Empire-nation: National and Imperial Discourses in England.

Introduction

When the states of England and Scotland combined in 1707, the conditions were created whereby English nationalism and interests would affect the expressions of a new British nationalism and notions of Britishness. As the British state expanded into Empire, ‘Anglo-British national identity’ began to be expressed through an imperial-national discourse based on notions of governance. As ‘Englishness’ played a large part in the creation of ‘Britishness’, so too did imperial discourses of ‘Britishness’ affect the meaning of ‘Englishness’.

Thus, with England as the most powerful and conspicuous of all the constituent parts of the Union, the statist and imperial framework for discourses of British nationalism that were articulated would not so much submerge Englishness, but feed into it. This situation gave Englishness and Britishness much of the same character, ‘hiding’ English identity in the sense that it became implicit in manifestations of ‘British’ identity and making the terms ‘English’ and ‘British’ almost synonymous – at least for the English. The conflation of notions of England, Britain and Empire also allowed English nationalists to appropriate non-English space and peoples when speaking about and defining England. Accordingly, it is here argued that imperial and national discourses are not necessarily opposed to each other, but are able to feed into each other, affecting the manner in which ideas of the nation are conceived and articulated.

Creation of the British State

In order to understand something of the ideology surrounding English nationalism and its relation to British national identity, it is necessary to focus upon the origins of the British state, and the tensions which that state apparatus had to overcome in order to operate and survive. Richard Rose has argued that the creation of the United Kingdom was ‘certainly not the product of a logical plan, nor is it the product of a particular ideology’ (Rose, 1982: 4). In his first assertion he is correct, but with regards to ideology the situation is a little more nuanced. As the British state consolidated its position throughout the eighteenth century, an ideology of ‘Britishness’ (although not without certain political antecedents) developed post facto in order to legitimise the new state in the face of possible threats form social and nationalist sources. Whilst this state-based identity ‘hid’ much of the national identities on the peripheries of Britain, it also did much to conflate the categories of state and nation, and England and Britain, at its core.

Although England, Ireland, Wales and Scotland had shared a monarch since 1603, the unitary state of Great Britain formally came into being on 1 May 1707 with the Acts of Union between the
parliaments of England and Scotland. Despite the existence of a British Monarchy, two parliaments still operated on mainland Britain, one in London the other in Edinburgh. However, a series of poor harvests at the end of the seventeenth century, threats to trade and Scottish estates in England and the failure of Scotland’s own attempt at a colonial empire in Central America, weakened the hand of those in Scotland who resisted Union with the English parliament. Although, popular anti-Union sentiment was focussed around the issue of sovereignty, it was the proponents of an economic argument in favour of Union who eventually won the parliamentary manoeuvring on the issue. The temptation to bring wealth into Scotland by joining in a tariff free union with England was too great for some Scottish lairds, despite deep divisions aroused by the idea of an incorporating Union within the Scottish community. During the parliamentary debates on Union, Scotland had witnessed scenes of civil disorder. Daniel Defoe was in Edinburgh during the debates and wrote that ‘There is an Entire Harmony in this Country Consisting in Universal Discords’ and was witness to several riots in Scottish capital (Healey, 1955: 136). In contrast, the English parliament at Westminster carried on its business after passing the Act of Union with barely any disruption, passing further acts concerning road maintenance in Bedfordshire and the enlargement of an entrance to the Palace of Westminster (Davis, 1999: 526-27). Seen from London, the English state had become the British state almost without any disruption and very little fanfare.

The timing of this Union is important in understanding the national identity that would be formed around the state in years to come, and by extension, ideas surrounding nationality and Empire in England. The British state was created before industrialisation began and before the political revolutions in America and France fundamentally altered political philosophy. In this sense Anglo-Britain was a proto-modern monarchical state, governed by an aristocratic élite. However, as industrialisation increased there was enough common ground between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie to form an alliance of common interest centred on the state. These commonalties included defense and expansion of Empire, a degree of economic and political homogeneity between these two classes, and as industrialisation progressed, a common enemy in the working classes (Nairn, 1977: 32). But what is important about the timing of the creation of the British state in relation to industrialisation is that the state was never obliged to impose itself upon civil society in order to foster economic development to the extent that other states that followed in its wake were forced to do (ibid: 19).

