The semi-detached nation: post-nationalism and Britain

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Until relatively recently 'national belonging' could not be taken for granted as evidence, even from the early twentieth century, shows. But we have become used to the idea of a world made up of nations, and of individuals having a primary national identity. In Britain and other countries these unquestioned national sentiments have become problematic; in this speculative paper I attempt to understand how and why Britishness has become precarious, and where present tendencies may lead. Whilst much of the discussion of this question has been overwhelmingly 'cultural': here I attempt to set the question in a material context. For one thing this requires both halves of the nation-state for it is mostly states who have sought to create, foster, or harness the national identification of their citizens. Once nation-states 'ruled the world', observers began to regard national identity as foundation, the 'trump card in the game of identity'. But I then examine social changes which, in Britain, have diminished the force of the 'nation' and its appeal to the individual. After then revisiting Bauman's arguments for the 'divorce' of state and nation, I conclude with some observations about the possible futures of Britishness.

The idea of attachment to nation has been raised to a high position in modern sociology and politics, whilst at the same being feared and treated with suspicion. National attachment is viewed with importance, even sacredness, in a world where nations, or more precisely nation-states, have become the primary political actors, and, for the individual, the nation has been seen as the principal locus of belonging. At the same time, national*ism* is regarded with high distrust as the ideology which has been deployed all manner of crimes against humanity. We project our national sentiments backwards into history, by seeing nations as historical enduring entities. But nationhood as the source of individual identity is relatively recent, given that even up to the First World War, empires spread across Europe, and into the near East. And within those empires the sentiment of national attachment was slight. When Wilson advanced the notion of self-determination of nations at the Versailles treaty negotiations, in many instances this required some very tricky negotiations as to the matching of geographical and cultural boundaries in the creation of new (or restored) nations as states. These negotiations are described in Macmillan's *Peacemakers*, where the author quotes an East European peasant's reply, on being asked to describe himself: 'I am a Catholic of these parts'.

Allocating people to self-determining nations was no easy thing. Through the nineteenth century, as Weber (1976) records, the French state had to persuade many of its citizens both to be French and speak French, in 'opposition' to local languages and affiliations. Bauman (2004) too shows that we cannot take 'being national' for granted even in relatively recent times: an immediately pre-second world war Poland census found over a million who just said we 'are from here' rather than give an ethnic or national identity (Bauman, 2004, p.17).

Because we have become aware, through the painstaking and fascinating work of historians and sociologists (Smith[1] 1986, Gellner 1983, Weber 1976, Davies 1999, Colley 1992) of these efforts to 'create' nations and a sense of national membership among the citizens, we have been able to view critically the idea that the nation is a natural entity living through endless time. We can also be sceptical of the assumption that, for the *individual,* national identity is primary and binding. In the British case, Colley's *Britons* (1992) was a landmark in describing how the idea of Britishness developed, was fostered and took hold among the people.

Naturalness, national character, and the primacy of national identity

However much these nations were 'constructed' and promoted by states – with the possibility that some nations are 'more constructed' than others – for much of the twentieth century some kind of national attachment became, increasingly, to be regarded as *natural.* This involved at least three ideas. The first of these was that nations were natural and historic organisms, changing and evolving but retaining a kind of historically endowed distinctiveness. The second was that nations had a national character and distinct temperament exhibited by the majority of their members; national character became a significant project of historical and sociological scholarship as early as mid-nineteenth century. The third idea was that individuals had a strong sense of membership of their nation; national identity was incorporated into individual identity. These ideas have been built into states' nationalist ideologies. That is, state élites have drawn on the idea of the naturalness of nations – by for example speaking of national membership as a family membership, and of citizens as brothers and sisters, tied to each other by bonds of blood, all descendants of mythical shared ancestors.

