

“Empire and Metropolis: The Impact of the British Empire on British Society”

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Banal Nationalism, Banal Imperialism

Surveying the treatment of empire – specifically the British Empire - in films and on television in Britain since the 1960s, Jeffrey Richards notes that it was almost wholly critical and hostile. This was against a background of more or less general ignorance, among the British population at large, of what the British Empire was or had been. At the same time the 1997 poll revealing that ignorance recorded a surprising degree of pride – more than 70 per cent of respondents - in the fact that Britain had had an empire. 60 per cent also regretted the loss of empire, and almost equally large percentage – 58 per cent - believed that the Empire had done ‘more good than harm’ in her colonies. ‘How is it’, asks Richards, ‘that after thirty years of exposure to largely hostile depictions of the Empire and in the light of demonstrated and colossal factual ignorance about it, the public are still proud of their vanished Empire?’ He attributes this to a largely English ‘crisis of national identity’ – the Scots, Welsh and Irish are, he thinks, more sure of themselves – and comments that ‘the English retreat into a nostalgia for an empire which they barely remember and of which they know almost nothing’.¹

It is interesting that some famous polls conducted by the Colonial Office in 1947 and 1948, when the British Empire was still more or less intact, revealed an almost equal degree of popular ignorance of the Empire – for instance, few people could name a single colony (one man suggested Lincolnshire), and some people thought that the United States

was still part of the Empire. Again though this was combined with a general sense of the importance of empire and the special responsibilities it placed upon Britain.² Evidently consciously-held knowledge of empire, as tapped by opinion polls and the like, may be only one way of understanding the influence of empire on the general population of a society. It may even be the least important way.

All this indicates the difficulty and complexity of assessing the impact of empire – especially, in this case, the impact on the home society. On the one hand there are those – largely but not only of the ‘postcolonial’ school – who are inclined to see empire everywhere, suffusing the consciousness of the population in a multitude of significant ways.³ On the other hand – partly in reaction to what they see as unexamined and largely ideological assertions on the part of the post-colonialists – are the sceptics who think that the impact of empire has been vastly exaggerated, and that its long-term influence has been slight.⁴

It is unlikely that the differences between these two schools of thought will ever be resolved. For they approach the same question – what has been the impact of empire on the home population of the colonizing society? – with very different methodologies. The one reads deep meaning in the culture of the imperial society, scouring it for the almost Freudian slips and symptoms of deep-seated and largely unconsciously held attitudes and assumptions. It is these, the postcolonialists, who are most likely to stress the pervasive influence of empire, manifested in such attitudes as racism.⁵ The other, more empirically-minded, school examines the more readily available evidence of school textbooks, novels, the popular culture of film and television, and the utterances of public figures. It is on the basis of this latter approach that some – by no means all - have

concluded that the British Empire has left surprisingly few marks on British society, at least among the general population.

Theorists and scholars of nationalism and ethnicity have recently begun to look more closely at the actual way in which national and other collective identities play out in the everyday lives of individuals. There is talk of ‘banal nationalism’, the way in which, on a daily basis, ‘the nation is indicated, or “flagged”, in the lives of its citizenry’.⁶ On stamps and coins, in the national flags flown on private homes and in filling stations, in the statues and monuments that, barely noticed, are scattered throughout the major cities, in daily school rituals, such as the ‘pledge of allegiance’ in US public schools, the nation is repeatedly and routinely drummed into the consciousness of people – but at so banal a level as to be virtually unnoticed. This is ‘mindless’, as opposed to ‘mindful’, nationalism. It involves not simply the collective amnesia with regard to certain past events that Ernest Renan saw as necessary for the existence of nations, but a further act of forgetting, a parallel ‘forgetting of the present’ that results from frequent, daily, repetition.⁷ That does not however mean that the attitudes and sentiments of nationalism are not latently there, waiting to be activated, as for instance in times of national emergency.

It has similarly been argued that there is a perceptual gap between the pronouncements of nationalist statesman and intellectuals and the ‘everyday ethnicity’ of ordinary people as they go about their daily lives. People have many other identities than national ones – as spouses, friends, co-workers, members of different classes and religions. For much of the time national and ethnic identities are not particularly ‘salient’ to individuals in the business of getting on with their lives. But several things – an openly

nationalist mayor intent on favouring a particular national group, a flare up of ethnic violence across the border – can bring home to individuals the fact of their ethnicity or nationhood and propel them into action.⁸

We need to bear this in mind when considering the question of empire and identities. Nation and empire are at one level divergent but, at other levels, also convergent phenomena.⁹ Just as there is banal nationalism, there can also be ‘banal imperialism’. The way in which the British Empire affected the sense of identity of the various groups within Britain cannot be gained from any simple source, whether conscious recollection and self-identification or the assertions of statesmen and other public figures. We have to consider the multiplicity of ways – public and private - in which the Empire impacted on the lives of individuals and shaped their sense of themselves.¹⁰ It is even possible that we have to go beyond the individual altogether – whether as one or many – and consider identity as a matter of structure or position, rather than of consciousness. There is no guarantee that even then we will come up with definite and incontestable conclusions. But, by situating England and Britain in the world, by placing them in relation to other nations and empires as well as their own, we will at least have indicated the ‘field of meaning’ within which individuals in Britain were able to understand themselves and form some idea of their collective identities.

Nationalism and Imperialism

Benedict Anderson, in his influential *Imagined Communities*, suggests that the European imperial experience was largely a matter of class, ‘as suggested by the equanimity with which metropolitan popular classes eventually shrugged off the “losses”

of the colonies ... In the end, it is always the ruling classes, bourgeois certainly, but above all aristocratic, that long mourn the empires.’¹¹ A similar suggestion had been made by George Orwell in the 1940s when he remarked that ‘it is quite true that the English are hypocritical about their Empire. In the working class this hypocrisy takes the form of not knowing that the Empire exists.’¹² More recently Bernard Porter has mounted a full-scale assault on the idea that the Empire was a formative experience of British society as a whole. He too argues that it was mainly the people who ran the Empire, the public-school educated upper-middle and upper classes – the ‘Prefects’, he calls them – who were most affected by it and who most regret its passing.

‘[T]he empire, huge and significant as it was, did not require the involvement of any large section of British society for it to live and even grow. So long as a minority of men (and their female helpmeets) was committed enough to actually ruling it, the rest of the population could be left to concentrate on other things. The empire made no great material demands on most people, at least none that they were aware of, and did not need their support or even their interest. All that was needed was a minimum of apathy.’¹³

One should note that it is quite possible to take the view that the Empire was an upper-middle/upper-class affair – that ‘the British Empire was first and foremost a class act’¹⁴ – without concluding that it *therefore* had little effect on the rest of the population. That is roughly speaking the position of David Cannadine in his engaging *Ornamentalism* (2001). Cannadine sees the Empire as reflecting and promoting the hierarchical structures of British society itself, thereby establishing a correspondence and consistency between

empire and domestic society to create ‘one vast interconnected world.’ The fact of class rule did not cut off the rest of the population from the empire, any more than it did from British society as a whole. Quite the contrary. The British people, of all classes, shared a vision of British society as ordered, graded, and hierarchical. This was the vision of society that shaped the Empire, an Empire constructed in the image of the home society. There was a ‘shared sense of Britishness’ that linked metropole and colony, centre and periphery. The British saw their hierarchical society mirrored in the practices and institutions of Empire: the same system of honours, the same cult of monarchy, the same ceremonials and rituals, the same forms of deference. Both parts of this common British world reacted upon each other in a mutually reinforcing pattern. ‘The British exported and projected vernacular sociological visions from the metropolis to the periphery, and they imported and analogized them from the empire back to Britain, thereby constructing comforting and familiar resemblances and equivalences and affinities.’¹⁵

Cannadine’s Burkean picture of British society no doubt exaggerates the consensus and underplays the conflicts and contestations between groups and regions over the past two centuries. But it has the merit of recognizing – what the Marxist model of class conflict often disguises or ignores – the very real linkages between different groups in society, no matter what their differences of perception and interest. A ruling class model of society does not, and should not, portray classes in isolation or separation from each other; rather, particularly through the concept of ideology, it indicates the manner in which society comes to be perceived, at every level, as a more or less coherent and integrated whole, with each part having its allotted place and function. That is what Marx himself showed in his major works, and it is what his most gifted disciples, such as

Antonio Gramsci with his concept of ‘hegemony’, also stressed.¹⁶ If British society was hierarchically ordered, and if this structure came to be reflected in the dominant culture of the time, then one would expect all groups to be affected by this perception, however unequal their actual condition. ‘False consciousness’, perhaps; but real nonetheless.

The relation between socialism and nationalism illustrates this graphically. By the early twentieth century powerful socialist movements and parties had developed in Germany, France and Italy. Even in Britain a largely non-Marxist but significant labour movement had come into being. Though not exclusively class-based, these movements all invoked the working class in their ideologies and looked to the working class for their core membership. The working class was announced to be the class of the future, the class that would dissolve all classes. If war were to break out between the capitalist nations, the working classes were enjoined not to take part; such wars would be capitalist wars, fought in the interests of the capitalists, not of the working class. The working class had no nation; its movement and aspirations were international, expressed in the successive Socialist Internationals.

