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The British state is currently struggling to ward off the nationalist threat (in particular in Scotland). Some are therefore convinced that the British state and the kind of identification it presupposes are mortally wounded, a situation which, in fact, they do not lament, far from it. My starting point in the article is to analyze why they believe so. This leads me to the conclusion that nation and state in Britain are not coextensive. I then try to explain that this peculiar political settlement is not so imperfect as it is often made out to be. It simply rests on an approach to the question of individual rights that is inherently flexible (as will be expected in a country where the concept of national identity cannot be taken for granted), unlike the kind of settlement the Welsh and Scottish Nationalists are advocating. The most interesting point, however, may well be that, in spite of the changing nature of people's self-definitions (with more emphasis on Scottishness, Welshness and Englishness than in the past), the conception of economic and social solidarity most members of the electorate still share throughout the land is based on a clearly British form of political identity.

Welsh and Scottish nationalisms, Britishness, state, individual rights, solidarity

Identity is a complex issue. It comes in various shapes and sizes: it can be cultural, ethnic, social, professional, and so on, or made up of any combination of these elements (which it usually is). But each time, although we tend to overlook the fact, it is about who/what we say we are, or, more accurately, who/what we *choose* to be individually (whether we intend to stand out or merely indicate we [want to] belong to a given group of people, however big, however small). Expressing one's identity then boils down to *choosing* a specific narrative that has to do with oneself.

This vision of identity fits into what recent trends in cultural history have taught us, namely that the modern self has somehow got increasing control over the conditions of social reproduction, since it is possible to avail oneself of the open and plural nature of our modern world, and therefore enjoy a 'diversity of autonomies', while older paradigms, that of the Frankfurt School eg, or the approach defended by Jean Baudrillard, tend to be less open as they collapse the concepts of culture and autonomy into that of society[1].

Individuals of course remain as social in Western democracies as in more traditional societies. The true difference is that, in the latter, belonging is compulsory. As it is not the case in the former, it is therefore the nature of the relationship with the rest of society (not the degree of socialization) that changes. The relationship is more personal, elective, contractual, and also more statutory. In that sense, identity can be seen as a prerequisite for action, not as a

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[1] See Alan Swingewood, *Cultural Theory and the Problem of Modernity*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1998, pp. 174 & 176, and Jean-Pierre Warnier, *La Mondialisation de la culture*, Paris: Eds. La Découverte, 1999, pp. 97-109.

form of destiny[2]. It can also be understood as pointing to a clear difference between individual identity, or individuality (which stems from choice and rejection of the 'other') and collective identity, or collectivities (top-bottom definitions)[3].

Identification anyway can only happen if one distances oneself from the various forms of socialization available[4]. Only by tearing oneself away from one's background or group can one begin to choose who to interact with, which is the founding principle of the notion of equal opportunity. Separation is what this form of individualism is about[5]. Though one remains, as seen above, tied to the wider society, the more diverse the forms of the separation and the more combinations available, the more free[6]. In other words, the individual can choose to be a member of one community or several.

The foregoing is particularly relevant in the case of political identity. At regular intervals indeed, we are called upon to choose representatives, an MP or a mayor eg, and, through this, basically defend, by casting our vote, a specific way of life, social security system, and the like, which we hold dear. We thus define ourselves politically, i.e. determine the boundary of the political world we 'inhabit' ('this is where I stand')[7].

The democratic state plays a vital role in this respect. It behoves upon the state to see to it that there is social cohesiveness in the first place. One's relationship to the 'other' is therefore dependent upon a norm that pre-exists, but an individual's right to choose is formally recognized too; in other words, the collective is individualized, which is what citizenship is all about[8]. This epitomizes what it is to be 'free' in a fundamentally plural society, where freedom can never mean complete and utter sovereignty (democracy, by definition, means involvement and participation) since we always have to make do with other people's wishes[9], and where we actually have, as individuals again, little or no control whether it is over macroeconomics, diplomacy, or this or that policy.

Political identity, on top of that, comes with civic rights attached (education, social security, right of abode, and so on), that act as a bulwark against encroachment by anybody (including the state) trying to exclude us because of our religion, colour, social background, cultural roots, political persuasion, etc.

Obviously, the very notion of Britishness has to do with the political in the sense of the word seen just above; otherwise, it would be pointless to insist that the Union between England, Wales and Scotland is unravelling fast, or is, at best, called into question, like other (eg cultural) forms of Britishness. A better political system indeed, it is pointed out by some, is currently emerging; it is the more popular and rational, they say, as it comes from below, from the home nations themselves. The following is a very good illustration of this.

Writing in the 10 January 2008 issue of the *Guardian*, Scottish journalist Iain MacWhirter explained:

> There is unstoppable momentum now behind the disaggregation of the UK, and time
> is running out for the political establishment in Westminster to respond. This
> country is changing – and, it has to be said, largely for the better, as the old

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[2] See Jean-Claude Kaufmann, *L'Invention de soi – Une théorie de l'identité*, Paris: Armand Colin, 2004, p. 174.

[3] See p. 122. See also Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History*, London: Granta Books, 2000 (1997), pp. 57-58.

[4] See Kaufmann, *L'Invention de soi*, p. 208.

[5] See François de Singly, *L'individualisme est un humanisme*, La Tour d'Aigues: Eds. de l'Aube, 2007 (2005), pp. 35, 37 & 80.

[6] See pp. 72-73.

[7] See Henry Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida*, Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986 (1984), p. 133.

[8] Marcel Gauchet, *La Démocratie contre elle-même*, Paris: Gallimard, 2002, pp. 246-247 & 251-253.

[9] See Alain Finkielkraut, *Nous autres, modernes*, Paris: Ellipses & Palaiseau: Ecole Polytechnique, 2005, pp. 251-252. See also E. M. Cioran, *Histoire et utopie*, Paris: Gallimard, 1960, p. 12.

centralised apparatus disintegrates before regional democracy. Now that the unionist parties in Scotland have all but given up, the UK faces a choice: adopt some form of federal solution, or prepare for political disintegration, on the lines of Czechoslovakia's "velvet divorce" in 1993. It is as serious as that. While Brown launches fatuous "Britishness" campaigns, the very fabric of the country he claims to love is being torn up and stitched anew.

Concerning the future, Iain MacWhirter may be right, or he may be wrong. One thing is certain however: the quote leaves a whole series of questions unanswered. Are national and political identities coextensive, contradictory or complementary? Can't a Scot or a Welshman be British, in a strictly political sense, as well? Can the measure of all things here be identity in the cultural sense? If, importantly, the objective reasons why Britain is terminally ill have been with us for a long time (Scotland eg has always retained her civil society, and the Welsh language is still very much alive), why on earth is the British state taking so long to disintegrate?

In an attempt to answer these questions, we see in Part I ('Nature and extent of the problem') that Britishness as political identity is said to be on its last legs primarily because nation and state in Britain, so some think, no longer coincide. In Part II ('Britain's best kept secret'), we try to explain, conversely, that Britishness in its political dimension is still relevant; it is a prerequisite for pluralism and, thereby, democracy throughout Britain since the concept of nation is contested terrain, to begin with on the periphery; crucially, and logically, proposed alternatives – analyzed in Part III: 'What if?' – are far less open. In Part IV ('*Fluctuat nec mergitur*'), we discover that facts are stubborn things and that (not too surprisingly, nor paradoxically, in fact) the apparent erosion of the national (a concept that, again, cannot be taken for granted in the British context) is not paralleled by the demise of the political (i.e. identification with the British state), probably because in Britain these identities are complementary rather than coextensive.

## Nature and extent of the problem

Many informed sources consider that Britishness is under immense pressure both culturally and socially, but it is also, they insist, terminally ill from a political point of view. According to a poll by Dod Polling in the spring of 2008, four out of five peers (and 75% of those on the Labour Benches) believed that the Labour government's programme of devolution (of power to Scotland and Wales in 1997-1999) had fuelled nationalism and damaged the Union. Labour peer Lord Prys-Davies eg said: 'I take the view that the establishment of the National Assembly has strengthened the consciousness of being Welsh, while the consciousness of being British is weaker.'[10] As a matter of fact, as early as December 1997, critics of devolution like Conservative MP Michael Ancram had expressed concern that the process might have no end and lead to nothing less than the break-up of Britain[11].