The idea of shared 'character' and 'temperament' moves in and out of public discourse as the occasion demands. In Britain the first Elizabethan age has been portrayed as chivalrous, amusing, and good-hearted. This image was revived with the advent to the throne of Elizabeth 2nd as people spoke of a new Elizabethan age of adventure and fun. On the other hand the idea of solidity and backs-to-the-wall dependability was evoked in Britain's singular role in opposing Germany in the Second World War, again a character trait which is revisited each time a British sportsman or woman achieves a feat of endurance or dogged resistance. The important thing in these assertions about national character is not the substantive part. The substance – are we 'really' reserved, dour, cautious, fun-loving, reliable and so on – is not what matters because these are unanswerable questions. The crucial thing is that the questions are asked at all, bearing as they do the possibility that there is a national character or a set of characteristics which makes us 'typically British'.

The third idea, that national identity is a crucial element of individual identity, has been both assumed and advanced as a serious argument. It is assumed in public discourse where national identities are referred to in reverential tones, notably, again, in sporting events. But the question of how much an individual thinks of him or herself as a member of a nation, as eg British or English or Scottish, is also one that can be tested by evidence. 'National

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[1] Of course Anthony Smith has made a very good case for a historical view of nations, but the distance between him and so-called constructionists has been exaggerated.

character' has become an unfashionable idea; but national identity has been taken seriously by social scientists, and ever more so as national identities have actually become more problematic. Thus there are specific methodologies for measuring national identities, both direct in survey questions (in, for example The International Social Survey Programme - ISSP[2]), repeated in standardised form in other surveys such as the Scottish Election Survey (see for example, McCrone, 2002 and 2002a), and evoked in qualitative methodologies where respondents speak discursively about their sense of membership of the nation (Fenton and Mann 2006, Condor 2000, Mann and Fenton, forthcoming). There are good reasons for taking this literature seriously even if 'identity' may seem difficult to capture, especially in the survey question format. But in both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, similar patterns have been observed by different scholars, and, for all the difference in interpretation, we can have reasonable confidence in what these studies reveal. We will return to this body of evidence later.

These three ideas – the *naturalness* of nations, the idea of national *character*, and the *primacy* of the nation in individual identity – have to be linked to a crucial further summative[3] fact: that nations have been, for some time now, discursively and politically implicated in states. The linking of nations to states has become virtually invisible, best attested by the naming of the United Nations, which is of course an organisation of *states*. This linkage is evidenced too in the phrase nation-state which encapsulates the idea that a nation should be represented by a state (hence all those zones and peoples with claims to nationhood but no state have their own name – *stateless nations*; McCrone 1992). The phrase also captures the idea, or promotes the idea, that states are the 'containers' of nations. Neither of these ideas is easily defensible. Many peoples with claims to nationhood do not have states, or have reduced forms of autonomy, as in the best-known cases of Scotland, Catalonia and Quebec. Equally many states are in some sense multi-national (and not just multi-ethnic) with many 'peoples' within their boundaries who claim nationhood. Nonetheless the state as a unitary or federal whole promotes a sense of nationhood: thus the circumstance seen in Spain or Britain where people may speak of themselves as having two modalities of national identity, such as Catalan-Spanish or Scottish-British. These may complement each other or compete with each other. And many people with a national identity bound up in their personal and family history are not citizens of the state which bears the name of their national identity, as is the case with immigrants and descendants of immigrants everywhere. Hence the core of national*ism* as a doctrine, in Gellner's famous account, was the proposition that the 'political and the national unit should be congruent' (Gellner 1983). A nation-state should 'contain' only its members and should bring its 'lost' members back within the fold. This is a principle with alarming associations, both historical and contemporary.

Attachment and detachment, the state and the citizen

One of the conclusions to be drawn from the foregoing is that whilst we can speak of nation as quasi-family with its own 'character' or culture, talk of nation starts to become compelling when the political marriage with the state is effected. Culture-talk (Mamdani 2000) is fine; state talk is serious political business. Culture talk accessible and engaging, hence the temptation for politicians to talk about the symbols of nationhood and for nationalists to talk about historic and binding cultural heritage. In recent years we have witnessed debates about Britishness, about the best symbols of Britain[4], about lessons in citizenship for immigrants, and endless web and press discussions of the subject, and of

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[2] ISSP can be viewed at: http://www.gesis.org/en/data_service/issp/

[3] Summative: in the sense that it 'sums up' and over-rides the first three points.