What happened in 1914, when war did indeed break out between the capitalist nations? With remarkably few exceptions – the Italian and American socialists – the vast majority of socialist and labour parties committed themselves to the war effort on behalf of their own nations. Nationalism triumphantly trumped socialism, a defeat from which the socialist movement never really recovered. Nationalism showed itself to have become the dominant ideology in Europe by the early twentieth century, an ideology that absorbed and overshadowed all others, and that drew in all groups and classes. ‘Nationalism’, as Oliver Zimmer writes of this period, ‘ provided the most powerful

source of moral authority – and thus of political mobilization – for those wishing to gain political recognition and success. Thus conflicts over politics tended to take the form of struggles over the definition of national identity. Nationalism became an integral part of political culture.’¹⁷

Britain was not of course immune from these powerful currents. Irish nationalism had already by the end of the nineteenth century joined the ranks of ‘historic’ nationalisms, along with the Poles, the Germans, the Italians, and the Hungarians. Welsh nationalism too, fuelled by the rapid industrialization and urbanization of South Wales, the equally explosive growth of religious nonconformity, and the revitalization of Welsh culture through the *eisteddfodau* and the choral festivals, began to stir. ‘By the early 1880s, a sense of Welsh nationality and of national distinctiveness within the wider framework of the United Kingdom was present as never before.’¹⁸ Jogged by Irish nationalism, and claiming a like Celtic ancestry and culture, Scottish nationalism also began its slow and erratic ascent in the 1880s, with the formation of an all-party Scottish Home Rule Association - and the establishment of a separate Scottish Football League - in 1886.¹⁹

Scottish and Welsh nationalism never matched the fire and energy of Irish nationalism; and for Scots and Welsh independence from the United Kingdom was never a seriously considered goal until the late in the twentieth century. Moreover whatever the feeling about the United Kingdom and their place within it, there was little inclination to dispense with the Empire - even in the case of the Irish, despite achieving independence in 1922. For much of the time Celtic nationalism and British imperialism marched together, often framed within the idea of an imperial federation. ‘Scotland within the

Empire' was the slogan of the Scottish National Party, formed in 1934, and Irish nationalists such as Erskine Childers were fervent imperialists, as were many Irish Home-Rulers.²⁰ Celtic nationalism in fact fared best, and was most actively fomented, in the overseas Empire, among the emigrant communities of Scots and Irish in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (not to mention the former American colonies). 'Indeed', says Raphael Samuel, 'it is possible to see the growth of Empire and the ethnic revival of the 1870s and 1880s as two sides of the same coin; each, after its own fashion, worshipped at the feet of race consciousness'.²¹

This phenomenon can be seen most clearly, naturally, in the colonies and dominions of white settlement, where the ties between the settler populations and the metropole could most plausibly be asserted. Here, despite discordant voices at various times, the development of colonial nationalism was accompanied by equally fervent declarations of imperial patriotism. As Keith Sinclair wrote of the case of New Zealand, imperialism 'was not evidence of the absence of nationalism but was itself an expression of an emergent nationalism.' Speaking more generally of the settlement colonies, Douglas Cole writes that 'everyone, it seems, was a nationalist and ... most nationalists had no difficulty in becoming imperialist.'²² That was because the aim of most so-called 'nationalists' was not the creation of an ethnically-defined nation but of a more or less autonomous *state*, and such people could see nothing but gain from stressing the continuing ties with fellow Britons in the Empire. If their consciousness can be described as nationalist, this was not a Canadian or Australian nationalism but an Anglo-Saxon or Britannic nationalism. In any case it was perfectly compatible with empire. That was why so many of their spokesmen supported schemes of imperial federation.²³

The same point could also be made from a contrary direction. Ethnic Scots, Welsh and Irish in the United Kingdom could find sustenance and support in the vigorous cultural and economic life of the overseas communities where so many of their members had settled. Of particular importance here was the swelling tide of British migrants to the Dominions, from about 1900 replacing the United States as the most popular destination.²⁴ The two-way visits, letters, and other forms of cultural communication and interaction played an enormously significant part in maintaining the sense of common identity, and in bolstering attachment to the Empire. Nationalism could flourish in both the Dominions and the United Kingdom without, in either case, necessarily threatening empire. ‘The crimson thread of kinship which runs through us all’ entwined all Britons, at home and in the Empire.²⁵

Elsewhere in the Empire however a different and, from the point of view of its rulers, more ominous form of nationalism was finding its voice. In 1885 the first meeting of the Indian National Congress took place in Bombay, spurred on by furious European reaction to a bill (the Ilbert bill) that would have put Indian judges on the same footing as European ones in the Bengal Presidency, and which therefore involved the possibility that Europeans might be tried by an Indian judge without a jury. Moderate at first, Indian nationalism took on increased fervour under the new Viceroy, Lord Curzon, with his high-handed behaviour and indifference to Indian sensibilities. In a pattern that became familiar from a host of anti-colonial nationalisms in the twentieth century, Western-educated professionals and intellectuals turned the ideas of the West against the legitimacy of its own rule.²⁶

As elsewhere, nationalism and imperialism in India went hand in hand, the one modifying the goals and tactics of the other. The practices and policies of the imperial state shaped the responses of the nationalists, which in turn led to attempts to conciliate and, as far as possible, neutralize nationalist demands. As in the settlement colonies, there was for a considerable time the possibility that Indian nationalism could be contained within a modified conception of empire.²⁷ What one has to see is that this pattern was one that also applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to the United Kingdom, John Bull's 'other empire'. Over the course of the centuries the English had in effect constructed two types of empire. The first was the 'inner empire', the result of the Anglo-Norman conquest of Wales and Ireland and the later shotgun marriage with Scotland. This was the land empire of the United Kingdom, what some eighteenth-century writers called 'the Empire of Great Britain' or 'the British Empire in Europe'. The other was the more familiar overseas empire whose construction began with the sixteenth-century settlements in North America.²⁸ These two empires interacted in complex ways with each other – for instance, working class movements in Britain could receive moral and material support from other parts of the Empire, and vice versa.; but so too British workers could react with hostility to the threat of cheap colonial labour, as in South Africa, and seek to resist competition from workers and industries elsewhere in the Empire, as with the Indian textile industry.²⁹

The two empires were not strictly parallel or symmetrical, of course. Most importantly, the native peoples of the United Kingdom shared in the rule of the overseas empire in a way that was not true of the native peoples of that empire, 'the British Empire' as normally understood. Scots above all, but also Irish and Welsh played key

roles in the running of the Empire, as administrators, soldiers, missionaries, merchants, engineers, doctors, botanists, explorers and educators. This was bound to give them a feeling of having a stake in the empire, and to mute any national consciousness that might have arisen out of a sense of resentment at English domination of the British Isles. Pride in the Empire, and a real share in its fruits, was by no means restricted to the English.³⁰ Moreover, the British did not just collectively rule and run the Empire; they to a good extent also occupied it, in the form of settlements of British people that formed extensions of Britain throughout the world, often displacing the native inhabitants - above all in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, but also in significant sections of East Africa.

Still there was never any real doubt that the British Empire was an *English* empire, founded originally by the English and developed largely according to the template of English practices and institutions. In that sense the overseas empire was the continuation of the original English empire – the ‘inner empire’ of Great Britain – by other means (as Seeley, among others, had noted).³¹ It was English common law, English administration, the English parliamentary system, the English monarchy, English education, English culture and the English language that were diffused throughout the Empire (though Scottish educational and ecclesiastical practices also left their mark). If, as Niall Ferguson has contended, the British Empire was one of the first and most powerful sponsors of globalization, it took the form, as he rightly notes, of ‘Anglobalization’ – the worldwide spread of an essentially English system of values and institutions.³²

One of the consequences of English domination of the Empire, as of the United Kingdom, was that they were obliged, by that very fact, to play down their own role as a nation. This is common among all imperial peoples, from Romans to Russians. To stress one's own ethnicity, to beat the nationalist drum, is a dangerous strategy for rulers concerned with the management of highly diverse peoples and cultures, as is the case with all empires. 'Mere' ethnicity or nationality has to be seen as something suited to other, 'lesser', peoples; imperial peoples have larger concerns, whether it be peace, religion or, in a more secular vein, *la mission civilisatrice*.³³ English nationalism therefore, in comparison with nationalisms elsewhere, even in the United Kingdom, remained low-keyed and severely underdeveloped. In an era of nationalism, for the English at least empire meant the suppression of a strong sense of national identity.³⁴

The great nineteenth-century Russian historian Vassily Kliuchevsky once wrote that 'all of Russian history is the history of a country that colonizes itself.'³⁵ He was referring to the seemingly inexorable movement of the Russian people across the vast inland space of the Eurasian steppe, a movement seen as almost natural and foreordained. One effect of this, frequently noted by commentators on Russia, was that Russians found it difficult to separate themselves from their creation, or to think of themselves as a distinct nation in relation to the other peoples of the empire.³⁶

Compared to the Russians, the English had a far more restricted inland space in which to expand. But, having filled that, they found ample scope for their colonizing impulse overseas. They too can be said to have been a people who colonized themselves. They too found it difficult to separate themselves from their creation, whether it was the United Kingdom or the British Empire. The most obvious and telling evidence of this is

the difficulty most English have of distinguishing themselves from British – compared to all the other peoples in ‘the British world’.³⁷

All this can help us understand the differential impact of the Empire on the peoples of Britain in the twentieth century. For much of the time the common designation of ‘British’ served as an adequate badge of identity for most people. But there were always fault lines; and with the end of empire they were bound to show themselves more clearly. By the end of the twentieth century commentators could talk about ‘the break-up of Britain’. There were many reasons for this; but the experience of empire, and of its passing, was one it was impossible to ignore.