It is easy to prove the point (superficially, at least). The notion of equal British citizenship has become rather elusive since devolution got off the ground: Britons can no longer enjoy the same rights all over the country as they now live under different laws in various fields (the so-called 'devolved matters', eg health and education). English patients, unlike their Scottish and Welsh counterparts, cannot enjoy free dental and eye checks eg; students no longer pay the same fees as these are now fixed by each individual home nation for its own universities.

Characteristically, in a statement dated 16 December 1997, the Chief Executive of the Scottish National Party (SNP), Michael Russell, now Environment Minister in the Scottish Executive, said:

[10] See Martin Shipton, 'Four out of five peers believe devolution has harmed the Union' – *The Western Mail*, 5 May 2008.
[11] See *The* Scotland Bill*: Devolution and Scotland's Parliament* (research paper 98/1), House of Commons Library (Home Affairs Section), 7 January 1998, p. 22.

> The reality is that the Scottish people are sovereign, and it is irrelevant what is said in the Scotland Bill. (...) the legal fact in Scotland is that the people are sovereign – and that parliamentary sovereignty is alien to Scottish constitutional law. If Westminster MPs want to peddle the fiction of their sovereignty over Scotland in order to mask the reality of London's diminishing power, then that is a matter for them.[12]

In a Mori/*Mail on Sunday* poll carried out in the course of the following year, 62% of respondents said that Scotland would be independent within 15 years[13].

If anything, events over the last ten years or so have tended to show that peripheral nationalism is not dead, far from it (though devolution was primarily introduced to 'kill nationalism stone dead'), and that the SNP and others, who are at least as bullish on the prospect of independence as they were back in 1997[14], remain a serious threat to Britain's future. Margo MacDonald, a former member of the SNP and a separatist, interviewed on the *Scottish Politics* programme broadcast on the BBC Parliament channel on 16 December 2007, said quite matter-of-factly that the political Union between England and Scotland just did not work anymore, and that independence for Scotland was tantamount to 'moving with the times'. In short, the Union is 'past its sell-by date', in the words of SNP leader A. Salmond (Scotland's current First Minister), speaking in early 2007[15], just weeks before winning the Scottish regional elections.

The Welsh Nationalists of Plaid Cymru have recently condemned plans for a 'British Day' to celebrate Britishness across the United Kingdom as 'regressive'[16]. An 'Independence Initiative', aimed at arguing the case for an independent Wales, was even launched in the summer of 2008. The brainchild of Plaid Cymru MP Adam Price, endorsed by the party's national executive, is premised on the notion that

> we also need to create a new generation of nationalists. The majority of people joining Plaid are enthused by a passion for Wales to become a full nation, an independent state. The Independence Initiative will provide a forum where ideas can be developed and articles published.[17]

As far back as the 1970s in fact, the whole point of Welsh nationalism was already to cut Wales off from the rest of the country and create an altogether different polity there. As Dafydd Elis Thomas (the current Presiding Officer of the Welsh Assembly) wrote in early 1976: 'we must now (...) stress the functional importance of Wales in organising a radically different system of social relationship.'[18]

Worst of all, there seems to be something fundamentally wrong with Britishness as political identity, which is seen as an inferior (i.e. far less stable) form of identity. To Bernard Crick, writing in *The Independent* on 22 May 1993:

> To identify with "British" is not the same as identifying with the warmth and width of English, Scottish, Welsh or Irish. "British" is a limited utilitarian allegiance simply to those political and legal institutions which still hold this multi-national state together[19].

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[12] See *Irrelevant sovereignty clause in Bill: Independence a matter for people of Scotland*, SNP PN.

[13] See Andrew Marr, *The Day Britain Died*, London: Profile Books Ltd., 2000 (1999), pp. 70 & 248.

[14] On publication of the Devolution Bill (18 December 1997), Alex Salmond had spoken of 'an historic day', of 'a process that will lead to Independence in Europe'. See *SNP reaction to devolution bill: 'part of a process not an event'*, SNP PN, 18 December 1997.

[15] Quoted in Ian Swanson, 'England unfairly treated by 'stale Union' says Salmond' – *Edinburgh Evening News*, 20 March 2007.

[16] See Robin Turner, 'Plaid condemns 'British Day' plan' – *The Western Mail*, 5 June 2008.

[17] Quoted by Martin Shipton, 'Plaid's 'party within a party' will argue case for Wales to become independent' – *The Western Mail*, 24 June 2008.

[18] Dafydd Elis Thomas, 'Self-government and the community: a formula for progress', in *Y Saeth*, n°1, Spring 1976, Cardiff.

[19] Quoted in Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006 (2003), p. 6.

More generally, academic research has shown time and time again that Britishness understood in that specific sense was on the wane. Between 1979 and 1999 for instance, national identification grew in Scotland while class identification plummeted: in 1979, 44% identified first with class and 38% with nation; in 1999, 24% only identified with class and 43% with nation. In 1979, 15% perceived 'very serious' or 'fairly serious' conflict between England and Scotland; by 1999, the figure was 43%[20].

Now, when the component parts of a country think primarily in terms of difference, identity no longer coincides with citizenship[21]. Back in the autumn of 1995, historian Raphael Samuel could therefore write not only that 'the matter of Britain (...) no longer inhabits the realm of the taken-for-granted', but also that 'Britain is a term which has a very uncertain future.'[22]

That Britishness does lack whatever it takes to truly bind people together has characteristically become a cliché in the meantime, and as such is often denounced – among others – in the media, as in the following extract:

> We can all define Scottishness (and some of us rather rudely), Welshness and Englishness – you can cite national characteristics and art and history. But Britishness can only be defined politically (...). Britishness is not something you have to be born with, like being a Lancastrian.[23]

Some draw far-reaching conclusions from this: they are adamant that the British state is constructed from disorder. In other words, it looks very much as if it was 'an historical accident'[24]. The crucial fact is that what is held in common in Britain is 'implicit', 'not stated and debated clearly as in some countries like France.' The 'approach to citizenship has been *laissez faire*' because 'Government certainly has no monopoly on the business of defining identity'. In short, 'we will never be like the French. We will always be different from New World countries, where the state has explicitly built up a sense of national identity.'[25]

Even unionists have misgivings about this situation. Hence the following remark by Lord Taylor of Warwick during the debate on Britishness in the House of Lords on 19 June 2008[26]: 'We have to recognize that Britain has failed to create a sense of national identity embraced by all, regardless of their faith or ethnic origins, in the way in which America has.'[27] Aware of the necessity of having 'a shared political culture (as) a *sine qua non* of a functioning democracy', MPs R. Kelly and L. Byrne have, unsurprisingly, advocated, along with eg a new national day, 'a renaissance of civic governance and identity in our counties, cities, towns, villages and neighbourhoods' because 'it is in local areas that people meet, interact with

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[20] See David McCrone & Lindsay Paterson, 'The conundrum of Scottish independence', in *Scottish Affairs*, n° 40, Summer 2002, pp. 54-75. As explained in this most interesting article, it should of course be borne in mind that, if support for independence has peaked at times over the years (eg it soared to 37% in 1997), it has been consistently supported by only a rather small minority (the authors talk about a 14% core support while the core group of opponents of independence is around 55%).

[21] See Pascal Bruckner, *La Tyrannie de la pénitence – Essai sur le masochisme occidental*, Paris: Grasset, 2006, p. 167.

[22] Raphael Samuel, 'Four nations history' (editorial for *History Workshop Journal*, n° 40, Autumn 1995) & 'Unravelling Britain' (September 1995), in Raphael Samuel, *Island Stories: Unravelling Britain – Theatres of Memory, Vol. II* (edited by Alison Light, with Sally Alexander & Gareth Stedman Jones), London & New York: Verso, 1998, pp. 37 & 41.

[23] Vicki Woods, 'Britishness is not something you're born with' – *The Daily Telegraph*, 15 March 2008.

[24] The phrase has been used in connection with Belgium by Flemish president Yves Leterme. See Mark Mardell, 'Belgians talk the language of division', in *BBC History Magazine* (Vol. 8, n° 8), August 2007, p. 11.

[25] Ruth Kelly & Liam Byrne, *A Common Place*, London: The Fabian Society, June 2007,  pp. 3, 16 & 17.

