelism between the uncertain conceptions of personal memories and the formation of collective memory turning history into a textual discourse built up on untrustworthy records:

It was like a country remembering its history: the past was never just the past, it was what made the present able to live with itself. The same went for individuals, though the process obviously wasn't straightforward. Did those whose lives had disappointed them remember an idyll, or something which justified their lives ending in disappointment? [...] An element of propaganda, of sales and marketing, always intervened between the inner and the outer person. (Barnes 2008:6)

History rewriting and editing means idealizing some past facts and omitting others that do not correspond with an imagined self. It is the present that designs how we want to live and remember our past, it is the artificial constructedness of our history which determines the image we project externally as an "element of propaganda and marketing" (*ibid.*:6). For Barnes, history is relative, it is partial and subjective and it is often consciously or unconsciously manipulated. In the novel, Martha's Spanish classmate, Cristina, teases her by saying that Francis Drake was a pirate, and Martha, convinced that Francis Drake had been an English hero, realizes that "one person's plundering privateer might be another person's pirate" (*ibid.*:7). Barnes therefore parodies a convenient construction of history through Martha's memories of school when British history was taught idyllically.

In the second section entitled "England, England", Barnes recreates an artificial state: Sir Jack Pitman's last dream of building an Englishness theme park on the imaginarily independent Isle of Wight. As the project takes form, English history and identity are artfully constructed and adapted to the economical interests of the Governor. The business mogul realizes that England is currently living in a period of decadence, and after the splendour era of the Empire, now finds itself in an identity crisis period and needs to find a way of encouraging its self-confidence and value: "So England, comes to me, and what do I say to her? I say, 'Listen, baby, face facts. We're in the third millennium and your tits have dropped'" (*ibid.*:37). As a solution, Pitman wants to preserve the essence of England and its splendor in *The Island*: "England [...] is [...] a nation of great age, great history, great accumulated wisdom" (*ibid.*:39).

Although Pitman's first idea is preserving real and authentic Englishness, we observe how in the process of its construction Pitman's team manipulates and varies the "recorded" version of history and the features that describe national identity in order to adapt them not only to commercial interests, but to Pitman's own conception of what Englishness should be. To carry out his purposes he employs a historian, Dr Max, who is in charge of elaborating the history of *The Island*, the history that will be offered and sold to visitors of the theme park. Sir Jack instills the historian to "change" history so as to adapt it to customers' likes and knowledge: "the point of *our* history –and I stress the *our*– will be to make our guests, those buying what is for the moment referred to as

Quality Leisure, *feel better*" (*ibid.*:70). In this respect, Pitman understands artful creation of nationhood as a natural process thanks to which the world develops. He compares it with nature, insisting that nature, as we know it, is not nature-made but man-made; rivers, woodlands, crops and animals are manipulated by man: "we change it all" (*ibid.*:60). Christine Berberich explained that "nations, whether imagined or not, are, of course, not nature-made. They are contained within man-made boundaries; they are run according to rules set by man. In order to 'forge the nation', countries often evoke their past- especially past success stories- in order to create a sense of togetherness" (2008:168).

In his attempt to create national identity, Pitman wants to make a worldwide survey to discover the top fifty characteristics associated with the word England. The survey results state that Englishness is Royal family, Big Ben, Manchester United Football club, the class system, the Union Jack, the BBC, Harrods, Queen Victoria [...] (Barnes 2008:83-85). However, Sir Jack disagrees with the list and tries to adapt it to his own conception of Englishness (*ibid.*:85). Similarly, with regard to the creation of a national character Pitman's team discusses the traits that describe the English people. They come across the problem that English character has a very bad reputation which is detrimental for marketing purposes: "how do we advertise the English? Come and meet representatives of a people widely perceived, even according to our own survey, as cold, snobbish, emotionally retarded and xenophobic" (*ibid.*:108). Hence, they decide to instill the locals other more practical characteristics like "warm-hearted hospitality" (*ibid.*:108). Therefore, "the nation is commodified and represented as a marketable, reified object and thereby converted into a series of saleable symbols" (Bentley 2007:490). Pitman's manipulation of Englishness is parodied in Barnes's novel to express the artificiality of nationhood and history. However, Barnes suggests that we should consider this artificiality as the "natural" way of history writing since it has never existed an authentic, innocent and real national construction: everything is created as a "positive improvement on the way things had been before [...] there is no authentic moment of beginning, of purity [...] We may choose to freeze a moment and say that it all 'began' then, but as an historian I have to tell you that such labeling is intellectually indefensible" (Barnes 2008:132). In other words, as Nünning states: "it highlights the impossibility of ever knowing what Englishness consisted of in the past, and it deconstructs the notion that there is either a continuity between past and present Englishness, or something like essential Englishness" (2001:25).