Empire and National Identities to the Second World War

In the final volume of Paul Scott’s ‘Raj Quartet’, Guy Perron, one of the central characters, reflects that ‘for at least a hundred years India has formed part of England’s idea about herself and for the same period India has been forced into a position of being a reflection of that idea.’ But the nature of that part had changed dramatically since about 1900, ‘certainly since 1918’. From being based upon a moral right of possession it had moved to its direct opposite: the duty to let go of India. ‘The part played since then by India in the English idea of Englishness has been that of something we feel it does us no credit to have. Our idea about ourselves will now not accommodate any idea about India except the idea of returning it to the Indians in order to prove that we are English and have demonstrably English ideas.’³⁸ These reflections occur on the morrow of the Labour Party’s victory at the 1945 election and the commitment to Indian independence as soon as possible.

These thoughts express admirably some of the complexities of the relationship between empire and identities in the first half of the twentieth century. The century began with Britain at the height of imperial power. Not much more than half way through most of that empire had disappeared. From seeing themselves at the centre of the world the British – and most notably the English – had to reconcile themselves to a position on the sidelines. On the way they had to change from a situation where the Empire was England or Britain writ large to one where the changes in the Empire were ricocheting back on Britain itself, forcing profound modifications in its self-conception.

Here the parallels between the inner empire of the United Kingdom and the outer overseas empire continued to show themselves. At the beginning of the century all the nations of the United Kingdom –even those that experienced nationalist stirrings – shared in the imperial enterprise and identified themselves with it. As nationalist movements seeking independence grew within the Empire, and as the Empire itself weakened through war and economic dislocation, the nations of the United Kingdom lost confidence in their imperial mission, and in their right and ability to hold on to empire. The Irish were the first to break away, using the anti-imperialist rhetoric common to all nationalist movements. But the other Celtic nations also felt the ‘demonstration effect’ of the rising tide of nationalism in the post-1918 world.³⁹ In the latter part of the twentieth century, with the Empire gone and Europe beckoning, they could contemplate, for the first time in more than two centuries, exit from the United Kingdom. Nor were the English themselves immune from these currents. Reacting partly against Scottish and Welsh nationalism, the English – or at least some of them - also began to re-consider

their place in the United Kingdom, and wonder whether they too might not be better off without it.

Actually Guy Perron dates the onset of the new attitude somewhat too early. The importance of the Empire to the British gained in significance during the First World War and was strengthened by the post-war settlement. The contribution of troops from all the corners of the Empire to the war effort was not lost on the British public – episodes such as the Gallipoli landing and the deaths of so many Australian and New Zealand soldiers there were especially telling. After 1918, with the addition of the League of Nations Mandates in the Middle East – Egypt, Transjordan, Iraq, Palestine – together with Tanganyika and other African territories taken from the Germans, the British Empire increased to its greatest extent ever, covering a quarter of the world's territory and incorporating nearly a quarter of the world's population.⁴⁰ Undoubtedly there were questions about the Empire's future, posed especially by the nationalist movements within the Empire. But there had always been questions, ever since the eighteenth century when Britain in effect lost one empire and acquired another. There was little in the debates following the First World War to suggest that the Empire was in a course of dissolution and might be wound up in the next few decades.⁴¹

In fact, as John Mackenzie has argued, there was, compared with the period of anxiety before the First World War, increased confidence and increased interest in the Empire in the 1920s and 1930s. It was in these decades that the Empire began to impact most directly on popular consciousness, spurred on by such events as the great imperial Wembley Exhibition of 1924, the activities of the Empire Marketing Board, the Christmas Day broadcasts by the monarch to the Empire, and the rise of a popular cinema

of empire.⁴² This was the period too when Britain's foreign trade also began to turn more decisively in the direction of the Empire: trade with the Empire in the 1930s for the first time topped fifty per cent of the total, matching and overtaking trade with the United States and Latin America. The British Empire, after the struggles and turmoil of the First World War, seemed to have emerged strengthened and a more necessary presence in the world than ever before, given the dangers and instabilities of the post-war order. Such was the conviction of public figures such as H. G. Wells, Halford Mackinder, and Ernest Barker.⁴³

Not that that Great War did not leave its mark on national consciousness. Students of post-war national identity in Britain have discerned a certain retreat, a certain turning in and turning away, from the turbulent events of world politics. The trauma of the First World War, the utterly unexpected savagery and brutality of the war in the trenches and in the unprecedented impact on civilian populations, had taken something of the glamour away from tales of glory and heroism. Manly attitudes of struggle and sacrifice yielded to a more 'feminized' view of the national character. There was a reaction against the blustering, aggressive, John Bull-ish image of the Englishman. This was the era of the cartoonist Sidney Strube's 'little man', and of the sense that Dicken's good-hearted and eccentric Mr Pickwick was closer to the average Englishman than the heroes of Rider Haggard's novels of adventure and derring-do. George Santayana's *Soliloquies in England* (1922), with its portrait of a gentle, modest, domestic, England, whose heart was in the countryside, was a popular and influential work throughout the interwar period.⁴⁴

But did this mean, as some have claimed, that this represented a retreat from empire, a decline in imperial consciousness?⁴⁵ Only a very selective reading of the

evidence can point this way. The intellectuals and publicists of the Round Table, which included some of the most prominent politicians from all parties, continued their work of educating the public in the task of Empire, and in proclaiming the need for empire in a parlous world situation (the world-wide community of the British Empire, Jan Smuts remarked, was the only truly successful League of Nations). If Strube and Santayana were popular, so too was the novelist and Governor-General of Canada, John Buchan, an ardent imperialist. Imperial adventure storywriters G. A. Henty, Edgar Wallace and ‘Sapper’ were widely read. Kitchener, the hero of Omdurman, remained an emblematic figure of imperial glory in the 1920s and 1930s. The same period also saw the romanticization and idealization of T. E. Lawrence, as the tortured intellectual turned imperial warrior. School textbooks of history continued the pre-war theme of England and Britain’s march to imperial greatness through the exploits of its famous heroes, from Drake and Hawkins to Clive and Kitchener. The ‘cinema of empire’, which reached its apogee in the 1930s, was almost wholly celebratory. Empire Day became an established and widely-observed holiday. As Valentine Cunningham has observed, the much-remarked ‘collapse of the idea of heroism’ in the wake of the Great War ‘did not last very long.’⁴⁶

Far-reaching changes in the structure of the Empire itself seemed to promise it a longer, not a shorter, lease of life. The Statute of Westminster of 1931, in granting the Dominions autonomy and equality within the British Empire, seemed to provide a firm framework for future development. The Ottawa agreement of 1932 established, in the most comprehensive way so far, the system of imperial preferences, linking all parts of the empire to each other as well as to the metropolis. India had been repeatedly promised

Dominion status since 1917, and the India Act of 1935, though rejected by the Congress leaders, was seen by many others in the party as well by officials in London as representing a stepping-stone to full Dominionhood.⁴⁷ The Empire seemed to be set on a relatively smooth path towards its evolution into a Commonwealth – but still a *British* Commonwealth.

John Darwin has in fact suggestively put forward the idea of a ‘Third British Empire’, built around the Dominion principle, that emerged during the interwar decades. In this view, ‘the Empire offered a capacious mould into which the special identities of the Dominions could be poured. Like Britain, herself a four-nation state, they were synthetic nations united through common adherence to British ideals and institutions.’ A shared ‘Brittanic identity’ could unite all parts of the Empire, offering ‘a distinctive blend of national status and Imperial identity’, ‘a permanent reconciliation of national autonomy and Imperial identity.’⁴⁸ True the ideal could be most easily applied to the White Dominions, with their shared British ‘racial’ heritage (which was why Seeley, the originator of the basic idea, had excluded India from ‘Greater Britain’). But it was thought that it could in time also include other parts of the Empire. The fact that nationalists in several of the colonies – including India - were attracted by this prospect made it seem all the more capable of realization. What had been granted the White Dominions in 1931 could be the model for future settlements with other dependencies.⁴⁹

Equally importantly, perhaps, the Dominion idea could be applied to the United Kingdom itself, as a constitutional device to sort out its own nationality problems (‘Scotland within the Empire’). Proponents of the idea – frequently couched in the terms of ‘federal Britain’ - clearly recognized its potential in this regard.⁵⁰ Ironically, though

the Dominion ideal finally failed within the wider British Empire, towards the end of the twentieth century it could re-appear (if not so-called) as a possible solution to nationalist demands within the 'inner empire' of the United Kingdom. Yet again one sees the permeability of the boundary separating the domestic and the imperial, the constant interaction of ideas and events in the overseas Empire and British society 'at home.'

The Second World War and Its Aftermath: The Re-affirmation of Imperial Identities

The Dominion idea, in its intended form, did not long survive the Second World War. Nor in the end did the Empire, though the war was fought in part to preserve it and with it Britain's place in the world. The impact of the war on Britain was devastating, weakening it on all fronts, domestic as well as foreign. Although it took time for this to become clear, Britain lost its hegemonic position as a world power. Whether or not without the war the British Empire – as the French or Dutch - might have survived for a considerable period longer is an interesting and by no means idle counter-factual question. But the fact was that the war did supervene, with consequences that were both a speeding up of pre-war developments and the result of dynamics specific to the war itself. Particularly important was the Japanese conquest of much of South-East Asia, with repercussions throughout the European empires in Asia. The belief in European superiority was shattered forever. Nationalists throughout the region were encouraged and emboldened to pursue their dreams of complete independence. Nationalist struggles and the altered balance of world power – with the United States and the Soviet Union

now the major players on the world stage – turned the stakes against the European empires.