[4] As an example *The Independent* online for 2 September 2008 lists things which are the 'best of British', including crumpets, picnic blankets, and 'saying sorry'!

course the deluge of debate about multiculturalism in which, again, 'culture' is the primary term at play. But if we are to take a longer look at Britishness we need to take the *state* half of nation-state at its full value. This will become evident when we stake out some of the social and political changes implicated in the strength – or weakness – of national identity and of the sense of Britishness. For if states are important then that may explain why 'nations' are assumed to be important, in the age of the nation-state.

We have said that sociologists have regarded national identity as being deeply embedded in individual identities, as one manifestation of the primacy of the nation in the array of identities which people may embrace. Another way of saying this is to remind ourselves of Geertz's (1973) brilliant and frequently misunderstood commentary on 'primordial' attachments (see Fenton 2003). In this essay Geertz points out that ethnic identities are peculiarly difficult for nations precisely because they are the same kind of identity as the nation demands. They are the same in being grounded in a loosely articulated sense of peoplehood which – under some circumstances – appears to threaten the primacy of national identity. With a similar logic Smith has argued that nation-statehood animates ethnic identities because the state promotes nationhood which has the potential to collide with ethnic sentiments. Parenthetically we may note that the same can be said of religious faith and identity with a faith community: a religious identity can and does make demands which supervene those of the nation.

Even if national identity may be contested, the claims of the nation are commonly taken to have a clear primacy. As Greenfeld and Chirot (1994) have argued:

> in the modern world, national identity constitutes what may be called the 'fundamental identity', the identity that is believed to be the very essence of the individual… other identities are considered secondary. (1994:79, cited in Fenton 2007)

Calhoun argues in a similar way adding that the nation has primacy in the construction of individual identity:

> National identity assumes a special priority over other collective identities in the construction of personal identity. (Calhoun 1997:125)

It is important to note that Calhoun refers to a 'priority' over other *collective* identities, although it is not immediately clear which other collective identities he has in mind, or indeed how precisely we distinguish collective and individual identities (i.e. if nationhood is part of 'the construction of personal identity' then he seems to be referring to a personal identity which links the individual to the nation – a collectivity).

Perhaps Calhoun gives us a clue about competing identities when he suggests that individual-to-nation is an unmediated identity, one that does not require some intervening affiliation to 'qualify' the individual for membership of the nation.

> The individual does not require the mediations of family, community, region or class to be a member of the nation. Nationality is understood precisely as an attribute of the individual ... the trump card in the game of identity. (Calhoun 1997: 46)

And both Geertz (1973) and Simons (1997) have suggested that national integration is difficult to achieve if local or community obligations have a powerful hold over the individual. Thus Simons argues that 'individuation' is necessary for democracy; for people to act as individual members of the nation and carry out civic obligations, individual choices must not be over-ridden by other collective ties.

It was precisely this assumption – that nationality 'is the trump card in the game of identity' – that I was able to question (Fenton 2007) partly on theoretical grounds, and certainly on the evidence of a substantial proportion of young adults whom we interviewed[5].

When they discussed their views of themselves, their ethnicity, and their attitude to Britain and England, a significant proportion (c. 35%) of young adults placed national identity quite low in their way of thinking of themselves and others. Even among the remaining c. 65% only a minority spoke of their national identity as a compelling identity. These findings broadly agreed with Condor's published analysis (2000) of qualitative research in which she found that some people declined to speak up for a national identity because they saw 'being national' as akin to racism, with similar implications for excluding others. As one of our (Fenton 2007) respondents put it: 'I probably felt that if people are insistent on saying, I am English, it feels to me as if they are making a point by wanting to insist on being English to differentiate themselves.'