[26] Lord Taylor of Warwick had called a debate on 'the concept of Britishness in the context of the cultural, historical and ethical tradition of the peoples of these islands'.

[27] *Hansard*, House of Lords, col. 1142.

others and root their own senses of identity. And when a newcomer moves to Britain for the first time they also move to Tower Hamlets, Cardiff or Cornwall.'[28]

Nevertheless, many who think that the sooner the British state goes to the wall, the better, have little appetite for such an agenda. Some say eg that it should be replaced with a 'social union and political co-operation that could be built among all states of the British Isles'[29], while others insist 'independence is normal for nations of Scotland's size'[30]. There seems to be something inevitable anyway about the future collapse of multinational states such as Britain. As one prominent expert has written:

> Governments and states may muzzle the expression of national aspirations for a time, but it is likely to be a costly and ultimately fruitless expedient. For the forces that sustain national allegiances have proved, and are likely to prove, stronger than any countervailing trends.[31]

One can hardly deny that David Cannadine brought up a very valid point when he said that 'there is nothing pre-ordained or primordial about the nation state as the quintessential unit within which political life is carried on', and, with relation to the current British Constitution (post-devolution), that 'uncertain unity is the present position.'[32]

To further complicate matters, the state, as an institution, has on the whole a fairly bad reputation, and not just with the members and activists of pro-independence movements (both in Britain and elsewhere). In the minds of quite a few academics too, it has thrived at the expense of pre-existing ethnic groups and even invented its own ethnicity to survive by discrediting all other forms of 'ethnic knots'. The sovereignty of the state as an independent entity on the international stage also goes hand-in-hand with its complete control over political, economic, social and cultural life within its own borders; the largesse of the state can be enjoyed by individuals only provided they accept the idea that the collective (as defined by the state) comes first[33]. As explained by K. Kumar:

> While Britishness might be seen to have a civic rather than an ethnic character – a point emphasized particularly by Scottish and Welsh nationalists – it has over the centuries developed a set of institutions, symbols and traditions that can lead to a form of emotional identification remarkably similar to that evoked by ethnic nationhood. The line between culture and politics, here as so often, is hazy and erratic.[34]

So, at the end of the day, it seems there is no escaping the fact that Britishness, in its political dimension, is shot through with contradictions: it has never given birth to a really homogeneous nation, but not for lack of trying, which ultimately justifies the fact that it is ripe for the shredder. A tell-tale sign that the problem has come to a head is the attitude of the current Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, who has been keenly aware of the problem for a long

[28] Kelly & Byrne, *A Common Place*, pp. 16, 4 & 5.

[29] See Margo MacDonald, 'The truth finally comes out - but 30 years too late' – *The Scotsman*, 2 January 2006.

[30] Alasdair J. Allan, *Talking Independence*, Edinburgh: Scottish National Party, 2002, p. 6.

[31] Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*, London: Penguin Books, 1991, p. 143. For a whole raft of other reasons why the sovereign power of the state is increasingly encroached upon (because of the extension of social and economic rights, migratory flows, localism, European integration, globalization, and so on), see eg Jacques Chevallier, *L'Etat post-moderne*, Paris: Librairie Générale de Droit et de Jurisprudence / E.J.A., 2003, pp. 197-203 & 209-213, and John Schwartzmantel, *The State in Contemporary Society – An Introduction*, New York & London: Harvester/Wheatsheaf, 1994, pp. 195-199.

[32] David Cannadine, 'Britishness: Devolution, Evolution and Revolution', a paper presented on 5 December 2007 at the 'Why Policy Needs History' conference for the official launch (at the Churchill Museum and Cabinet War Rooms) of the History and Policy initiative, which is a call for the government to appoint a Chief Historical Adviser.

[33] See eg Ramon Maiz & Jean Tournon, 'Le visage politique de l'ethnicité', in Jean Tournon & Ramon Maiz (eds.), *Ethnicisme et politique*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005, pp. 27-29 & 38.

[34] Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*, pp. 238-239. See also Smith, *National Identity*, pp. 76 & 141.

time now. He has actually called for a modern view of citizenship and defining what being British amounts to:

> ritain does best when we have both a strong civic society and a government committed to empowering people, acting on the principle of fairness. (...) But we must now look to further devolution of power away from Westminster, particularly to a reinvigoration of local government and to schools, hospitals and the self management of local services, the emphasis on empowerment, communities and individuals realising their promise and potential by taking more control over their lives. And in doing so we must recognise that people's local sense of belonging is now focused on the immediate neighbourhood. So I welcome the debate on what some call double devolution – on how we reinvigorate democracy at the most local of levels.[35]

Besides, since 1997, there has been a new stress on the values of citizenship, with eg citizenship ceremonies and a statutory place for citizenship in the national curriculum. Citizenship education was introduced into primary schools in 2000, and has been a statutory foundation subject for 11 to 16 year-olds since September 2002. It has three strands: social and moral responsibility, community, and political literacy. Besides, a report on diversity and citizenship in the curriculum (by Sir Keith Ajegbo) was published in January 2007, in the wake of which the Department for Education declared that 'teenagers will learn British history in new-style classes which put understanding core British values at the heart of citizenship teaching'[36].

But Gordon Brown's efforts at defending Britishness have actually been rubbished by many; Elfyn Llwyd eg, Plaid Cymru's Westminster leader, has said: 'Mr Brown's quest for the Britishness grail is beginning to make him sound like a laughing stock.'[37] In fact, as pointed out by Prof. J. Curtice on 11 April 2008, in an interview for 'The Record Review' programme (a special edition on devolution in Scotland) on BBC Parliament, Britishness means different things to different people in different parts of Britain, which, the academic further insisted, is not quite how the Brown government in London sees it. The Britishness extolled by the centre, in other words, is too England-based to be enough at the end of the day to unite the nation. But doesn't even this balanced criticism completely miss the point?

The foregoing, indeed, raises two questions. One is of a theoretical/philosophical nature: can't one identify with the state when it is not coextensive with one's nation? Is there, importantly, anything inherently obnoxious about this situation? The other question is practical: if, politically, Britishness is dead, how come there is still a clear majority of voters in all parts of Britain (including the periphery – see below) who, if given the choice, would still vote against independence? We now turn to the former problem.

## Britain's best kept secret

By and large, Britishness operates (has to operate) on two levels: it allows for a measure of autonomy in keeping with history, with people's sense of separateness, and so on (downward trend) and a measure of centralization in the name of justice (upward trend) to combine. A country, indeed, is not just a constitution, or its own history; it is first and foremost what its

[35] Gordon Brown, speaking at the Fabian New Year Conference 2006 ('Who do we want to be? The future of Britishness'), held at Imperial College, London, on Saturday 14 January 2006.

[36] See Tristam Hunt, 'Teaching History: Narrative and the Challenge of Britishness (Manifesto Challenge: Developing a Capable Population)', p. 9; transcript of a lecture delivered at the RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures & Commerce), London, 7 February 2007.

[37] Quoted by Tomos Livingstone, 'Brown's warning to the Welsh Assembly' – *The Western Mail*, 14 December 2007.

population wants it to be. Therein lies the knottiest of all problems: 'For a nation to exist, the group must be collectively aware of its own existence, of its unity, of its specificity.'[38]

If Britain as a whole cannot fill the bill here, neither can Scotland or Wales (or England for that matter), as all are profoundly divided, which precludes any blanket claim about identity. People living within the same territory normally share cultural practices and symbols, but these are interpreted in many different ways depending on one's social class, one's generation, whether one lives in the country or in an urban environment, etc. A culture can never be identical with itself either in the sense that an individual can only be, can only say 'I' or 'we', express his/her own wishes, etc., if he/she emphasizes his/her non-identity with the larger culture[39]. So a common culture hardly ever means consensus. Quite the opposite: it gives rise to a diversity of opinions. 'What the members of a nation have in common is precisely what divides them.'[40] Consequently, 'it is an illusion to base a lasting national consensus upon a homogeneous culture.'[41]

As underlined by Labour MEP Catherine Stihler (a Scot who is adamant that 'the primary identity of someone born and brought up in Scotland will always be Scottish'): 'Interestingly, when national identity is associated with political party identification, there is considerable non-alignment between those who identify as most strongly Scottish. Around half support neither the SNP nor Scottish independence.'[42] This is confirmed by detailed analyses of electoral behaviour in Scotland. By 2003, 21% of Scottish Conservative supporters felt 'Scottish not British' while 40% of SNP supporters described themselves as, to some extent, British[43].