But though we, from the vantage point of the present, might see the war as the decisive turning point, and the end of empire as inscribed in the logic of events, that was not necessarily how it appeared to contemporaries. Our tendency to read the twentieth-century history of empires teleologically – to see their end as somehow foreordained, and discernible in various stirrings at the very beginning of the century – tends to foreshorten their lives and to obscure their continuing impact on their own societies.⁵¹ The British Empire, as conventionally understood, did indeed come more or less to an end a mere two decades or so after the close of the Second World War. But, in the first place, that was not an outcome that seemed at all inevitable to contemporaries during and immediately after the war. In the second place, our telescoped vision of empire has the effect of preventing us from seeing its long afterlife in the metropolis, in British society itself.

From one point of view the Second World War can be thought of, not as administering the *coup de grâce*, but as the acme of empire.⁵² If a ‘Britannic identity’ was one of the unifying marks of the Empire, the Second World War saw Britishness reach a new peak and intensity of expression.⁵³ It was a Britishness that was freely and deliberately extended to all the subjects of the Empire, through such media as the Empire (later Overseas) Services of the BBC, the Colonial Film Unit, the royal broadcasts at Christmas, and perhaps even more the films and broadcasts of the popular actor Leslie Howard – a virtual compendium of the best British qualities - to all the corners of the Empire. Newsreels in Britain showed Australian, Canadian, New Zealander, South

African, Indian and West Indian servicemen coming to Britain as well as fighting in the war zones. Films such as *49th Parallel* (1941) showed the multinational empire in action against the threat of the Nazi's 'New World Order'. The common theme was of a loyal empire coming to Britain's aid in a time of dire emergency. The common image was that of 'one great family', as George V said in his Christmas broadcast of 1941, 'the family of the British Commonwealth and Empire.' There was a calculated stress on the *ordinary* people of the Empire as of the nation, the men and women in the fields and factories as well as at the front. The spirit of the 'people's war' was complemented by that of the 'people's empire'.⁵⁴

The Second World War also qualified somewhat the picture of a more inward-looking, peaceful, and quiet national character that had been one significant development of the interwar years. It did so in a direction that laid the stress on more heroic, soldierly, and, in a word, imperial qualities. There could of course be no imitating the Nazis with their bullying and glorification of militarism. To that extent there was the 'pipe-and-slippers' Little Englander, J. B. Priestley, with his nightly BBC radio 'Postscripts', to indicate continuity with the pre-war period. A tempered, restrained, masculinity was celebrated as against the 'hyper-masculinity' of the Nazis.⁵⁵ But against this, or rather perhaps combining with this, was the ample figure of the cigar-smoking Winston Churchill, the epitome of empire, the Churchill who famously declared in 1942 that 'I have not become the King's First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire.'⁵⁶ It was Churchill who most clearly embodied the imperial character of the war effort, and the aspiration to continue the Empire in some form after the war.

The British people rejected Churchill in 1945; but did they also reject the Empire at the same time? Anticolonialism, championed by a few fringe groups on the left, had not been popular during the war nor had it much impact immediately afterwards (despite, or perhaps because of, considerable popular confusion and ignorance about what the Empire was, as we have seen).⁵⁷ The theme of the ‘people’s empire’ continued in the popular culture of the post-war period, shown partly in the increasing preference for the term ‘Commonwealth’ over ‘Empire’. The *Sunday Times* in 1947 even proclaimed a ‘Fourth British Empire of independent peoples freely associated’, much what people had come to understand by the ‘British Commonwealth of Nations.’ Such a theme reached its climax with the great procession of representatives from the whole Empire at the time of the coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953. ‘The “people’s empire” promoted in Coronation year emphasized the ideal of a multiracial community of equal nations that would maintain Britishness as a global identity through transforming and modernizing its imperial dimension.’⁵⁸

In fact what is most apparent in the post-war period is not so much a resigned acceptance of the end of empire as rather a surge of energy and new thinking, especially in official circles, as to how to reform the Empire in order to preserve it. In that sense John Gallagher was right to say that ‘in the short term, the impact of war considerably strengthened the empire.’⁵⁹ The new Labour Government, especially in the persons of the Prime Minister Clement Atlee and the Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin, had no intention of giving up on the Empire. Burma and India might get their independence, though this was not the same as severing ties with them nor ceasing to expect continuing British influence upon them. But perhaps for the first time the government turned its serious

attention to its African colonies, seeking to stimulate economic development there to offset the losses in the eastern empire. ‘The same Labour Government which had liquidated most of British Asia went on to animate part of British Africa. Africa would be the surrogate for India, more docile, more malleable, more pious.’⁶⁰ In other areas too the British sought not so much to wind-up their empire – that never seems to have been the goal of any important groups – as to allow it to continue by other, more indirect, means. The belief in Britain’s role, as a power for both the good and the stability of the world, remained strong. The veteran liberal imperialist Ernest Barker remonstrated with his old friend Alfred Zimmern, now settled in America, when he seemed to be forgetting this: ‘To me ... the hope of the world is the continuance of our Commonwealth as the great sane *via media* power of the world.’⁶¹

The most radical attempt to renew the Empire came with the British Nationality Act of 1948. Common citizenship, as the bond of solidarity, had been a major theme of both official and popular propaganda on the home front during the Second World War.⁶² It was a long-standing promise also held out to other peoples of the Empire, though in many cases slow in its fulfilment. Now, spurred on by the mobilization of the whole Empire for the war effort, the British Government at last delivered on that promise. At a stroke all members of the Empire – all inhabitants of the dominions and dependencies, as well as former colonies, such as India, which had achieved Commonwealth status – were made equal subjects, with the right to live and work in the United Kingdom. While each dominion was left free to create its own citizenship laws, the United Kingdom as the ‘Mother Country’ made it clear that all subjects of the Crown were equal in its eyes, and that it remained the centre to which all members of the Empire would be drawn. As the

Attorney-General Sir Hartley Shawcross stressed, ‘the Bill’s whole purpose is to maintain the common status, and with it the metropolitan tradition that this country is the homeland of the Commonwealth.’ The image of the family, common in the war, was once more drawn upon: the conception of an ‘all-pervading common status, or nationality’, said Lord Chancellor Jowitt, was ‘the mark of something which differentiates the family from mere friends.’⁶³

Conservative critics of the 1948 Nationality Act at the time thought that, with its exceptionally liberal immigration provisions, it was storing up trouble for the future; those on the left have said that its liberal pretensions were undermined by a ‘racialisation’ of immigration policy in the actual implementation of the Act, as well as by a discourse of race and nation that increasingly defined Britishness as whiteness against the threat of ‘dark strangers’.⁶⁴ No-one however has denied that the Act represented, realistically or not, an extraordinary declaration of faith in the British Empire, and an expression of the determination to continue it, albeit in transformed form, in the changed circumstances of the post-war world.

Empire and Identities After Empire

By the late 1960s most of Britain’s formal empire had gone. But neither in the former colonies nor in the metropolis itself did that mean ‘the end of empire’ – not, at least, if that suggests the end of imperial impact and influence. One does not so easily shrug off nearly four hundred years of imperial existence. By comparison with some other empires, such as the Chinese, that may not seem very long. But in modern conditions that may be long enough. ‘The empires of our time were short-lived’, says the

protagonist Ralph Singh in V. S. Naipaul's novel *The Mimic Men*, 'but they have altered the world for ever; their passing away is their least significant feature.'⁶⁵

The Empire had given the British, and more specifically and especially the English, a sense of themselves. They were an imperial people, not a merely 'national' people. In the heyday of empire, all the peoples of the United Kingdom – Scots, Irish, and Welsh, as well as English – shared in the enterprise of empire. The Empire, in this sense, was a force for convergence, enabling the creation of an overarching British identity that could incorporate not just the peoples of the 'inner empire' of the United Kingdom but also those of the 'outer empire', the overseas British Empire.

But while the Empire contained and controlled possible fragmentation, it also to some extent provided the pattern of a less cohesive post-imperial British state. Here, once again, the United Kingdom participated in some of the same developments as in the rest of the Empire. Just as the requirements and practices of the Empire called into being a series of nationalist movements that eventually took over rule as independent states, so – though never to the same extent - the character of the Empire also led to the strengthening of distinct national identities within the United Kingdom itself. While never sufficient to threaten the unity of either the Empire or the United Kingdom, the development of these national identities at home meant that there were national communities 'in waiting', capable of being mobilized and deployed when the need or the opportunity arose.

John Mackenzie has argued that, far from the Empire stifling national identities in the British Isles, it had the effect – similar to what occurred elsewhere in the Empire – of preserving and promoting them.⁶⁶ For the Scots, Welsh and Irish, the cultivation of their

distinct identities was a means of offsetting the dominance of the English – the old enemy – in both the Empire and the United Kingdom. The Empire afforded them an opportunity to do so on a scale and in a manner impossible within the home country itself. Scots, Welsh and Irish were able to carve out distinct ‘niches’ for themselves within the Empire. Cities such as Belfast, Cardiff, Glasgow and Dundee became in effect imperial cities, performing specific economic functions within the overall economy of the Empire. Scottish, Welsh and Irish regiments maintained and developed a sense of ethnic pride within the overall framework of the imperial armed forces – and were encouraged to do so, as a matter of *esprit de corps*. Colonial settlements of Scots, Welsh and Irish all over the Empire became in many ways the central breeding grounds of their respective nationalisms, maintaining strong connections with their home communities and supporting and promoting their distinctive identities.⁶⁷

The end of empire did not eliminate the need for it, or something like it, as a wider theatre allowing the different nationalities of the United Kingdom to find and express their identities. This was as true for the English as the other nationalities, but characteristically the problem expressed itself differently in the two cases. For the other nationalities the difficulty remained as always the overwhelming preponderance of England, within the United Kingdom as within the Empire. All attempts to ‘federalize’ Britain and the Empire since the late nineteenth century had fallen foul of this basic asymmetry. The Kilbrandon Commission on the Constitution of 1973, the last serious attempt to consider a federal solution for Britain, pointed precisely to this obstacle in its conclusion that a United Kingdom federation was ‘not a realistic proposition.’⁶⁸