Others spoke directly of national boundaries being like racial boundaries. With the caution that these were young adults (20-34 years old), this was a strong indication that the primacy of national identity, the trump card in the game, could not be taken for granted. In what follows now, I would like to suggest that attachment to the nation has become precarious and unstable, that the social trends which 'push' towards detachment from the nation are growing in power, and finally that these pressures towards detachment from nation may be particularly strong in Britain and in countries with some structural similarities. Beyond this I want to suggest that within the British population, the strength of national identity and any inclination to embrace nationalist positions, is bifurcating. One direction is towards an indifference to national identity or at best a lukewarm civic identity coupled with cosmopolitan and anti-nationalist sentiments. The other direction is towards a sub-state nationalism, taking broadly 'progressive' forms in Wales and Scotland, but a neo-nationalist resentful and possibly racist direction in England.

Detachment and attachment: theory and evidence about national identity

In what follows we will consider the speculative and theoretical arguments which might lead us to expect that people in Britain will remain attached to or detached from a sense of identity with 'the nation'. I will dwell on theories of, and some fragments of evidence for, the tendencies towards 'detachment' since these are, in my judgement, more telling under present circumstances. But there is no doubt that there are two 'theoretical narratives' in the present day sociology of nationalism and national identity. In one narrative we read that in recent decades there has been a 'revival' of nationalism and that we had been mistaken to think that the age of high nationalist politics was over, just as we had been wrong to assume that all ethnic identities belonged in a pre-modern world. A qualification of this way of thinking is the view that nation-states continue to be important actors in the modern world (i.e. that the 'post-national' view is exaggerated) and that citizens retain a profound sense of national membership, even if this is only tacitly marked. The second narrative is quite contrary to this. The assumption that nation states retain their primacy is replaced by the argument that globalisation and supra-state entities have diminished the power of states and thus lost some 'grip' over national members. Which of these views is more persuasive and how does it bear on British identity? Let us consider first the arguments for 'detachment, especially as they apply to the British case.

Neo-liberal individualism

From the beginning of the Thatcher-led regime in 1979 Britain has taken a turn towards a markedly more individualistic culture in both political and economic spheres. This took shape in many ways: we may mention the attack on the unions which had represented an ideal of

solidarity among workers not only in defending their own interests but in industrial action in sympathy with other unions or in relation to political goals. By the first decade of the twenty-first century it is hard to recall this climate of 'solidarity' and therefore difficult to sense what has been lost. The Thatcher-led government also railed against all forms of 'dependency' on the 'nanny state'. Goals which had once been articulated as 'collective care' were re-framed as 'dependency'. In the work-place old industries began to fold and were gradually replaced by a range of light industrial enterprises (consider the mills of Lancashire as warehouses for mail order firms) and service work, so that the careers of individuals became much more separated from each other in following individual paths, as against the collective paths of the old large employers (Roberts 1995). The language of enterprise began to infiltrate even public sector organisations (eg the universities) and individuals were encouraged to plan their careers and 'realise themselves'. It is impossible to say how much all this undermined a sense of collective belonging in Britain – and to be sure the USA manages to combine a high degree of individualism with an equally strong tone of national belonging. But in Britain it is possible that people have been less accustomed to this US-style public and personal culture. If that is so, neo-liberalism as doctrine and practice has, in the longer run, profoundly undermined the sense that we are 'in it together'. The Thatcher period also saw plenty of old-fashioned nationalism in the shape of the Falklands campaign and the sabre-rattling against Brussels; many people in Britain responded to the Falklands with jingoistic nationalism, but we cannot be sure how long such nationalist stirrings last. Furthermore the neo-liberal politics has persisted, with barely a flicker of change, through ten years of New Labour. It is this which opens up the possibility that the next round of 'collectivist' thinking may take a more ominous turn.