It is a complex issue, through and through. It is actually so complex, so hard to tackle in a monolithic way because of the considerable disagreement over the future of Britain, that there are apparent contradictions, to say the least, between various surveys by the best experts concerning eg Scottish attitudes towards independence and unionism. On the one hand, there are those who underline the fact Scottish unionists tend to be older than pro-independence voters[44], as if there was a clear shift towards independence, the realization of which would then be merely a matter of time; on the other hand, there are those who, using reliable data too, explain that, in Scotland, dual identities (British and Scottish) continue to be widely prevalent[45]. According to an ICM opinion poll for *The Scotsman* in January 2007, young Scots were the most enthusiastic supporters of the Union in the country. 42% of the 18-24 age group believed the Union had had a positive impact on Scotland, while only 19% felt it had been negative. When asked if the Union should break up, with Scotland and Wales each

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[38] Patrice Canivez, *Qu'est-ce que la nation ?*, Paris: Libraire philosophique J. Vrin, 2004,  p. 13 (my translation).

[39] On these questions, see Jacques Derrida, *L'autre cap*, Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 2007 (1991), pp. 23 & 16-17.

[40] Canivez, *Qu'est-ce que la nation ?*, pp. 53-54 (p. 54 for the quote; my translation).

[41] See p. 67 (my translation).

[42] Catherine Stihler, 'Devolution – the layers of identity', in Nick Johnson (ed.), *Britishness: towards a progressive citizenship*, London: The Smith Institute, 2007, p. 71.

[43] Catherine Bromley, John Curtice, Kerstin Hinds & Alison Park (eds.), *Devolution – Scottish Answers to Scottish Questions?*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003,  p. 126.

[44] Anthony Heath & Shawna Smith, 'Varieties of nationalism in Scotland and England', in William L. Miller (ed.), *Anglo-Scottish Relations from 1900 to Devolution and Beyond*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (for The British Academy), 2005, pp. 144-145.

[45] Michael Rosie & Ross Bond, 'Routes into Scottishness?', in Catherine Bromley, John Curtice, David McCrone & Alison Park (eds.), *Has Devolution delivered?*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006, p. 156.

gaining their independence, only 16% of the English, and 32% of Scots agreed. A total of 73% of the English and 56% of the Scots wanted things in the Union to stay as they are[46].

The situation is much the same in the Principality. By early 2006, some 21% of the people of Wales saw themselves as just Welsh, up from 17% in 1997. 27% saw themselves as more Welsh than British (no change compared to a decade ago). 29% felt as equally both (down from 34%), while just 8% felt more British than Welsh, with 9% feeling just British[47].

Wales's political future is therefore quite uncertain; indeed, there is competition between various options and interests. A convention eg, with a view to gauging public opinion, in advance of a referendum (earmarked for 2011), in order to decide whether Wales is ready for the creation of a law-making parliament, might have been set up in the course of 2008[48], but opponents of further devolution of powers to the National Assembly of Wales have since then announced the formation of a cross-party campaign called 'True Wales'. The group includes Labour, Conservative and Independent councillors and party members from South East Wales[49].

The British state, therefore, is forever trying to conciliate a political organization based on law, political and legal equality, with competing (community-oriented) approaches. The paradox this tension does create is called 'a community of citizens' by Dominique Schnapper, i.e. an essentially fragile entity since it appeals to reason first and foremost[50].

This goes some way towards explaining why the British state is not, once everything has been said and done, 'a monolithic, oppressive entity'; it has always been reluctant 'to attach any formal political significance either to England or its component regions' and the truth of the matter is that 'the process of territorial integration has always remained incomplete'[51]. Professor Ted Cowan, of Glasgow University, has recently marvelled at this situation, and talking about the Treaty of Union of 1707, whereby Scotland disappeared as a nation state (see below), he said that 'it was remarkable that in a treaty about union so many institutions and subjects remained non-united.'[52]

In fact, one may say that Britishness in its political dimension has always been a deliberate and necessary attempt at not making nation and polity coextensive. Scotland may not be a state anymore, but it is nevertheless a political system with some features of statehood through which the values which maintain her identity can be allocated. On account of the 1707 Treaty of Union, and although it ushered in a new era 'with parliamentary sovereignty firmly anchored at Westminster', 'a good deal of power (in Scotland) lay outside parliament and the political area.'[53] The Scottish legal system was retained, along with the Presbyterian

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[46] See Hamish MacDonell, 'Young Scots are strongest supporters of the Union' – *The Scotsman*, 16 January 2007.

[47] Tomos Livingstone, 'Welsh people more patriotic than ever' – *The Western Mail*, 10 March 2006.

[48] See Tomos Livingstone, 'Referendum group begins series of meetings' – *The Western Mail*, 18 December 2007, and David Williamson, 'Convention must not be for anoraks' – *The Western Mail*, 23 November 2007.

[49] See Martin Shipton, 'Group's 'no' to Assembly lawmaking' – *The Western Mail*, 26 September 2008. The least one can say is that, as shown by research commissioned by the National Assembly Commission and led by Professor Roger Scully of the Institute of Welsh Politics, the questions of independence and of transforming the Assembly into a fully-fledged parliament prove very divisive issues in Wales at all levels (regional, political, etc.). See David Williamson, 'Poll reveals young keen on an independent Wales' – *Wales on Sunday*, 12 October 2008.

[50] See Dominique Schnapper, 'Beyond the opposition: civic nation versus ethnic nation', in Jocelyne Couture, Kai Nielsen & Michel Seymour (eds.), *Rethinking Nationalism*, Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2000 (1998; 1996 – *The Canadian Journal of Philosophy* / Supplementary volume, XXII), pp. 231-232.

[51] Carwyn Fowler, 'Welsh national identity and the British political process', in Stephen Caunce, Ewa Mazierska, Susan Sydney-Smith & John K. Walton (eds.), *Relocating Britishness*, Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2004, pp. 199 & 212.

[52] T. Cowan, 'The Unions of 1707', in *History Scotland*, March/April 2008, Vol. 8, n° 2, Edinburgh, p. 54.

[53] John Kendle, *Federal Britain – A History*, London & New York: Routledge, 1997, p. 10.

Church of Scotland (it is decentralised and independent from the Crown), the Scottish educational system, and the 'royal burghs' (i.e. partly autonomous local authorities). So much so that, even in pre-devolution days, McCrone *et altri* felt they could say with confidence: 'Scotland has in fact had more constitutional autonomy than many formally more independent states in Western Europe', and even talked of a 'semi-state'[54]. Quoting from other writings on the question of the British state, by, among others, Linda Colley and David Marquand, they equally talk of a 'nightwatchman state', of 'a minimal state', suffering from 'a form of arrested political development'.[55] By way of conclusion to the chapter entitled 'Politics, state and society', they go one better, insisting that 'the lack of alignment between state, society and nation in the British context might be judged as a positive if peculiar advantage.'[56]

The measure of how true this happens to be was given by Scottish pundit Lindsay Paterson, in the mid-1990s, when he wrote that

> Scotland has, apparently, not existed politically for a very long time, and yet political rhetoric claims that its traditions are under uniquely serious threat. (...) not only did the UK state allow diversity, it actively encouraged it, in the sense that the personnel in the state agencies in Scotland were self-consciously Scottish. (...) the writings, but more importantly the practices, of politicians and civil servants in the Scottish Office show that they have had a conception of the Scottish national interest in their minds as they governed.'

To L. Paterson, the 18th century saw the creation, by Scotland and Britain, of 'a depoliticised realm of cultural practices', i.e. 'cultural activities could be pursued free of interference from the state.'[57]

Even under governments with a clearly centralizing agenda the safety valve of Britishness never quite disappeared. The successive Conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s may have disregarded the 1707 arrangements, as when eg they introduced the poll tax (1989), a new local tax (set at an equal amount for each adult within the local authority area) to replace the domestic rates (which were levied according to the type and value of a property only), or they attempted to privatize water distribution (which fell within the remit of local government) in 1993. But this never was one-way traffic.