But if not the Empire, why not Europe? If, with the end of empire, the ‘Celtic’ nationalities had lost one of the principal reasons for remaining attached to the United Kingdom, as well as one of the central means by which they had been able to assert themselves against English dominance, might they be able to find in the developing European Union a functional alternative to the British Empire? Could ‘Scotland in Europe’ substitute for ‘Scotland within the Empire’?⁶⁹ Ireland seemed to have shown the way. Since its accession to the European Union in 1973, it had blossomed economically and socially, reversing its former position as one of the most backward regions of Europe to become one of the most dynamic and progressive - a magnet for migrants not just from the European Union but from other parts of the world as well. Could not Scotland and Wales repeat the Irish miracle? Could they not also find salvation within Europe? And would that not, in a way, continue the old imperial story of small nations finding a protective niche and nest within the larger framework of a multinational empire? For ‘British Empire’ read ‘European Union’ – an expansive, still growing, multinational entity that some have already begun to compare to the empires of old.⁷⁰

The relation between empire and identities is one not so much of consciousness as of structure. People may or may not know much about the empire; as with national identity (of which it can of course be an element), their imperial identity may, as a matter of consciousness, be highly fuzzy or unstable. They may even deny point-blank that they have one. But we are given our identities as much as we choose them. To live in an empire, as in a nation, is to be located in set of institutions and practices which daily infuse in us a sense, however imperfectly understood or articulated, of who we are and to what we owe allegiance. It becomes part of our common understanding of the world, and

of our place in it. We need be no more self-conscious about it than we are about being a man or a woman.

As John Seeley and later John Pocock so clearly showed, the United Kingdom and the British Empire were entities that evolved together, in a ‘symbiotic’ relationship. As Pocock puts it, the British Empire was ‘essentially an extension ... of the complex of marches and polities by which the archipelago underwent consolidation.’ Both were fundamentally achievements of the eighteenth century, and both have marched in step ever since. The identities of the different peoples of the United Kingdom were given – not chosen – by their place in the division of labour that constituted the running of the kingdom and the Empire. The blows to the Empire, especially as the result of the world wars of the twentieth century, were also blows to the unity and integrity of the United Kingdom. The peoples of the United Kingdom were to a good extent held together by the common enterprise of empire; with its demise, that glue has begun to melt. People begin to look elsewhere for the satisfactions of their interests. ‘The connections between loss of empire, assimilation to Europe, and loss of Union are without doubt confused and contradictory, but they seem to exist.’⁷¹

In an oft-quoted passage, written at the height of the nationalist agitation of the late 1970s, the historian of empire Jan Morris observed: ‘In the days of the never-setting sun all the pride of Empire was there for the sharing, and to be part of one of the most vital and exciting of the world’s Powers was certainly a compensation. But who gets satisfaction from the present state of the Union? Who is really content with this grubby wreck of old glories? Is there anyone, except those with a vested interest in the thing, who does not yearn for a new beginning?’⁷² It was a diagnosis and a sentiment frequently

expressed at the time, most powerfully in a work that became almost a rallying-cry in certain quarters, Tom Nairn's *The Break-Up of Britain*.⁷³ In a similar vein Kenneth Morgan, at the end of his history of modern Wales, commented that 'the loss of empire ... has wrought powerful changes in the psyche of the British people', among them the erosion of 'the certainty that had once attached to English and imperial values.' But he noted that the loss of confidence in these values and the other 'dissolving certainties' of late twentieth-century Britain have, if not for the English at least for the Welsh and perhaps others in the United Kingdom, been 'to some degree liberating and invigorating'. They have made Welsh nationalism and Welsh national identity, with their different values and different modes of attachment to place and race, more relevant than ever before.⁷⁴

The 'break-up of Britain' has not so far occurred, nor may it, despite the fillip given to Scottish and Welsh nationalism by the substantial devolution measures introduced in 1997. 'Euroscepticism' remains strong throughout Britain, though certainly less so in Wales and Scotland than in England. Without Europe, without the shelter and support that the European Union makes possible, it is difficult to see how any of the constituent parts of the United Kingdom could make it on their own, least of all the smaller and less prosperous nations on the periphery. Nevertheless empire, or rather its demise, has done its work. It has loosened the bonds that held the nations of the United Kingdom together.⁷⁵ It has made it possible, perhaps for the first time since the union of 1707, to conceive of the dissolution of the British state. If, as John Pocock says, a truly 'British history' can be defined as 'the creation of an offshore empire', then 'a case might

be made for holding that the history of Britain is coming to an end and is about to be written by the owls of Minerva.’⁷⁶

But if British history comes to an end, what does this say about *English* history? Where do the English fit into this story? The English are the anomaly, the joker in the pack. It is they who masterminded the whole imperial venture, from the conquests of Wales and Ireland in the thirteenth century, to the forced incorporating union with Scotland in 1707, to the global expansion of the Empire from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. They did not do this alone, of course; the other peoples of both the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’ empires were in most cases willing accomplices and often beneficiaries. But the Empire, just as the United Kingdom, carried an English stamp, in its dominant culture and institutions. The English were the imperial people *par excellence*, the ones who could afford to suppress ethnic and national pride in pursuit of a wider and more-encompassing imperial mission.

The end of empire was bound to affect the English even more than Welsh, Scots and Irish.⁷⁷ Those others had to some extent created their identities against the dominant English; without empire they felt free to accentuate those identities and to find an alternative theatre of operations in Europe and perhaps elsewhere as well (the continuing links with the former white dominions might prove important in this respect). This left the English feeling doubly exposed: the loss of the outer empire – the British Empire – was now also matched by the possible loss of the inner empire – the United Kingdom. Moreover, if the Scots and Welsh had problems with Europe, the English had, for good historical reasons, even greater ones, thus making the European card even more difficult for them to play.⁷⁸

The legacy of empire in the English case is an acute question of national identity. The Scots, Welsh and Irish seem relatively secure in theirs: in this case their subordinate position in the United Kingdom and the Empire has served them well. Nothing creates identities better than exclusion and opposition. The English were able to look with lordly disdain on ‘mere’ nationalism – in their eyes, something akin to tribalism and best suited to an earlier stage of civilization. For them, the main opponents were other imperial powers – France, Russia, Japan, perhaps Germany and the United States. But imperial competition is of a different nature from national competition. Nations look to a world of nations, equal in principle. Empires seek universality – the realization, on a world scale, of the ‘civilizing mission’ that most empires aspire to carry. Ideally there can be only one empire – a world empire.⁷⁹

The fact that the British Empire came close to realizing that ideal only makes things more difficult for the English once that empire has gone. If you have been lords of the world, it is a little hard to shrink to being a mere nation. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that the English, engaged in empire and other global enterprises, had no need for and therefore did not develop the resources of a tradition of reflection on national identity and national character (as David Hume put it, ‘the English, of any people in the universe, have the least of a national character; unless this very singularity may pass for such’⁸⁰). This was by no means disabling for much of the time – one might think it almost fortunate, given the excesses of nationalism in the last century or so. But it became problematic with the loss of empire, and the rise of nationalism in other parts of the United Kingdom. Whether or not the United Kingdom broke up, it seemed apparent that from now on the four nations would need to be more conscious of their own character

and take more control of their own concerns. After 1997, the Scots, Welsh and Northern Irish had their own parliaments, or something close to it; the English did not. To many in England this began to seem unfair and anomalous. One began to see a movement for the establishment of an English parliament, alongside the British parliament at Westminster; even the rise of that historical oddity, English nationalism.⁸¹

‘The danger for the English is that they will be left holding on to the symbols and institutions of Britain long after it has been cleared out of any emotional or political meaning ... England should prepare itself for the abandonment of Britain and give some thought to its own political future.’⁸² Is this what the four hundred-year story of empire has come to? The Empire reduced to its English core, the protective layers surrounding England one by one peeled away, leaving it to fend for itself? Certainly there is no reason to think that it could not survive in this form. England’s wealth and population – far greater than that of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland combined – are sufficient to allow it to compete on equal terms with virtually any nation earth, only the very largest such as the United States and China perhaps excepted. Its membership of the European Union, for all its occasional holding back, gives it additional support and direction. Even the perhaps residual goodwill of the Commonwealth, and the sometimes misguided sense of kinship with the United States, can serve it well, in drawing upon a common store of basically English institutions and understandings with which to confront the problems of an increasingly disorderly and turbulent world.⁸³ If not the English themselves, the English inheritance in the world remains rich and powerful.

Nevertheless there may be good grounds for mourning the death – if that is what comes to pass – of the United Kingdom. It has been some kind of experiment in

multinationalism, as was the larger British Empire of which it was a part. In an increasingly multicultural world, marked by mass migrations and new intermixings of peoples, the wiser choice would seem to be the larger and more capacious political unit rather than the smaller and potentially more exclusive one. It may not be entirely a matter of intellectual fashions that empires are once more arousing serious scholarly interest. They embody a wealth of experience in the management of difference and diversity. The British Empire was one of the most imposing of these attempts. Ernest Barker, reacting against the narrowness and intolerance of the nationalism that was sweeping Europe at the time of the First World War, observed in 1917 that ‘whatever the sins of the British Commonwealth, exclusive nationalism is not one of these sins. The Commonwealth has not sought to proselytize all its peoples into acceptance of a single culture ... It flourishes on diversity.’⁸⁴ There is enough truth in this to make it a fitting epitaph on the British Empire, as it conceived itself and as it operated. It may be that not the least of the Empire’s legacies are the lessons that can be learned from its history.