The British brand

Miller (1995) has observed that one element of a sentiment of Britishness rested on the sense that Britain was an enterprising country which led the way in triumphal industrialism. Of course this essentially Victorian self-image, which Thatcher attempted to revive, had been in decline for 100 years when she came to power. So the loss of this enterprising and entrepreneurial pride, a kind of brave adventurousness which was echoed in the military and in sport, was one of the losses which undermined a key substantive part of being British. The others, much more frequently cited, are the decline of the Royal Family, and the loss of empire; they are indeed so 'obvious' that I don't here propose to say any more about them. But the decline in enterprise, business, and industry is less often remarked. It is possible that it carried with it a known and tangible sense of Britain and Britishness. In some cases the word British is in the title as in British Celanese or British Petroleum, and the repeating of the phrase bearing the term British is an example of the banal nationalism described by Billig (1995). To be sure the great industrial concerns do not always bear the name 'British': consider ICI or Rolls Royce, although businesses with 'Imperial' in their name had a barely-concealed and celebrated British reference. Even without British in the title, these companies were clearly identified as British, as such were a source of British pride, and their sale to overseas interests was nationally regretted. By the end of the century observers remarked that even the *idea* of national pride in British industrial eminence had been lost[6].

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[6] 'Once, the very idea of Rolls-Royce Motors, the emblem of British engineering excellence, disappearing into foreign hands would have provoked cries of outrage. Whatever fate awaits the marque, however, public opinion appears relatively indifferent - and perhaps with good reason. First, engineering lost its sovereign importance long ago, when the car industry dwindled to the Rover rump and the famous engineering conglomerates (like GKN, TI, Hawker-Siddeley and the Roller-owning Vickers) slid down the world leagues'. *Management Today,* 1 January 1998 (http://www.managementtoday.co.uk/search/article/ 411516/uk-cares-owns-motor/).

In the post-second world war period 'British' and 'National' titles were much more prominent, not only in private business, but in nationalised industries and new national services. Peter Mandler (2006) has described this brilliantly, in his detailing of the 'pride in social democracy as a 'peculiarly British' formula for national success in the post-war world…' (p. 214)[7]. All this grew, he argues, as 'a common project', suggesting that national identity and pride resides in doing things and creating things which are seen to be 'national' and seen to be shared. The institutions which he has in mind 'associated the nation with the ideals of social democracy'. They had British and National in their titles: he lists the National Health Service, British European Airways, British Rail, the National Coal Board as well as 'cultural institutions such as the Festival of Britain in 1951 and the Arts Council of Great Britain, founded in 1946'. Like the private companies I mentioned above, they were regarded as representing Britain; men and women of the time spoke of them with pride and affection. When they did so, the pride and high regard was entirely associated with Britishness. Unlike the largely symbolic functions of the Royal Family and memories of empire, these British brand institutions were part of the material fabric of people's lives[8].

The state, nation and welfare

The reference to the National Health Service alerts us to the whole idea of (in Mandler's terms) 'social democracy' or, more broadly the Welfare State. The association of a Welfare State with the nation has been much discussed in a great deal of recent commentary (Taguieff 2004, Bauman 2004). There is not space to develop the whole argument here but we can sketch out a concise version. In Europe especially, and in the pre-war period in some countries (eg Sweden) and post-war in others (Britain), national welfare institutions were both well developed and attained high political and public salience. Not only did state develop welfare systems and services, but also the very idea that we should have such a system was central to much political thinking (shared by both main parties in Britain in the post-war period). It was in effect a statement that 'we' were locked together in a system of mutual obligations; our fellow citizens were those who contributed to these services and provisions, along with ourselves. Sometimes the benefits were immediate (if, for example, we or a family member were ill); sometimes the benefits were simply the reassurance that whilst others benefited now, we might benefit later. Miller (1995a) has suggested that our sense of membership of a nation brings with it a sense of duty to fellow members:

> In acknowledging a national identity, I am also acknowledging that I owe a special obligation to fellow members of my nation which I do not owe to other human beings (Miller D. 1995, p. 49).

One way of looking at this proposition is to say that when we have a strong national identity we readily recognise mutual obligations. Another way is to argue that when we recognise mutual obligations – in the shape of mutuality institutions like the National Health Service – then our sense of national identity is fostered. Most people would agree that the Second World War generated a certain sense of national solidarity, plus a strong sense of entitlement flowing from the war sacrifices which people had made (see Dench Gavron and Young 2006). This solidarity contributed to the mood which supported the further development of the British Welfare State. But it is also plausible to argue that welfare institutions, once instituted, promote a sense of solidarity, and from that a sense of national belonging. It follows that if an institution has a national identification, its failure is viewed as a national failure.