In the last section of the novel, "Anglia", Barnes concludes that history and identity construction are inevitable. Even in a country like Anglia that represents a bucolic and, for some reason, idyllic place to live, characters still contribute to the bogus formation of local history. Jez Harris, for instance, an

American immigrant who has changed his “real” name, enjoys telling fake and invented legends of the place to entertain visitors. Among other manufactured constructions for the village’s history, the scene where the schoolmaster insists on the need to revive or institute the Village Fête could be mentioned. However, due to the lack of records, they need to start from scratch and invent, with Martha’s memories, the events that will take place, such as the band, the songs, and the games (Barnes 2008:262, 263).

Moreover, Anglia or Old England is, at the same time, presented as a dystopian place in which all the advantages of a rural and agrarian state also contribute to the consumption of the nation; while England, England, enjoyed “power, territory, wealth, influence and population” (*ibid.*:251), Old England experienced disintegration and isolation in the world: “Old England had lost its history, and therefore –since memory is identity– it has lost all sense of itself” (*ibid.*:251).

Barnes’s satirical portrait of national creation converges with the idea that even though nationhood and history are artificial and interested constructions, history is important for the creation of identity, and together they favour the psychological stability and completeness of a nation. In this direction, Nünning states that “Barnes’s novel also suggests that one of the major functions of a nation’s collective memory lies in its importance for forging its national identity” (2001:24). If we come back to the analogy that Barnes establishes between national identity and personal identity, personified in Martha, we realize that Martha’s inability to reconstruct her memories, and with them her identity, leads her to a state of dissatisfaction and unhappiness: “an individual’s loss of faith and a nation’s loss of faith, aren’t they much the same?” (Barnes 2008:237).

5. CONCLUSIONS

Barnes’s parody of national construction, a narrative halfway through utopian and dystopian reality, could be related with the utopia that Blair’s New Britain and his Third Way represented (Stein 2003:194, 195). Tony Blair’s modernization programme embodies the historical context in which the novel is set satirizing the remodeling process of the time when the Prime Minister took great pains to pursue his vision of a new and modern country. Hence, both Blair and Barnes’s character Sir Jack Pitman acknowledge the fact that their “England/Britain” finds itself in a critical period in which it is necessary to

rethink its role in the world and its sense of nationhood. Blair's Britain, post Thatcherite and at the doors of the new millennium, required a new approach to Britishness, a new conception of being British and a new way of projecting Britain to the future. On the other hand, Pitman's resembling attitude towards a declining historical moment in terms of nationhood and national identity drives him to dream about the construction of the theme park "England, England" as a way of preserving his version of the authentic Englishness.

Furthermore, both character and Prime Minister represent how the political elite manipulate the construction of national identity and how history writing is artificially composed. On the one hand, Blair's efforts to modernize the country were popularized under the slogan "Cool Britannia", and were based on the Prime Minister's personal concept of what it meant to be British, an idealisation of Britishness that he aimed to implement. Similarly, the character Jack Pitman aspires to artificially construct an English national identity based on his own personal understanding of what it means to be English. In this respect, the novel explicitly mentions Blair's national renewal when making reference to a "Government of Renewal, which pledged itself to economic recovery, parliamentary sovereignty and territorial reacquisition" (*ibid.*:252) and New Labour's nationalism is acknowledged in the novel as the "modernizing patriots" (*ibid.*:253).

Blair and Pitman's plans of national construction are based on the *imagined community* they aspire their nations to be, transforming societal mechanisms to implement their ideals. Such is Blair's idealism of creating a fair society, a young and dynamic nation, economically efficient and prosperous (Blair 1996:3-4), and proud of its history, which recalls Sir Jack Pitman's attempts of making "everything you imaged England to be, but more convenient, cleaner, friendlier, and more efficient" (Barnes 2008:184). Barnes's character dreams about shaping a faultless nation free from crime, and identified with economic success and social harmony, portraying both Blair and Pitman's idealism when forging the nation. Therefore, in this artificial construction that is both Blair's "Cool Britannia" and Jack Pitman's theme park "England, England", man-made influence and manipulation determines the definition of national identity and history writing. On the one hand, Pitman's remodeling of English history means adding invented details, changing and omitting past events. Such are the cases of characters Samuel Johnson or Nell Gwynn who are asked to modify some of their authentic features as historical *personae* to adjust their performance to customers' demands; not to mention Dr. Max, the historian, whose mission was to adapt real English history to visitors' partial knowledge of British history (*ibid.*:70-71); or the redefinition of the English character from cold and emotionally self-restraint to "warm-hearted" (*ibid.*:108). This process of rewriting and editing history and national identity