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¹ Jeffrey Richards, 'Imperial heroes for a post-imperial age: films and the end of empire', in Stuart Ward (ed.), *British culture and the end of empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 143. The poll Richards refers to was conducted by Gallup for the *Daily Telegraph*; see the *Daily Telegraph*, 26 August 1997.

² See John M. MacKenzie, 'The persistence of empire in metropolitan culture', in Ward (ed.), *British culture and the end of empire*, p. 28. For a critical discussion of this poll and other surveys of the time, see Andrew Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005), pp 207-9. As Thompson remarks, 'people did not need to know a lot about [the Empire] in order to have an opinion on it.' The complaint about popular ignorance of and indifference to the Empire has, as many have remarked, a long history, stretching well back into the nineteenth century: see, e.g. Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 31-2, quoting J. S. Mill and J. A. Froude.

³ See, e.g., John M. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion 1880-1960*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Antoinette Burton (ed.), *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press,

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⁴ See especially Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*, and – though more cautiously- Bill Nasson, *Britannia’s Empire: Making a British World*, (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2004); Richard Price, ‘One Big thing: Britain, Its Empire, and Their Imperial Culture’, *Journal of British Studies*, 45/3, (2006), pp. 602-27. A cautious note was also earlier struck by P. J. Marshall, ‘Imperial Britain’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 23/3, (1995), esp. pp. 380, 392-3 – though Marshall stressed more the lack of overt discussions of the empire in public life, and the relative ease with which Britain wound up its Empire, than the absence of an impact on British society, which indeed he

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⁶ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, (London: Sage Publications, 1995), p.6.

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¹³ Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*, p.307. This is a view that, without the extensive documentation that Porter gives it, has been common among a number of recent commentators – see, e.g., David Miller, 'Reflections on British National Identity', *New Community*, 21/2, (1995), p. 159.

¹⁴ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.10.

¹⁵ Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, p. 122. The view of British society contained in this account was first elaborated in David Cannadine, *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). For further exploration of the idea of a common 'British world', see Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich (eds), *The British World: Diaspora, Culture and Identity* (London: Frank Cass, 2003).

¹⁶ It is this understanding that seems to be lacking in E.P. Thompson's hugely influential *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Gollancz, 1963), which studies the working class more or less in isolation from other classes. In his later work, especially on the 18th century, Thompson was acute in his analysis of class interaction and in the shared perceptions of different groups. He seems to have assumed – wrongly, in my view – that this pattern was decisively broken in the 19th century. See further on this Krishan Kumar, 'Class and Political Action in Nineteenth-Century England', in *The Rise of Modern Society*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), pp. 131-68.

¹⁷ Oliver Zimmer, *Nationalism in Europe, 1890-1940*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 34. See also Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd edn, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 101-30; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 83-111. For a good study of how socialism in Britain was undermined by the patriotic teaching of the elementary schools in the pre-First World War period, see Stephen Heathorn, *For Home, Country, and Race: Constructing Gender, Class, and Englishness in the Elementary School, 1880-1914* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1999).

¹⁸ Kenneth O. Morgan, *Rebirth of A Nation: A History of Modern Wales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 90.

¹⁹ Christopher Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism; Scottish Society and Politics 1707 to the Present*, 4th edn. (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 15-20.

²⁰ For the Irish leader John Redmond's embrace of empire, from the 1880s onwards, see Marshall, 'Imperial Britain', p. 388. This view survived independence: the 'vision of empire or Commonwealth as a union of free peoples in which the Irish could play a full

and distinctive part was still alive in the 1920s, when the Cosgrave government in the Irish Free State was maintaining Ireland's Commonwealth membership'. Marshall, 'Imperial Britain', p. 389; see also Deidre McMahon, 'Ireland and the Empire-Commonwealth, 1900-1948', in Judith M. Brown and Wm. Roger Louis (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol. IV: The Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 147-54; Richard J. Finlay, '“For or against?”: Scottish Nationalists and the British Empire, 1919-39', *Scottish Historical Review*, 71, (1992), pp. 184-206. For a similarly powerful assertion of the coincidence of Welsh national identity with imperial patriotism, see the petition of Welsh MPs to Churchill in 1943, quoted Richard Weight, *Patriots: National Identity in Britain 1940-2000* (London, Pan Books, 2003), pp. 51-52; and, for the theme of 'unity in diversity' as applied to Wales in the United Kingdom and the Empire – 'a family of distinct nations each contributing its essential talents and characteristics to the organic whole' - see John S. Ellis, 'Reconciling the Celt: British National Identity, Empire, and the 1911 Investiture of the Prince of Wales', *Journal of British Studies*, 37/4, (1998), pp. 391-418.

²¹ Raphael Samuel, 'Four Nations History', in *Island Stories: Unravelling Britain* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 35; see also David S. Forsyth, 'Empire and Union: imperial and national identity in nineteenth century Scotland', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 113/1, (1997), pp. 6-12; Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back?*, pp. 199-200; T. M. Devine, 'The Break-Up of Britain? Scotland and the End of Empire', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, sixth series, 16, (2006), pp. 166, 170.

²² Douglas Cole, 'The Problem of “Nationalism” and “Imperialism” in British Settlement Colonies', *Journal of British Studies*, 10/2, (1971), p. 163, who also quotes Sinclair there.

²³ Cole, 'Problem of "Nationalism" and "Imperialism"', pp. 172-3. See also Thompson, *Imperial Britain*, pp. 28-32.

²⁴ See Stephen Constantine, 'British Emigration to the Empire-Commonwealth since 1880: From Overseas Settlement to Diaspora?', in Bridge and Fedorowich (eds), *The British World*, pp. 20-1; Stephen Constantine, 'Migrants and Settlers', in Brown and Louis (eds), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, Volume IV: *The Twentieth Century*, p. 167.

²⁵ 'The phrase, perhaps the most famous in Australian history, is that of Sir Henry Parkes': Cole, 'Problem of "Nationalism" and "Imperialism"', p. 169 n.25.

²⁶ Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 163-70, 346-51; Percival Spear, *A History of India*, 2, rev ed., (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981), pp. 158-80. It is worth noting that the Indian National Congress was actually founded by an Englishman, Allan Octavian Hume - son of the great mid-Victorian anti-imperialist Joseph Hume - a retired administrator who believed that the best way of preserving the permanence of British rule in India was to give qualified Indians some share in the running of the country. See Kathryn Tidrick, *Empire and the English Character* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1992), pp. 223-4.

²⁷ See especially Anil Seal, 'Imperialism and Nationalism in India', in J. Gallagher, G. Johnson and A. Seal (eds.), *Locality, Province and Nation: Essays on Indian Politics 1870-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 1-28; see also John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, 2nd edn., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 170-83.

²⁸ See for the general argument, Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003), pp. 35-8, 180, and *passim*. For the key medieval period, see R. R. Davies, *The First English Empire: Power and Identities in the British Isles 1093-1343* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

²⁹ See Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back?*, pp. 64-82.

³⁰ See John M. MacKenzie, 'Essay and Reflection: On Scotland and Empire', *The International History Review*, 15/4, (1993), pp. 714-39; *idem*, 'Empire and National Identities: the Case of Scotland', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th Series, 8, (1998), pp. 221-8; Michael Fry, *The Scottish Empire* (East Linton: Tuckwell, 2001); T. M. Devine, *Scotland's Empire 1600-1815* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 2003); Keith Jeffery (ed.), *'An Irish Empire'? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996); Kevin Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); A. Jones and B. Jones, 'The Welsh World and the British Empire, c. 1851- 1939: An Exploration', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 31/2, (2003), pp. 57-81; Gwyn Williams, *When Was Wales?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), pp.221-26; Hopkins, 'Back to the Future', p. 212.

³¹ See J. R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (1883; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 13.

³² Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. xxiv; see also Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). A.G. Hopkins has suggested that this is a general feature of all forms of globalization, that they all carry the

‘imprint of nationality’, and that they are all in that sense species of ‘national globalization’. ‘Links across space and cultures could be sustained only by generating common core values and a lingua franca, and these were put in place by a few dominant nations with the power to spread their own diasporas while also inspiring imitation and instilling deference in other societies ... From constitutions to consumer tastes, from weights to measures, and from the creation of postal services to the colonization of time, it was the national stamp that sealed global connections’. A. G. Hopkins, ‘The History of Globalization – and the Globalization of History?’, in A. G. Hopkins (ed.), *Globalization in World History* (London: Pimlico, 2002), pp. 31-2.

³³ A typical view was that, as Harold Nicolson put it in explaining why the British, unlike the French, Germans and Italians, had not established a cultural institution for promoting their way of life, the ‘genius of England [*sic*], unlike that of lesser countries, spoke for itself.’ Another diplomat added that ‘good wine, we optimistically feel, needs no bush.’ Quoted in Frances Donaldson, *The British Council: The First Fifty Years* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), pp. 11-12. In the climate of the 1930, with the competition offered by Russian Communism and Italian and German Fascism, such insouciance, it was felt, was no longer justified, and the British Council was established in 1934 ‘to make the life and thought of the British peoples more widely known abroad.’

³⁴ See Krishan Kumar, ‘Nation and Empire: English and British National Identity in Comparative Perspective’, *Theory and Society*, 29/5, (2000), pp. 575-608; *idem*, ‘Empire and English Nationalism’, *Nations and Nationalism*, 12/1, (2006), pp. 1-13.

³⁵ Quoted C.K. Woodworth, ‘Ocean and Steppe: Early Modern World Empires’, *Journal of Early Modern History*, 11/6, (2007), p. 507.