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[7] Peter Mandler, 2006, *The English National Character*, London: Yale University Press.
[8] On the rooting of national identity in the everyday lives of ordinary people, see Gullestad M., 2006, *Plausible Prejudice: Everyday Experiences and Social Images of Nation, Culture, and Race*, Universitetsforlaget.

In recent research Mann and Fenton recorded peoples' views about 'the country' in relation to their own lives and personal histories. Welfare, housing and the health services formed a large part of peoples' talk, as did accounts of 'civility' and incivility in everyday life. Our interviewees (Mann and Fenton, forthcoming) in our Leverhulme project (Fenton and Mann 2006) said things which show that when people are asked to talk about 'our country' they quite often refer to the practical ways in which people treat one another[9]. One interviewee spoke about 'this country' by simply telling a story of discourtesy in an encounter whilst shopping. Others spoke of scruffiness, indiscipline and ill manners. We may interpret this as meaning that, when people talk about how they relate to 'the country' they actually talk about how they relate to one another. One step up from these tangible everyday encounters is the 'relating to each other' implicated in welfare institutions and these too were soon mentioned when we asked people to talk about 'the country'. Mostly the solidarity relationship was seen to have broken down: people either did not get what they expected from welfare services (especially in relation to housing and the national health service) or they thought the whole system of rights and responsibilities had broken down. Our evidence is not conclusive but, taken together with other kinds of evidence (Dench et al. 2006), we have very strong clues that 1. how people relate to one another as a matter of civility, and 2. how people regard welfare institutions, are strongly related to 3. a broader sense of social solidarity or its absence. These practical things, suffused with a moral language, are a crucial element of how people conceive of their engagement with 'the nation' or 'the country'.

The state, the nation and Zygmunt Bauman

We cited Bauman earlier as evidence of relatively recent cases of an absence of national identification, as in the responses to Census questions in pre-war Poland. Like others, Bauman regards the modern state as having taken on the task of promoting national belonging. Modern states he says 'sought to implant 'national identity' in their citizens'. Thus was established the grand liaison between state and nation: 'State and nation needed each other, a marriage made in heaven. The state was the fulfilment of the nation's destiny.'

It is this marriage which, Bauman argues, is tottering towards divorce. And a leading reason for this divorce is the diminishing of the resources, rewards, and security which the state can offer in a compact binding the individual into the state-nation. There has been

> a re-thinking of the traditional compact between nation and state, only to be
> expected at a time when the weakening states have fewer and fewer benefits to offer
> in exchange for the loyalty demanded in the name of national solidarity.

Bauman will partly have in mind the retreat from the welfare state in Britain and other European countries, in the face of neo-liberal economic policies. Though welfare continues to absorb a high proportion of state expenditure in countries like Britain, the *principle* of welfarism has been under sustained attack. In the National Health Service, for example, the 'patient' has been recast as the customer[10], making institutional relationships equivalent to market relationships. Examples would be the advocacy of internal markets in health services, and the so-called 'choice agenda' in patient's access to hospital care. It is not just a question of welfare spending, but also the question of the more *general security* which the state can provide, none more so than in the field of economic predictability. Not only is the modern state very much weakened in the face of economic globalisation, but also political leaders *say so* when they attribute misfortunes to global changes out of their control.

[9] Steve Fenton and Robin Mann, The state of Britain: the ethnic majority and discourses of resentment, paper for *Conference of the Leverhulme Programme,* University of Bristol, March 17, 2006: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/sociology/leverhulme/conference/mobility conference. html.

[10] In recent decades the rail *passenger* has been recast as a 'customer', a terminology that has reached many spheres where once it was unknown. To this degree the 'customer' has replaced the citizen. Once citizens were passengers on British Rail; now customers purchase services from First Great Western etc.