The privatizations that began in earnest around 1983 were to affect Scotland only later on. The region was also left largely unaffected by the 1988 Education Reform Act that centralized the management of primary and secondary education. This goes a long way towards showing how powerful the so-called 'Scottish lobby' was at both Whitehall and Westminster levels, which is also why the Scottish Development Agency and the Highlands and Islands Development Board, two tell-tale signs of Wilsonian state intervention, were not suppressed either. In the late 1980s, over £80 thousand million pounds of funds was managed and controlled in Edinburgh (finance services also mushroomed in Glasgow) while generally inward investment had soared. By 1987, the number of the head offices of Britain's top 1,000 companies located in Scotland amounted to 52; at the time, the figures for the North of England, East Anglia, the South west, Wales and Northern Ireland were respectively: 19, 21, 27, 8 and 3[58]. By the early 1990s, on a wide range of economic indicators (productivity, inward investment, export growth, and standards of living eg), Scotland was outperforming most of Britain.

[54] Alice Brown, David McCrone & Lindsay Paterson, *Politics and Society in Scotland*, Basingstoke & London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1996, p. 34.

[55] See p. 40.

[56] See p. 44.

[57] Lindsay Paterson, *The Autonomy of Modern Scotland*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994, pp. 2, 24 (for concrete examples with relation to the pre-devolution era, see pp. 130 & 160) & 25.

[58] David Smith, *North and South – Britain's Economic, Social and Political Divide*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1989, p. 224.

The same applied to the relationship between Westminster and the Principality at the time. By the mid-1990s, just under 30% of the Welsh manufacturing workforce (up from 17% in 1979) was employed by over 400 foreign-owned manufacturing companies. But it must be said that they were not in the main 'fly-by-night' foreign concerns; all forms of inward investment were attracted, including high-quality inward investment such as research and development. According to researchers, in the 1990s, the wide range of functions of the Welsh Office meant, crucially, that 'Wales has been somewhat more capable of influencing its own economic trajectory than it might otherwise have been. Certainly, these institutions are envied in comparable parts of Britain that do not possess them.'[59]

The introduction of devolution has further loosened the grip of the centre on the periphery. As pointed out above, there are already some fairly fundamental differences in key policy areas between Scotland, Wales and England. The Welsh Assembly, where a majority objects to what is called the 'marketisation' of welfare (it is reluctant to use private health care contractors, which is done in England), has been following its own path for some time, with pioneering policies such as the abolition of prescription charges for young and old, and the establishment of a Children's Commissioner for Wales and of a Commissioner for Older People. Scottish pensioners too, unlike English elderly people, get free central heating installation, free bus travel, and free personal care, regardless of their means.

On the surface therefore, as seen in Part I, Britishness seems to be, at best, unstable while in fact it is this very instability that is a prerequisite for a healthy democracy, for an open society. As D. M. Weinstock has pointed out, 'for all of us, the delineation of our identities is an individual achievement, the result of complex, highly individual negotiations by which we attempt to bring some order to our variegated affiliations'. Since identities are complex, 'affiliations are correspondingly overlapping rather than mutually exclusive.' What this means is that

> it is also a mistake to see the moral individualism at the heart of the principles and institutions of the liberal state as somehow foreign to the allegedly more "real", lived identities that individuals achieve through their membership in discrete groups. Rather, individualism *is* the lived reality of citizens with different, complex affiliations, attempting to construct an identity (and a life) without having to sacrifice any one affiliation at the altar of one of the others. (Therefore) the principles and institutions at the heart of the liberal-democratic dispensation (...) encompass the conditions required for each individual to be able to concoct a life-plan out of a welter of affiliations and memberships.

Individualism, then, cannot be morally wrong as it is 'the natural condition of individuals with complex attachments.'[60]

This is hardly surprising. State and society are poles apart since the former gives pride of place to the collective to foster a common sense of participation, while the latter consists primarily of the free interaction of individuals[61]. There is however no escape from the contradiction between the two as each of them obviously serves a necessary purpose: freedom can only be experienced on an individual basis, but without enforced cooperation of a sort, without some degree of convergence (which is not the same as uniformity, nor the same as pretending that there are no conflicting interests), the chances are that chaos would ultimately prevail.

What is not always understood about the British Constitution (both pre- and post-devolution) is that the centre has always tended to neutralize itself. Of course, as emphasized

[59] See Philip Cooke, Kevin Morgan & Adam Price, *The Welsh Renaissance: Inward Investment and Industrial Innovation*, Cardiff: Regional Industrial Research Centre for Advanced Studies, 1994, pp. 13 & 51.

[60] Daniel M. Weinstock, 'Liberalism, multiculturalism, and the problem of internal minorities', in Anthony Simon Laden & David Owen (eds.), *Multiculturalism and Political Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 259-261.

[61] See Lorenz Stein, *Le Concept de société* (trans. Marc Béghin), Grenoble: ELLUG, 2002, pp. 101-114.

by the late Donald Dewar himself (who was Scottish First Minister in 1999-2000), during a Commons debate on Scottish devolution (24 July 1997):

The United Kingdom Parliament is, and will remain, sovereign in all matters, but, as part of our resolve to modernise the constitution, Westminster will be choosing to exercise that sovereignty by devolving legislative responsibility to the Scottish Parliament, without diminishing its own powers.[62]

However, the truth of the matter is that sovereignty today, as in the past, is not so much shared as it is divided between centre and periphery (hence the phrase 'quasi-federalism' sometimes used to refer to the 1998 settlement, whereby the Act of Union of 1707 between Scotland and England/Wales was revisited).

As G. Brown and D. Alexander once wrote: 'with the creation of a Scottish Parliament, no longer can it be claimed that Scottish nationhood or its civic institutions are at risk. No longer can it even be claimed that Westminster has been insensitive to Scottish needs.'[63] However, the settlement cuts both ways, to the extent that Scottish society remains extremely diverse. Hence the fact that M. G. H. Pittock has, quite rightly, branded any attempt by the Scottish Parliament at seeking Scottish consensus (at being an expression of it) as 'contradictory'[64].

And as Lord Parekh (the famous political theorist) explained in his masterly contribution to the debate on Britishness in the House of Lords on 19 June 2008:

I am not happy with the term "Britishness" that we are debating today. (…) We are not British because we embody something called Britishness; rather, we choose what we want to be as a nation. Britishness simply refers to whatever results from our choices. In other words, being British is not about embodying a transcendental essence; it is a political project. Basically, the problem underlying the debate is that we are a multinational state, made up of three, possibly four, nations. We are an individualist country where people take great pleasure and pride in making their own choices and having their own lifestyles. Some are religious, others are secular; some are gay, others have a different sexual orientation; some of us are socialists, others are equally committed to private enterprise. We are also a multiethnic and multicultural society; some of our fellow citizens are white, others are brown, black or another colour; some are Christians, others belong to different religions or none. We also take different views of our history. Some people are intensely proud of British history; others are deeply uneasy about it and find it aggressive, imperialist and militarist. Others cherish some aspects of British history and feel embarrassed about other aspects of it.[65]

In my view, therefore, the Earl of Mar and Kellie was wide of the mark during the debate about 'British Identity and Citizenship' held in the House of Lords on 2 February 2006 when he stated: 'It is in the political sense that "British" comes into some real difficulty.' Or when, obviously failing to understand the fundamental logic and *raison d'être* of the British state, he gave the following piece of advice: 'The depoliticisation of Britishness will be essential.'[66]

Let's now consider the question of the end of Britishness as political identity (and the implications this would probably have) to better understand its nature.

## What if?

In an independent Scotland, under SNP plans, anybody refusing to take up Scottish citizenship would 'continue to enjoy an unaffected right to residency in the country'[67], which seems to be another of way of saying that independence would not make so much difference

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[62] Quoted in Barry K. Winetrobe, *The* Scotland Bill*: Some Constitutional and Representational Aspects*, House of Commons Library, Research Paper 98/3, 7 January 1998, p. 10.

[63] See Gordon Brown & Douglas Alexander, *New Scotland, New Britain*, London: The Smith Institute, 1999, p. 18.

[64] See Murray G. H. Pittock, *Scottish Nationality*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001, p. 147.