³⁶ Kumar, 'Nation and Empire', pp. 584-88.

³⁷ See the surveys discussed in Christopher G. A. Bryant, *The Nations of Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 4-7.

³⁸ Paul Scott, *A Division of the Spoils* (London: Granada Publishing, 1977), p.105.

³⁹ See John Gallagher, 'Nationalism and the Crisis of Empire, 1919-22', *Modern Asian Studies*, 15/3, (1981), pp. 355-68; A. P. Thornton, *The Imperial Idea and Its Enemies: A Study in British Power* (New York: Anchor Books, 1968), pp. 232-300.

⁴⁰ Although strictly speaking, as Ashley Jackson points out, it was in 1945, not in the wake of the First World War, that the British Empire achieved its greatest territorial extent ever, as Britain reconquered its own colonies lost earlier to the Japanese and Italians and acquired new territories - in Somaliland, Libya, Madagascar, southern Iran and elsewhere - from its defeated enemies: *The British Empire and the Second World War* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), p. 5.

⁴¹ Charles Meier claims that after the First World War, 'the spectacle of internecine European warfare and the advent of Woodrow Wilson's idea of self-determination undermined the legitimacy' of the French and British Empires, despite their massive postwar territorial gains: *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 154. But he gives no evidence for this. Concerns and anxieties about their empires, and the sense that they would inevitably go the way of all mortal things - what Meier calls 'the melancholy of empire' - were common among the French and the British (as among all imperial peoples) throughout the lives of their empires. But there is little evidence that this deepened particularly in the wake of the First World War. For the British Empire, see especially John Gallagher, *The*

Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire: The Ford Lectures and other essays, edited by Anil Seal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 86-99; see also John Darwin, 'The Fear of Falling: British Politics and Imperial Decline Since 1900', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 36, (1986), pp. 27-43.

⁴² John MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, pp. 255-6; *idem*, 'The Popular Culture of Empire in Britain', in Brown and Louis (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, Volume IV: *The Twentieth Century*, pp. 212-31; Stephen Constantine, '“Bringing the Empire alive”: the Empire Marketing Board and imperial propaganda', in John M. Mackenzie (ed.), *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 192-231.

⁴³ For Wells's view of the British Empire, see his *Imperialism and the Open Conspiracy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1929); see also Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), pp. 194-205; Daniel Deudney, 'Greater Britain or Greater Synthesis? Seeley, Mackinder, and Wells on Britain in the Global Industrial Era', *Review of International Studies*, 27, (2001), pp. 203-7; for Barker, see his 'The Conception of Empire', in Cyril Bailey (ed.), *The Legacy of Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), pp. 35-60; and see also, for Barker's strongly positive view of the British Empire and Commonwealth right up to the Second World War and beyond, Julia Stapleton, *Englishness and the Study of Politics: The Social and Political Thought of Ernest Barker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 186-97.

⁴⁴ On these changes in the image of the English between the wars, see Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991); Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an*

Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 143-76; Robert Colls, *Identity of England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 315-6. One further reaction to the war seems to have been a somewhat nostalgic retreat to the regions. England was seen not as an urbanized, centralized, mass society, centred on London - as it really was - nor even as the countryside, as in Stanley Baldwin's famous utterance, but as a complex of regions, each with its own distinctive qualities, and each of which exemplified something quintessentially English. The sum of these individual and unique parts made up England. See Catherine Brace, 'Finding England Everywhere: Regional Identity and the Construction of National Identity, 1890-1940', *Ecumene*, 6/1, (1999), pp. 90-109.

⁴⁵ See, e.g., J. H. Grainger, *Patriotisms: Britain 1900-1939* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), pp. 324-7; Paul Rich, 'Imperial Decline and the Resurgence of English National Identity, 1918-1979', in Tony Kushner and Kenneth Lunn (eds), *Traditions of Intolerance: Historical Perspectives on Fascism and Race Discourse in Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), esp. pp. 33-40.

⁴⁶ Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 156. See also Alex May, 'Empire Loyalists and "Commonwealth Men": the Round Table and the end of empire', in Ward (ed.), *British Culture and the End of Empire*, 37-44; Tidrick, *Empire and the English Character*, pp. 228-32; Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, pp. 174-97, 217-24, 231-6; John M. MacKenzie, 'T. E. Lawrence: The Myth and the Message', in Robert Giddings (ed.), *Literature and Imperialism* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 156-66; Jeffrey Richards, *Films and British National Identity: From Dickens to Dad's Army* (Manchester: Manchester

University Press, 1997), pp. 31-59 ('empire and imperial values remained central to interwar culture', p. 57); James Chapman, 'Cinemas of Empire', *History Compass*, 4/5, (2006), pp. 814-19.

⁴⁷ Judith M. Brown, 'India', in Brown and Louis (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, Volume IV: *The Twentieth Century*, p.430; John Darwin, 'Imperialism in Decline? Tendencies in British Imperial Policy Between the Wars', *Historical Journal*, 23/3, (1980), p. 676-7; John Gallagher and Anil Seal, 'Britain and India Between the Wars', *Modern Asian Studies* 15/3, (1981), pp. 406-7 – though they stress the 'ambiguities' in the term 'Dominion status'.

⁴⁸ John Darwin, 'A Third British Empire? The Dominion Idea in Imperial Politics', in Brown and Louis (eds), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, Volume IV: *The Twentieth Century*, pp. 70-1, 85. See also Thompson, *Imperial Britain*, pp. 25-32; Hopkins, 'Back to the Future', pp. 218-20, 235-6; Brown, 'India', pp. 435-6; Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorovich, 'Mapping the British World', in Bridge and Fedorovich (eds), *The British World*, pp. 1-15.

⁴⁹ Darwin, 'Imperialism in Decline?', p. 662; 'Fear of Falling', p. 42.

⁵⁰ Such a link had been made since the late nineteenth century, especially in the context of discussions of Irish Home Rule: see John Kendle, *Federal Britain: A History* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 46-78; Vernon Bogdanor, *Devolution in the United Kingdom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 19-54; Keith Robbins, '“This Grubby Wreck of Old Glories”: The United Kingdom and the End of the British Empire', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 15/1, (1980), pp. 87-90. At the time of furious debates over Irish Home Rule in the early 1900s, the Liberal *Daily News* linked Home Rule within the

United Kingdom to the Empire: 'The nationalities within the British Isles are the natural units for devolution and their nationalization does not take from but strengthens a common Imperial patriotism.' *Daily News*, 5 August 1910, quoted Paul Ward, *Britishness Since 1870* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 97. A similar point was made by a Scots nationalist, W. Scott Dalglish, in 1883: 'the maintenance of [Scottish] nationality will not only be just to Scotland but will also strengthen the Empire, of which Scotland forms an integral part.' Quoted Kendle, *Federal Britain*, p. 183 n.15; see also Forsyth, 'Empire and Union', p. 11. For the idea of 'imperial federation', see Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, pp.12-20, 93-119. For discussions in the interwar period, largely centred on the ideas of the Round Table group, see Kendle, *Federal Britain*, pp. 79-104; Mackenzie, 'On Scotland and the Empire', p. 738; Finlay, '“For or against?”'.

⁵¹ Cf. John Gallagher: 'There is a general notion that [the] empire rose, flourished, declined, fell, and that in its fall lay its fulfilment. But this is a sentimental view, arising from a banal teleology. In fact, the movement towards decline was reversible and sometimes was reversed.' *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire*, p. 86. Cf. John Darwin: 'Decline ... is a treacherously ambiguous phase in the history of empires.' 'British Decolonization since 1945: A Pattern or a Puzzle?', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 12/2, (1984), p. 187; see also Darwin, 'The Fear of Falling', p. 27.

⁵² 'The Second World War saw the apotheosis of the British Empire': Keith Jeffery, 'The Second World War', in Brown and Louis (eds), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, Volume IV: *The Twentieth Century*, p. 326. This is a view comprehensively and powerfully presented by Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War*; cf. also

A. P. Thornton's comment that, with the war, 'the Empire was on the march again'. *The Imperial Idea and Its Enemies*, p. 362.

⁵³ See Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*, pp. 233-8; Richard Weight, *Patriots*, pp. 23-118; Mandler, *English National Character*, pp. 187-95; Christopher Harvie, 'The Moment of British Nationalism, 1939-1970', *Political Quarterly*, 71, (2000), pp. 328-40.

⁵⁴ Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire 1939-1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 19-54; Toby Haggith, 'Citizenship, nationhood and empire in British official film propaganda, 1939-45', in Richard Weight and Abigail Beach (eds), *The Right to Belong: Citizenship and National Identity in Britain, 1930-1960* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), pp. 59-88; Siân Nicholas, ' "Brushing Up Your Empire": Dominion and Colonial Propaganda on the BBC's Home Services, 1939-45', in Bridge and Fedorowich (eds), *The British World*, pp. 207-30; John M. Mackenzie, ' "In touch with the infinite": the BBC and the Empire , 1923-53', in Mackenzie (ed.), *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, pp. 165-91.- Though Sonya Rose stresses divisions and exclusions in wartime consciousness, she too acknowledges that 'there was a left-leaning, populist, progressive shift in the dominant political culture that inundated the United Kingdom' in these years, leading to a 'utopian vision of renewal.' *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 24-5; see also pp.69-70, 290-1; and see also on this question the review article by Stephen Brooke, 'Identities in Twentieth-Century Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, 40/1, (2001), pp. 151-8.

⁵⁵ Rose, *Which People's War?*, pp. 151-96.

⁵⁶ Quoted John Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation: The Retreat from Empire in the Post-War World* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1988), p. 42.