Unless we are reading him incorrectly, Bauman is arguing that the modern individual is bound to the nation because national belonging is the ideological form taken by the modern state, and because the state has been able to 'bind in' individuals via a combination of duties (taxation, military service) and provision (security, welfare). Those reciprocities between state-nation and individual are weakened and consequently the sense of membership and engagement has declined.

He is sceptical about two commonly advocated solutions, autonomy-seeking nationalisms and multiculturalism, the first because they are unrealistic attempts to escape the ravages of the global economy, and the second because it has little appeal beyond the 'new global elite'. These élites speak multiculturalism to each other on their global circuits ('and they travel a lot' says Bauman) but it is a doctrine which has little purchase beyond these élites. Indeed if we think of national identity or belonging on the reciprocity model we have discussed, it is hard to see what multiculturalism[11] has to offer to the ethnic majority outside its cosmopolitan wing.

We are left with a view of the modern nation-state where the 'nation' half of the term has lost its appeal. The idea of nation, and in particular the appeal to the individual to see him/herself as belonging to the nation, is the moral ideology of the modern state, culturally suffused with ideas of family, and materially bound together by duties and obligations. It is the divorce of this modern couple which explains why we speak of national identity at all; the crisis explains the interest. And the material component, the decline of mutuality, explains the divorce:

> The reduced powers of the state do not promise much. A rational person would no longer trust the state to provide all that is needed in case of unemployment, illness or old age, to assure decent health care or proper education for children. … the meaning of citizenship has been emptied of much of its past contents – it is no longer the natural depository of the peoples' trust. (Bauman 2004: 4)

Britain, England and the semi-detached individual

Much of the theoretical speculation applies well to Britain and we have tried to show how and where it does. There is certainly substantial evidence for declining national pride, documented by Tilley, Heath and colleagues in a series of papers[12]. Between 1981 and 2003 the authors note a 15% decline in those who report themselves as 'very proud to be British' from a high of 55%. More striking is the relationship between generation and national pride. It is an older generation with memories of the Second World War who account for much of the reported pride, whilst the decline to the younger generation is precipitate. The authors argue for a generation effect rather than an age effect – we should not expect the current younger people to grow more 'national' as they get older. 'We show that there have been large declines in pride and that this is exclusively generational in nature; with more recent generations having substantially lower levels of pride in 'Britishness' than previous generations.'

In Fenton's cited article (2007) a large proportion, about 35% or more of young (20-34 years old) adults discussed nation as a matter of indifference, with several who expressed active hostility to the idea of assuming a national identity. In the research of Mann and Fenton (forthcoming) with an all age sample, one of the predominant themes of the interviewees' discourse is a resentful national sentiment, an anger about not being 'allowed to be British-English' and at being excluded from the (multicultural) national discourse. There are themes in this research which echo Bauman's case, the expressed resentment about welfare, housing

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[11] Multiculturalism is of course a perfectly proper plea for respect for cultural difference, but that is another matter. Even for minorities multiculturalism offers 'inclusion' at the 'cost' of retained 'ethnicity'. But multiculturalism as an ideal of anti-racism and respect is different from multiculturalism as the solution to the problem of national identity.

[12] See especially James Tilley and Anthony Heath (2007), 'The decline of British national pride', *The British Journal of Sociology* 58 (4), 661–678.

and entitlement. Key elements of the respondents' language are references to 'the soft state' which fails them in so many ways: fails to stop people coming into the country, fails to provide for housing and health care, and fails to preserve decency and civility in everyday life, or fails to uphold public order – because of its soft treatment of criminals. So, for this resentful segment of our[13] respondents – a strong element among our 80 interviews – the failing state undermines their ability to identify positively with the nation. If this set of dispositions can generate 'nationalism' it can only be a xenophobic, resentful or racist nationalism[14].