could be analogous to Blair's intention of the reinterpretation of contemporary national identity as being modern, young, urban and culturally tolerant. In this respect, Lunn stated that the construction of Britishness in this process of edition and selection, other versions of Britain are excluded or omitted: "it is clear that public versions of 'Britain' are constructions, achieved in a number of ways and using a variety of social, cultural and political techniques. [...] They work not merely at the level of identifying and stereotyping a particular image of Britain and Britishness but, in the process, they actively exclude other possibilities, other versions of Britain" (1996:87). The transformations of the national image, together with the construction of modern national emblems like the Millenium Dome, go in the direction of Pitman's construction of the nation as a theme park. Both Blair's New Britain and Barnes's novel exemplify the manipulation and subjectivity of political leaders when defining national identity, sustaining, subsequently, the theory of the unreliability of history and artificial constructedness of national identity and collective memory under both commercial -Pitman's business, his theme park- and political and ideological interests -Blair's modernization programme.

Institutionalisation of man-made creations of nationhood also takes place in states like Blair's Britain or Pitman's "England, England". These versions of history are reproduced in public representations such as "in education, books, television documentaries, museums and monuments, but also in the rituals of daily life" (Weedon 2008:26). In the case of Barnes's novel *England, England*, the magnate represents an all-powerful figure that designs and controls everything in his territory officialising and institutionalising his imagined representation of the nation. Pitman's institutionalisation of "their history" is achieved by the presentation of an official history designed and adapted by the Official Historian, Dr. Max (*ibid.*:58), but also through the reproduction of national monuments like the Houses of Parliament, the Big Ben, Stonehenge, castles, thatched cottages, churches, etc (*ibid.*:74); the recreation of legends and myths like Robin Hood and the Merrie Men; as well as the national emblems such as the Royal Family or the cup of tea. On the other hand, with regard to Blair's institutionalisation of modern British identity, we acknowledge the construction of the Millenium Dome, the public recognition of modern cultural products like Britpop and Britart, and the intention of promoting museums of Britishness and a British national day:

There have been suggestions for a British national day, for encouragement to Britons to fly the flag in their gardens, making the teaching of citizenship involve instruction in British history, for the creation of an Institute of Britishness, and a national conversation on Britishness, charged with drawing up a list of the values everyone can agree on a constituting part of Britishness. (Gamble and Wright 2009:4)

However, despite this modern vision of the country, New Labour's Britishness was also based on traditional values like tolerance, democracy, equality and liberty; its national achievements, especially the empire and military victories (Gamble and Wright 2009:4); traditional institutions like the Monarchy, the Parliament, the common law, etc (Hazell 2009:104); and the importance of rights and duties of the British citizens. In this regard, this version of Britishness seemed to be too rooted in the past, an image that resembles that idyllically rural, stereotyped and traditional Englishness portrayed by Sir Jack Pitman in the novel.

Additionally, this artificial construction of identity and history is not only institutionalised by the government or society leaders like Pitman, but also by the influence of national identity on the tourist market. Both Blair's Britain and Pitman's "England, England" embody the exploitation of a marketable nation. On the one hand, Blair's Cool Britannia was utilised to activate a young consumerist society (Osgerby 2005:127) but it also intended to attract international tourism, promoting a new and modern image of the country. Likewise, in the novel, Pitman's theme park expects to profit from national identity in order to captivate tourists and increase his personal income. As mentioned in the novel, The Island turns out to be "a pure market state" (Barnes 2008:183) where perfect capitalism resembles the business industry of the late nineties.

As Thomas M. Stein suggests when claiming that *England, England* deconstructs New Labour's agenda (2003:201), Barnes's novel represents an illustration of how invented and imagined versions of what the political elite thinks a nation should be end up being created realities. This shows that man-made convenient constructions of history and identity take place in contemporary societies, leading to the assumption that those artificial creations are unreliable accounts of the past. Subjectivity, partiality and inauthenticity form part of a postmodern era in which historiographic practices become mere discourses that, like literature, contribute to history writing. In his novel Julian Barnes, deals with the unnatural construction of collective memory and national identity, suggesting that, even though the former is a fake and artificial invention, it is necessary for the composition and formation of the latter.

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Author's contact: betsabenr@yahoo.es