⁵⁷ Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*, pp. 82-142. In this the British public was only reflecting the muted anticolonialism of most of the major left-wing groups and parties, including the Communist Party, preoccupied as they were with the imperialism of the Axis powers rather than their own.

⁵⁸ Webster, *Empire and Englishness*, p.8; see also pp. 55-6, and, on the Coronation and empire, pp.92-118.

⁵⁹ Gallagher, *Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire*, p. 139. See also Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War*, p.527.

⁶⁰ Gallagher, *Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire*, p. 146; see also Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Declining Empire: The Road to Decolonisation 1918-1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 94-5, 162-7. For parallel attempts to regenerate the French Empire after the war, see Frederick Cooper, 'Labor, Politics, and the End of Empire in French Africa', in *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 204-30.

⁶¹ Barker quoted Stapleton, *Englishness and the Study of Politics*, p. 192. And see generally on post-1945 attitudes to the Empire, Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*, chs. 3 and 4; Darwin, 'British Decolonization since 1945'; Wm. Roger Louis and Ronald Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Decolonization', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 22/3, (1994), pp. 462-511; Wm. Roger Louis, 'The Dissolution of the British Empire', in Brown and Louis (eds), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, Volume IV: *The Twentieth Century*, pp. 329-56; Thornton, *The Imperial Idea and Its Enemies*, pp.

378-80. All these accounts emphasize Anglo-American cooperation as the basis of attempts to maintain worldwide British control even as Britain divested itself formally of many of its colonies.

⁶² See Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-45* (London: Pimlico, 1992); David Morgan and Mary Evans, *The Battle for Britain: Citizenship and Ideology in the Second World War* (London: Routledge, 1993); Weight and Beach (eds), *The Right to Belong*; Rose, *Which People's War?*, 1-28.

⁶³ Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 16-17; see also Rieko Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship: Empire, Commonwealth and Modern Britain* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), p. 117.

⁶⁴ Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, pp. 111-30; Chris Waters, ' "Dark Strangers" in Our Midst: Discourses of Race and Nation in Britain, 1947-63', *Journal of British Studies*, 36/2, (1997), 207-38. But see also, for a contrary view that stresses continuing official commitment to the Commonwealth ideal in the 1950s, Randall Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Postwar Britain: The Institutional Foundations of a Multicultural Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), chs. 1-3. Mary Hickman notes the difficulty - no new thing - of fitting the Irish into the new dispensation: they were foreign nationals but also, it was officially declared, 'British', the 'same' as the inhabitants of Great Britain whether the Irish 'liked it or not'. Thus even though with the declaration of the Irish Republic in 1949 Ireland had left the Commonwealth, the Ireland Act of that year confirmed that an Irish citizen on entering Britain was to be treated, as Atlee put it, 'as if he were a British subject.' See, on this 'extraordinary' situation and the reasoning behind

it, Hickman, 'Ruling an empire, governing a multinational state: the impact of Britain's historical legacy on the contemporary ethno-racial regime', in Glenn C. Loury, Tariq Modood, and Steven M. Teles (eds), *Ethnicity, Social Mobility and Public Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 41-42.

⁶⁵ V. S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 32. For the various ways in which the end of empire impacted on British culture and society, ranging from the satire boom of the 1960s to the 'literature of decline' from the 1950s onwards, see the essays in Ward (ed.), *British culture and the end of empire*, especially the 'Introduction' by Stuart Ward, pp. 1-20; for the impact on British political culture, see Anthony Hartley, 'The Lost Vocation', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 15/1, (1980), pp. 67-79.

⁶⁶ John M. MacKenzie, 'Empire and National Identities: The Case of Scotland', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 8, (1998), pp. 229-31; see also Mackenzie, 'On Scotland and the Empire', p. 738; John M. Mackenzie, '“The Second City of the Empire”: Glasgow – imperial municipality', in Felix Driver and David Gilbert (eds), *Imperial Cities* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 215-37; Forsyth, 'Empire and Union', p. 10; Gwyn. A. Williams, 'Imperial South Wales', in his *The Welsh in their History* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), pp. 171-87.

An instructive comparison with this process is the development of the identities of the Slav nations within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in response to domination by Germans and Magyars. More recently it has been shown how the Soviet Union also played a major role in the creation of national identities within its borders, thus, as with the United Kingdom, establishing 'nations in waiting' – waiting for the break-up of the

Soviet empire (which, as with the British Empire, was not brought down by nationalism).

See Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

⁶⁷ See, for the relevant historiography, John Mackenzie, 'Irish, Scottish, Welsh and English Worlds? A Four Nations Approach to the British Empire', paper presented to the conference, 'Race, Nation, Empire: The Writing of Modern British Histories', University College, London, 24-26 April, 2008; see also the essays in Bridge and Fedorovich (eds), *The British World*.

⁶⁸ Kendle, *Federal Britain*, pp.8, 165, and *passim*. Kendle rightly stresses that most demands for 'home rule all round' since the nineteenth century have been basically demands for decentralization and devolution, rather than for true federalism. Almost no-one was prepared to demand, or concede, that the Westminster parliament should *divide* its sovereignty with the devolved units, whether in the Empire or the United Kingdom – so denying a basic requirement of federalism.

⁶⁹ Cf. Mackenzie, 'On Scotland and the Empire', p. 739.

⁷⁰ See especially Jan Zielonka, *Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁷¹ J. G. A. Pocock, 'The Limits and Divisions of British History: In Search of the Unknown Subject', *American Historical Review* 87/2, (1982), pp. 333-4; see also David McCrone, 'Unmasking Britannia: The Rise and Fall of British National Identity', *Nations and Nationalism*, 3/4, (1997), pp. 579-96; Catherine Hall. 'Introduction: thinking the postcolonial, thinking the empire', in Catherine Hall (ed.), *Cultures of Empire: A Reader* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 2; Iain McLean and Alistair

McMillan, *State of the Union: Unionism and Its Alternatives in the United Kingdom since 1707* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 239-56.

⁷² Jan Morris, 'The Hills are Alive with the Sound of Devolution', *Daily Telegraph*, 24 February 1979, quoted Robbins, ' "This Grubby Wreck of Old Glories"', p. 83; see also Keith Robbins, *Great Britain: Identities, Institutions and the Idea of Britishness* (London: Longman, 1998), pp. 302-7. Keith Thomas, writing about the same time as Morris, remarked that 'it is no coincidence that the decades of imperial decline have seen a recurrence of separatist feeling in Wales and Scotland. The association with England has become something less obviously to be treasured.' 'The United Kingdom', in Raymond Grew (ed.), *Crises of Political Development in Europe and the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 52-3.

⁷³ Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*, first published 1977; third, expanded edition (Altona, Vic: Common Ground Publishing/ Edinburgh: Big Thinking, 2003).

⁷⁴ Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation*, p. 419-21.

⁷⁵ Though one should note T. M Devine's view that Scotland's disenchantment with the Empire long predated its end, starting with the economic and social crisis of the interwar period: 'The Break-Up of Britain?', pp. 174-80. See also, for a sceptical note on the argument that the Empire was a critical force in holding the United Kingdom together, Robbins, ' "This Grubby Wreck of Old Glories"'.

⁷⁶ Pocock, 'Limits and Divisions', p. 334. See also the special issue of the *Political Quarterly*, 'The End of Britain?', 71/1, (2000). For some thoughtful comments on the challenge to British identity brought about by the loss of empire, see also Peter Scott, 'An

Imperial but Provincial Nation', *Times Higher Education Supplement*, August 1, 1986, p. 28; Linda Colley, 'Britishness and Otherness: An Argument', *Journal of British Studies* 31, (1992), esp. 327-9.

⁷⁷ See Hartley, 'The Lost Vocation', p. 68; James Vernon, 'Englishness: The Narration of a Nation', *Journal of British Studies*, 36/2, (1997), p. 249.

⁷⁸ See Krishan Kumar, 'Britain, England and Europe: Cultures in Contraflow', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 6/1, (2003), pp. 5-23.

⁷⁹ See further on this Kumar, 'Empires and Nations'.

⁸⁰ David Hume, 'Of National Character' (1741), in *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1987), p. 207. For the opposition of English intellectuals to English patriotism and nationalism, as a threat to the wider – and potentially non-national – concept of citizenship, see Julia Stapleton, 'Citizenship versus Patriotism in Twentieth-Century England', *Historical Journal*, 48/1, (2005), pp. 151-78.

⁸¹ See, among others, Mark Perryman (ed.), *Imagined Nation: England after Britain* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2008); David Goodhart, *Progressive Nationalism* (London: Demos, 2006); Arthur Aughey, *The Politics of Englishness* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Weight, *Patriots*, pp. 706-26; Christopher G. A. Bryant, 'These Englands, or where does devolution leave the English?', *Nations and Nationalism*, 9/3, (2003), pp. 393-412.

⁸² David Goodhart, 'England Arise', *Prospect*, 148, (July 2008), p.5.

⁸³ See the interesting remarks in Deudney, 'Greater Britain or Greater Synthesis?', pp. 207-8.; also Bell, *Idea of Greater Britain*, 266-72. A powerful re-statement of the idea that the Anglo-Saxon nations were basically the creators of the modern world is Walter

Russell Mead, *God and Gold: Britain, America, and the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).

⁸⁴ Quoted Stapleton, *Englishness and the Study of Politics*, p. 99. For Anthony Hartley, 'Empire brought with it a knowledge of foreign languages, of strange peoples, a habit of responsibility and government in conditions remote from those of the British Isles. The loss of these assets can be observed as signs of a greater provincialism.' 'The Lost Vocation', pp. 73-4.