Concluding comments: Britain and England and the threatened nation-state

In this paper we have set out some of the social changes which have the tendency to undermine the individual's identification with the nation, the process of detachment or semi-detachment. We began by reiterating that it is modern states which have persuaded their citizens to adopt national membership as a foundation of identity. Even in quite recent periods, this nation-individual identity could not be taken for granted. In the later modern period the triumph of nationalism, as the ideology of the modern nation-state, paved the way for re-casting individuals as 'nationals'. From this point we showed how several commentators have stated and re-stated the case for the potency of the nation in capturing the imagination of the individual, the 'trump card in the game of identity'. We then turned to the arguments which point towards the *detachment* of the modern individual from the nation-state, and thus from the nation as the ideological form of the modern state's appeal to the individual. We paid particular attention to three themes – neo-liberal individualism, the decline of the British brand, and the declining ability of the state to bind its individuals into a moral community. Following from these historical standpoints, Bauman's argument gave a partly speculative and theoretical support for the 'detachment' line of reasoning; the analysis from Heath and others provided survey evidence to underline the case. Lastly we saw how qualitative interviews (Mann and Fenton) give support to some of the arguments about security, welfare and the 'soft state'. If respondents did not entirely reject British or English identity, they could only articulate it in resentful or nostalgic-resentful ways.

In the British case we may detect three types of national orientation: Indifference; Cosmopolitanism-multiculturalism; and Resentful nationalism. The first of these (indifference) is well outlined by the young adults evidenced in Fenton (2007). Generation is here a crucial factor as Tilley, Heath (2007) also indicate. The second (cosmopolitan-multiculturalism) is embraced partly by minorities, but also by the mobile global elite and intelligentsia. For all the best efforts to reconcile multiculturalism with national identity (Parekh, Modood) both cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism have the tendency to be critical of nationalism (more accurately the majoritarian version of national identity) or at very best to re-frame it – in ways which have little apparent appeal to large constituencies of the ethnic majority. The third (resentful nationalism) seems likely to be the orientation of (some of) the white working class or downwardly mobile, older and nostalgic elements of the middle class[15].

We have said little here about three other crucial social changes which are so important in understanding the present and the future of British national identity: devolution, the European Union, and the breaking of the bond between the Labour Party and the white working class.

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[13] Mann R and Fenton S.: for the project see the Leverhulme Programme, University of Bristol.

[14] See Fenton and Mann, 'The state of Britain: the ethnic majority and discourses of resentment', Draft paper for Conference of the Leverhulme Programme, March 17, 2006.

[15] At the risk of stereotypes we could say readers of *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail*.

At the time of the initiation of devolution two roads seemed possible. One was that devolution would buy off nationalism and pre-empt the appeal of separatism. The other was that devolution would prove to be the wedge opening the door to independence – in the case of Scotland. At present neither has happened but if anything the second looks more likely than the first. Thus for the Scottish working class, at least for a time, the Scottish National Party can take up where the Labour Party left off and provide Scotland with a progressive politics with a cross-class appeal. Such alliances may not last, especially if independence were achieved, but for the time being the Scottish National Party offers Scotland's working class, as well as the public sector and media-related middle class, somewhere to go[16].

This is not so in England. English nationalism has always been suppressed for reasons brilliantly adduced by Kumar[17], notably including the idea that English dominance in the Union would have rendered an English nationalism both impolite and impolitic. As the Union weakens, those very reasons diminish and we might expect signs of an English nationalism. It may yet come although as yet evidence is slim (Lee, 2000). What does seem likely is that if an English nationalism makes any headway it is unlikely to have the progressive cast which the Scottish National Party currently has, and Welsh devolved politics also display. The European Union appears to pose a threat to British national identity: if it poses a threat to nation*alism*, then that was a part of the Union's intentions. The parties which have attempted to trade on anti-Europeanism (notably the United Kingdom Independence Party) have been largely unsuccessful, and complaints about Europe simply feed into an un-focussed resentful nationalism. As for the Labour party, until the present recession, New Labour has been able to hold together its cross-class alliance. This seems to be more than likely to break apart in the next election and a door will be opened (maybe a rather large door) to neo-nationalist, racist and resentful English (not British) nationalism.

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[16] There is, of course, a large and excellent literature on this subject: David McCrone, Bechofer, Cohen and many others.

[17] Kumar, Krishan, 2003, *The Making of English National Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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