[65] *Hansard*, House of Lords, col. 1144.

[66] *Hansard*, House of Lords, cc. 367-368.

[67] See Alasdair J. Allan, *Talking Independence*, Edinburgh: Scottish National Party, 2002, p. 7.

after all. Yet this is hardly the end of the story. Living in different states basically means – otherwise what would be the point of separatism? – living under different laws ('our own laws for our own people'[68]), with one of the consequences being that restrictions are inevitably imposed upon any citizen of a given state who happens to reside or live in another; in other words, you can only enjoy full citizenship in one state.

In a new 'Britain', where Scotland and England were two separate states, people would have to choose between the two forms of citizenship. Despite the rousing style and the Jacobin vision, the following declaration by Alex Salmond would leave little room for expressing oneself politically if one still saw no contradiction at all between Scottishness and Britishness, and consequently insisted upon sharing the same political and constitutional rights as others in other parts of the former British state:

> There can be nothing more alien to the spirit of Scottish Nationalism than its perversion by those who seek to found a new country on the tribal divisions of the old. It matters not a jot whether the person sitting next to you now is from Scotland, England, India, America, France, Pakistan, Bangladesh or Timbuktu. What matters is their commitment to working with you and with me for the good of our fellow citizens.[69]

Such an outpouring of human kindness, of course, raises the question of why the SNP, a separatist party, does refuse to extend the benefits of its civic/republican values to all English people wherever they may live.

As a matter of fact, the SNP's view of Scottish citizenship in an independent Scotland has narrowed in recent years: while in 1993, citizenship would have been granted to anybody born in Scotland, or to anyone with a Scottish parent or grand-parent, by 1999, it had become more limited, with only people residing in Scotland, or born there, being able to apply for full citizenship[70]. By definition too, state nationalism expresses itself in economic competition[71], as witnessed by the SNP's plan eg to cut the corporate tax to 20% in an independent Scotland to attract businesses from England at the expense of that country's economy, though of course England could go down the same road and cut the said tax even further with all the repercussions this could have on either side, in particular socially.

Welsh Nationalists are very much on the same wavelength; in his speech to the Plaid Cymru conference in September 2006, Dafydd Elis-Thomas, clearly expressed his wish to see a different form of citizenship for Wales, embodied in the creation of a fully-fledged parliament for the Principality, when he said: 'We need to set out clearly the target of removing that neo-colonial need for consent by another Parliament (...). We can only achieve that consent by making our politics as vibrant as our nation building.'[72] The use of the phrase 'another parliament' for Westminster says it all: again, what would be the point of a Welsh parliament if the whole idea was not, at the end of the day, to live under a different system (regardless of how many people on the ground would actually disagree with the move)?

The only possible explanation is that Nationalists always start from the premise that nationhood has to be the lynchpin of any constitution. This is because 'a nationalist argument (...) makes an antecedent set of customs and traditions the condition of legitimate political

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[68] The much-vaunted 'velvet divorce' between the Czech Republic and Slovakia in the early 1990s is a fine illustration of this. See eg Pavol Petruf, *La Slovaquie*, Paris: PUF., 1998, pp. 79, 81, 86, 92 & 95.

[69] Alex Salmond, 'The Making of the Foundations' – Williamson Memorial Lecture, Stirling University, 28 April 1995.

[70] See Brown & Alexander, *New Scotland, New Britain*, pp. 34-35.

[71] For some interesting examples, see eg Joseph E. Stiglitz, *La grande désillusion* (trans. P. Chemla), Paris: Fayard, 2003 (2002), p. 126.

[72] Martin Shipton, 'Plaid calls for Welsh to break free from colonial bonds' – *The Western Mail*, 25 September 2006.

authority.'[73] To Alex Salmond, an independent Scotland would not primarily be about how well or how bad the Scottish economy would perform, but about 'us'[74], which is a community-based (or Burkean) vision of Scotland, used as justification for the formation of the state (despite the fact that the region is profoundly divided on the national question as we have seen).

It is often heard that the pro-independence movements, Plaid Cymru and the SNP, 'have won the argument', but unless I am mistaken, the onus is in fact still very much on them to prove that breaking with the rest of Britain would result in freedom all around. Another way of putting this is: to what extent would breaking up Britain improve democracy in the Isles? Or as someone has written: 'if the national claim simply involves trading places in terms of culture or political dominance, then it presents a problem for multicultural justice.'[75] By definition, nationalist movements can only seek to universalize their vision of themselves since recognition that diversity is the hallmark of any given territory in this time and age would undermine the political goal they have set themselves, i.e. the autonomy of the said territory.

It is only logical then that someone like journalist Simon Heffer, in a book about how better off England would be if she were shot of the Scots, should have written:

> It would also be useful for the English if their parliament took practical steps to rebuild the national identity in just the way that (...) the Scots propose to do (...). The revived English parliament (and) the English government (...) would need to help devise and support the cultural projects, in schools, in the arts, in broadcasting and elsewhere, that would project the English temper, English attitudes and the English way of life both to the English people and to the world. In practical terms, this would entail taking that leaf out of the SNP's book. Scotland has never been embarrassed about itself; it is time for the English to think likewise.[76]

Identification then would be with the collective consciousness embodied by that nationhood, however subjective and (therefore) controversial its definition[77].

Interestingly, the approach smacks of that advocated in the 1960s and 1970s by Enoch Powell, who repeatedly demanded a definition of Britishness in an attempt to create a British citizenship on that basis[78]. This again is due to the nature of the nationalist discourse, which takes it for granted that its definition of 'who we are' (along with the obvious political implications) is the only way forward. The citizen is chained to 'his' nation, 'his' history, 'his' culture; the citizen can therefore belong to one polity only, which should be nothing but the expression of 'his' nation, upon which the state should be superimposed. Individuality is either blotted out (i.e. exit rights/options cannot be exercised) or, at best, invariably comes second.

Hence the emphasis in the pro-independence camp's rhetoric, and in that of quite a few academics, some of whom have finally joined the SNP (Christopher Harvie eg), on the necessity to go down the road France has over the last two hundred years, and especially on civic nationalism (historian Tom Nairn is also a classic example of this), which takes it for granted there is such a thing as a homogeneous Scottish people.

The danger, of course, is that the new state by tying nation and state together, and promoting, to that end, cohesion across the board, i.e. presiding over what is claimed to be a

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[73] See Glyn Morgan, *The Idea of a European Superstate – Public Justification and European Integration*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007 (2005), p. 135.

[74] As he himself made clear on BBC1's *Question Time* programme (22 February 2007).

[75] Catherine Frost, *Morality and Nationalism*, London & New York: Routledge, 2006,      p. 111.

[76] Simon Heffer, *Nor Shall My Sword – The Reinvention of England*, London: Phœnix, 2000 (1999), p. 126.

[77] See Rieko Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship – Empire, Commonwealth and Modern Britain*, London: Franck Cass, 2003, p. 27.

[78] See p. 184.

national community, could become 'a destructive and fragmentary force, which can be added to the list of problems for democracy and its continued survival.'[79]

In fact, if what I have explained about social interaction and the rights of individuals is correct, the Nationalists have wrapped themselves in contradictions, and are consequently in a situation where they have a lot more explaining to do: not only would all those who disagree with separatism have to choose what part(s) of themselves to let go of (which some call 'dissociety'), but they would also be prevailed upon to integrate at all costs in the new polity (which is sometimes called 'hypersociety', i.e. when society is made co-existent with the state)[80]. What a huge paradox this would be for all those who have over the years (quite rightly) rubbished Mrs. Thatcher's statement about 'there (being) no such thing as society', and more generally launched sustained attacks on the British state on account of its (perceived) lack of liberality.

Conversely, of course, the only way this can be avoided is by allowing individuals to belong to various political spheres at the same time, just what the Union is currently about. The British state has partly neutralised itself, in typical liberal style, in the name not of equality (whereby rights are universalized, i.e. individual rights are made coterminous with those of the rest of society), but in that of equity (whereby individuals are treated more or less differentially on the political level within the same polity on account of their specificities)[81].

In that sense, the British state is not, and can never be, the 'historical forgery' that Plaid Cymru's General Election manifesto of March 1997 (see opening chapter: 'The principles of Plaid Cymru') insisted it was. The point was made most forcefully by (Labour) Lord Hunt of Kings Heath (Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Ministry of Justice) during the debate on Britishness in the House of Lords on 19 June 2008[82]:

> Some noble Lords have argued that, for a nation known for its understatement, an explicit statement of values is unnecessary and somehow un-British and that our rather pragmatic approach, which is to be commended now as in the past, sets out the course for us in the future. I have a great deal of sympathy with that view. (…) It is very risky when we define a group with a set of characteristics and then say that all people within that group are implicated in those characteristics. (…) The union of nations of hundreds of years has demanded a tolerance and an openness towards others, accustoming us to plural identities that lie at the heart of being British. I believe that it is intrinsic to the nature of the union that we have plural allegiances; indeed, research suggests that the British are comfortable with that. Our British identity is different from our English, Scottish, Bengali or Cornish identities, because it is plural and therefore inherently inclusive.

The difference between this and other options could not be any clearer. The political settlement is democratic in today's Britain as it does take the diversity of British society into account, which means performing an almost constant balancing act on the part of the central government, while the Nationalists' rhetoric of 'independence for our people' (singular) falls far short of what is required in terms of addressing the question of diversity on the periphery.

Indeed, in a diverse society, it is likely only the following can apply if democracy is not to suffer: 'Citizens do not merely inhabit a territory, but live in a dense network of interests and associations. It may be convenient to contract representation into an omnibus form and a single channel, but it remains the case that representation is most effective when it is most

[79] Schwartzmantel, *The State in Contemporary Society*, pp. 224-225 & 186.

[80] See eg Jacques Généreux, *La Dissociété*, Paris: Eds. du Seuil, 2008 (new edition; 2006), pp. 436-437.

[81] See Danilo Martuccelli, 'Les contradictions politiques du multiculturalisme', in Michel Wieviorka (ed.), *Une Société fragmentée ? Le multiculturalisme en débat*, Paris: La Découverte, 1997 (1996), pp. 64-66.

[82] *Hansard*, House of Lords, cc. 1173, 1174 & 1175.

differentiated. What this implies is a developed structure of functional representation alongside a reformed structure of territorial representation.'[83]

In fact, the beauty of Britishness, as political identity, lies in its sheer malleability; however arbitrary it may appear to be, it keeps evolving without being the sole reproduction of a specific natural order, whether of a cultural or social nature. It can therefore hardly be called nationalism in the basic sense of the word, as defined by Anthony D. Smith: 'Nationalism (is) the doctrine that makes the nation the object of every political endeavour and national identity the measure of every human value'[84].

Britishness, as political identity, is a process that has the two-fold result of, first of all, the full realization of individual freedom for those who feel emotionally attached to Britain (however irrational this may seem) and/or are convinced it is rationally better (eg for economic reasons), and, secondly, despite unitary tendencies at times[85], of enabling the Scots and the Welsh to avail themselves of the rights enjoyed by others (the English), and vice versa, but not at the expense of their nationhood (of who they think they are). In that sense, Britishness, as political identity, is nothing less than the precondition for the survival, conjointly, of two elements (crucial for one's sense of identity) that are normally collapsed into just one in the average nation state, i.e. nationhood (whatever the definition) and citizenship. In the words of Arthur Aughey: 'A defence of Britain must begin with the proposition that Britishness has for a long time represented the triumph of 'and', a relaxed duality of identity, over 'either/or', an assertive belonging.'[86] Therefore, Britishness, in its political dimension, ought to be taken for what it is, namely the sign of a healthy (i.e. pluralist) political system.

What this means, crucially, is that the granting of more autonomy to Scotland and Wales will *not* automatically make them any less British. In a state like the British state, with both centripetal and centrifugal forces, there can indeed only be constant negotiation and compromise[87] if full democracy is to be preserved. Better still, this situation, again, a most peculiar one, characterized by obvious instability, is a sure sign that Britain does remain a vibrant and open democracy. In fact, only settling the matter one way (independence) or the

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[83] Tony Wright, *Citizens and Subjects – An Essay on British Politics*, London & New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 97.

[84] Smith, *National Identity*, p. 18.

[85] In general, national citizenship can only consist of one formal membership, but British citizenship is of a most specific kind to the extent that nationhood is not the acid test to determine whether one is in or out, to differentiate between its holders and its non-holders. This is because the notion of Britishness has never been formally clarified. See Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship*, pp. 18-20, 29, 185 & 194-195. Nevertheless, British citizenship has a tendency towards functioning like all the others, i.e. it leads to exclusiveness towards non-citizens and inclusiveness towards citizens. Ever since the passing of the 1905 Aliens Act in fact, administration after administration raised new obstacles to entry into Britain. See Robert Winder, 'Immigration and national identity', in Nick Johnson (ed.), *Britishness*, pp. 31-32. The very definition of the phrase 'British citizen' actually changed dramatically in particular from the 1940s onwards on account of the demise of the former British Empire, and always in an attempt to draw a clearer line between insiders and outsiders. Indeed, the development of the law on immigration and nationality from the 1948 Nationality Act up until the early 1970s followed a continuous line, gradually separating persons supposed to be closely connected with the UK from persons who were British but who lacked such a connection. The 1981 British Nationality Act went further down that road by creating a separate British citizenship for those who had a 'close connection' with the UK itself. Under this new piece of legislation, no rights were attached to British nationality as such. The only 'citizen's right' specifically attached to British citizenship by the Act was 'right of abode' (see section 39). Moreover, a wide range of rights (eg access to the NHS and Social Security) were already dependent upon factors other than British (or Commonwealth) citizenship. See Ann Dummett (with Ian Martin), *British Nationality – The AGIN Guide to the New Law*, London: Action Group on Immigration and Nationality, 1982, pp. 15-16, 63 & 65.

[86] Arthur Aughey, *Nationalism, Devolution and the Challenge to the United Kingdom State*, London: Pluto Press, 2001, p. 56.

[87] See Brown, McCrone & Paterson, *Politics and Society in Scotland*, pp. 219-220.

other (centralisation) would be a serious problem. It seems the Lord Bishop of Norwich did have a point when, during the debate on Britishness in the Lords on 19 June 2008, he said: 'Perhaps (…) I can sound a note in favour of the British habit of avoiding rigidity in our national identity, even a note in favour of muddling through.'[88]

So much for the more or less theoretical reasons why Britishness, in its political dimension, is actually far from flawed. A more practical aspect of the question has now to be addressed, namely that of actual identification with the British state. Does Britishness, in other words, fit into the following (classic) definition of citizenship: '*Citizenship is a set of norms, values and practices designed to solve collective action problems which involve the recognition by individuals that they have rights and obligations to each other if they wish to solve such problems.*'[89]

## *Fluctuat nec mergitur*

However profound the resentment against London, i.e. the government and the state, and despite the evidence (see eg the comments made by Lord Wallace of Saltaire during the 2 February 2006 debate on 'British Identity and Citizenship' in the House of Lords[90]) of political alienation from public life being now very strong, with fewer people voting in the 2005 General Election than in any election since 1918, and fewer belonging to political parties, and, as a result, fewer people having any sense of a link between their lives and political society and the state, identification with the latter (and therefore with the rest of the population regardless of the way they define themselves in national or cultural terms) remains strong.

Let us be clear: on the surface, it would seem that Iain MacWhirter (see quote in introduction) is right after all. In 2003, 63% said they trusted Holyrood (i.e. the Scottish Parliament) to work in Scotland's best interests while a mere 21% said this of the British government; more interestingly still, 66% thought the Scottish Parliament should have the most influence over how Scotland is run compared with 20% who said this about Westminster. Although a very clear majority of people by 2003 expressed disappointment with Holyrood's (perceived) poor record (in terms of NHS and education), they were still more likely to lay the blame at the British government's door. But there is more, and it changes everything, despite the obvious, irreducible contradiction.

Surveys and interviews carried out in the autumns of 2000 and 2001 have shown that, while around two-thirds of respondents were not satisfied with British democracy, over 75% of them still expressed a pride in British citizenship[91]. Better still, there seems to be no clear-cut difference between the centre and the periphery in terms of their vision of what national solidarity should mean. Thus, almost as many respondents in London eg (69%) as in Scotland and Wales (75% and 74%) agreed with the following statement: 'Government should reduce income differences between rich and poor'[92].

As experts have underlined: 'On balance people would prefer to see matters such as public service standards, the level of tuition fees and unemployment benefits to be uniform across the UK rather than for Scotland to have the power to vary them.' In fact, 'only 31% would be happy for Scotland to be able to vary both tuition fees and unemployment benefits and 47%

[88] *Hansard*, House of Lords, col. 1150.

[89] Charles Pattie, Patrick Seyd & Paul Whiteley, *Citizenship in Britain: Values, Participation and Democracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 22 (emphasis added by Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley).

[90] See *Hansard*, House of Lords, col. 345.

[91] See Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley, *Citizenship in Britain*, p. 39.

[92] See p. 72 (table 2.22).

want them the same everywhere.' Besides, up to 61% denounce the fact that, one way or the other, Holyrood does not look after the interests of all parts of Scotland equally[93].

This clearly suggests, so it seems to me, that there is some discrepancy between what is said and what is expected/hoped for, which points to the fact that the staples of unionism (equality of treatment, reciprocity and solidarity, which the French, more generally, call 'la continuité territoriale'), if not completely unscathed, remain rather solid.

In other words, the notion of common citizenship, i.e. when people are willing to cooperate regardless of where they actually come from or live, and crucially regardless of the way they define themselves culturally, shows no sign of being seriously undermined by changing national self-definitions. Most importantly, Westminster, though disparaged across the board, contrary to local government[94], remains very much the arch-focus of British politics as illustrated by the discrepancy between turnouts in local government elections compared to turnouts for General Elections. In the 2000 local elections eg, only 28% of people throughout the land bothered to vote at all[95], which is quite paradoxical as voters (in all parts of Britain) tend to say that they do trust local government[96].

The same can of course be said about voting in regional and European elections. The turnout for the May 2007 regional elections in Scotland eg not only showed that unionism (with all its implications) was, despite the SNP's victory, the favoured option with that majority of people who voted for either one of the three unionist parties (around two-thirds of the voters), but it was also rather low (slightly under 52%) compared with the 2005 General Election results (almost 61%). In a similar way, the turnout in Wales for the 2004 European election eg was 41.4%; that for the 2003 Assembly elections had been a poor 38.2%. In contrast, the figure for the 2005 General Election was 62.4%. In other words, 'bi-focal politics', which was already the order of the day back in the 1960s and 1970s eg in rural Wales[97], is still very much alive.

What this clearly means is that most members of the electorate still believe that it is important which of the two main British parties is in office (in London) and that the British government affects their lives most[98]. British voters do have a point of course. As constitutional expert R. Hazell has explained, the 'Westminster Parliament continues to be the most important source of primary legislation for each part of the country'[99], which, as we have seen, does not raise so many eyebrows as one might have suspected.

The current Prime Minister may after all have had a point when he insisted[100]:

> There is no Scotland-only, Wales-only, England-only solution to transnational challenges that range from terrorism to foot and mouth disease, and from avian flu to security and climate change. So for these islands an environmental Union, a security Union and a Union for defence is to the benefit of all. But what matters even more are the common values we share across the United Kingdom (...). So today, wherever and whoever you are in any part of the United Kingdom, you enjoy not only the right to liberty within the law but also the right to education, to healthcare, to help when unemployed and to a state pension and soon, for everyone, an

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[93] Catherine Bromley, John Curtice & Lisa Given, *Public Attitudes to Devolution: the First Four Years (Report based on the 1999-2003 Scottish Social Attitudes surveys)*, Edinburgh: Scottish Centre for Social Research, February 2005, pp. 1, 4, 2 & 17-18, 3 & 42.

[94] See Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley, *Citizenship in Britain*, p. 170.

[95] See p. 77.

[96] See pp. 37 & 230.

[97] See P. J. Madgwick (with Non Griffiths & Valerie Walker), *The Politics of Rural Wales – A Study of Cardiganshire*, London: Hutchinson & Co., 1973, p. 228.

[98] See Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley, *Citizenship in Britain*, pp. 45 & 111.

[99] R. Hazell, 'Westminster as a 'three-in-one' legislature', in R. Hazell & R. Rawlings (eds.), *Devolution, Law Making and the Constitution*, Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2007, p. 233.

[100] Gordon Brown, 'We must defend the Union' – *The Daily Telegraph*, 25 March 2008.

occupational pension too. It is through such social insurance that all parts of the UK share risks and resources to provide security for each of us.

This approach to the question of solidarity (Britain-wide) clashes with the plans of the Welsh Nationalists whose nationhood-based vision of solidarity leaves little room for a 'wherever and whoever you are' type of approach. Talking on the 'Election Night 2007' programme (broadcast by BBC1 Wales on 3 May 2007), Elfyn Llwyd (see above) was adamant that anybody leading the new Welsh Assembly (in the event of a Labour-Plaid Cymru coalition, which did come into being later on) would have to make sure nobody was left out, all in the name of fairness and equality. Though it is indeed hard to imagine anyone disagreeing with the idea, one can only seriously call into question the rationale of Mr. Llywd's thinking. As a Nationalist, he is all in favour of Welsh independence; however, this can only mean one thing: in an independent Wales, enforced solidarity would stop at Offa's Dyke. Otherwise, why insist upon solidarity within and autonomy without? This would then clearly be paid for in the very real coinage of the creation of two different types of citizenship between England and Wales, on the basis of a narrow definition of the concept of nation (see above), with, inevitably, insiders and outsiders.

## Conclusion

Britishness as political identity is not organic in the sense of an organic culture, since it can never be uppermost in people's minds at all times (elections eg are not held every week), unlike, say, the language they speak, the job they have, the social class they were born into, or the place or street where they live. However, it is the basis upon which the whole notion of individual freedom in Britain ultimately rests. In other words, Britishness as political identity may have little material existence, but it nevertheless remains vital for each and every individual no matter where he/she lives, and – crucially – no matter how much he/she may dislike (the ways of) the people 'south (or north, or east, or west) of the border'.

Britishness is also the prerequisite for shared citizenship (and therefore solidarity), which goes way beyond the letter of the 1707 Treaty of Union, whereby England/Wales and Scotland are partners, an interpretation which primarily means that rights should be awarded to people as members of a sub-group within Britain, and that equality at Union level is achieved only because one belongs to a specific nation in the first place. Had the settlement been respected from day one, it is likely a Britain-wide NHS eg would never have materialized.

The British state, which is often perceived as an unstable 'strange hybrid state'[101], may be objectively under pressure because of the deliberate neutralization of part of its remit (eg through devolution). However, it is the said tension that guarantees democracy, that promotes an 'and' approach to problems, not an 'either/or' one. As Welsh Secretary Paul Murphy has said: '(devolution means) better government but not difference for the sake of it.'[102]

This is exactly what we often fail to grasp when we tend to collapse the peripheral populations into the peripheral regions/territories themselves. Only a flexible political identity like Britishness can help promote relative parity and difference at the same time, without the former prevailing at the expense of the latter, and vice versa. This crucial merit of the settlement probably goes a long way towards explaining its resilience.

Finally, to echo B. Crick's quote above, I will now quote historian Raphael Samuel who, introducing his *Patriotism* volumes back in the late 1980s, wrote:

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[101] John K. Walton, 'Introduction', in Caunce, Mazierska, Sydney-Smith & Walton (eds.),  *Relocating Britishness*, p. 1.

[102] Paul Murphy, 'Devolution: the view for Whitehall and Torfaen' – St David's Day Lecture  at Cardiff University (Welsh Governance Centre), 11 March 2002.

> Compared with "English" ("British") is formal, abstract and remote. But it allows for a more pluralistic understanding of the nation, one which sees it as a citizenry rather than a folk. It does not presuppose a common culture and it is therefore more hospitable both to newcomers and outsiders.[103]

Better still, to paraphrase Marcel Gauchet[104], one may say that the specific function of Britishness understood in this way has nothing to do with defining what the community should be about; rather, it is, today and for the foreseeable future, what enables it to exist, i.e. to hold together, despite all manner of (more or less profound) divisions within British society.

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[103] Quoted in Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*, p. 16.
[104] See Marcel Gauchet, *La Condition politique*, Paris: Gallimard, 2005, pp. 552-557.