Consequently, and in common with another imperial state, Tsarist Russia and its successor, the Soviet Union, Britain remained essentially a state governing a diversity of nationalities. David Rowley contends that as the Tsarist and Soviet regimes were ‘imperial’ in their frame of reference, they were unable to pursue specifically Russian nationalist politics without fear of alienating other nationalities in the Empire and thereby undermining imperial power. Thus Rowley argues that Russia did not develop a nationalist movement ‘of its own’, as the Tsarist regime was concerned with the expansion and maintenance of the Romanov Empire, and not the creation of a specifically Russian nation-state. In this
regard, the Soviet regime differed little, as it too was concerned not to create a Russian state but to maintain the USSR. Thus what might be understood as today as ‘Russian nationalism’ – political demands for a Russian state for the Russian people – was, prior to the 1990s, dominated by discourses of empire – politics aimed at preserving the Tsarist and Soviet empires (Rowley, 2000).

In addition to this insight into nationalism in Russia, Rowley also argues that the ‘absence’ of specifically Russian nationalism during the Romanov and Soviet eras has implications for nationalism theory. Russia possessed all the social, political and economic forces identified as causes of nationalism by 1914, but a specifically ‘Russian’ nationalist movement failed to find serious political expression until the break-up of the Soviet Union. From this Rowley concludes that what is crucial in the rise of nationalism is the appearance of a secular, particularist ideology, for what distinguished Russia from the rest of Europe was its universalistic, religious and imperialist discourse of national identity. ‘What really ‘causes' nationalism,’ he states, ‘is the discourse of particularism and secularism that provides a legitimating vocabulary to those who seek to rule a sovereign, territorially bounded state in opposition to an imperial rival’ (ibid: 38).

An analysis such as Rowley’s would hold true for England and Britain too, if we were to view nationalism as solely of the anti-imperial, state creating type, rather than an ideology also designed to preserve states by conferring popular legitimacy on the ruling élite. Rowley follows Ernest Gellner’s well-known political definition of nationalism (1983) and reduces this to the statement that ‘nationalism is a political demand, and what it demands is the creation of a nation-state’ (ibid: 24). However, Gellner’s analyses of the origins of nationalism is strong on the creation of nation-states from former empires, but weaker when examining the ways in which ‘nations’ are maintained. In contrast to Rowley, it is here argued that imperial and national discourses are not opposed to each other, but are able to feed into each other, affecting the manner in which ideas of the nation are conceived and articulated. Part of the problematic nature of nationalism in both England and Russia (although not confined to these two countries) was that the state pre-existed the idea of nationalism as a guiding political principal of legitimation of the type outlined by Gellner. The processes of industrialisation, imperial and commercial expansion, and nationalism are all closely intertwined. Arguably, these processes, which caused the expansion of empire-states such as Britain and Tsarist Russia, also engendered nationalism, which was one of many threats to the legitimacy of these imperial regimes. This led to such regimes adopting what Benedict Anderson calls ‘official nationalism’ as a means of self-legitimation in the novel language of nationalism, which in England and Russia became tied up intimately with the trappings of imperial states (Anderson, 1991: 83).

However, whilst the British state was created in 1707, with Ireland added in 1801, a sense of ‘British’ identity was slow to emerge. When it did emerge, it was not so much a unitary identity that
completely submerged those identifications that preceded it, but rather permitted them to co-exist alongside the newer, state-based identity. The significance of this should not be underestimated, as regional identities ran deep (Colley, 1992: 17). Since the Reformation, state politics had been given popular expression in mainland Britain in an anti-Catholic worldview, which was further boosted by the radicalism of the Civil Wars (Hill, 1989: 161). However, the different forms of Protestantism in Scotland, England and later Wales could divide the population of the British Isles as much as unite it. Anglicanism and Presbyterianism were the state religions of England and Scotland respectively. Wales and Cornwall could distinguish themselves from other parts of the realm with distinctive languages. Catholic Ireland could distinguish itself by religion, language, geographic isolation from Britain and not least the experience of colonial domination from the English and conflict with Scots Presbyterian settlers in Ulster. However, as the English state entered into unions with its neighbours and expanded overseas, the English people were left with few institutions that could help distinguish ‘England’ from ‘Britain’.

Based on the argument that the British state rested lightly on the institutions of civil society (Nairn 1977, Rose 1982), Linda Colley argues that British national identity complimented these pre-existing forms of identification and loyalty without completely over-riding them. Many of the institutions of the non-English nationalities within Britain such as language, religion and law could not be entirely or effectively brought into line with English models. English dominance could not be translated into a homogeneity promoted by the British state as institutions such as Scottish law and the Kirk had been given constitutional protection in the Acts of Union of 1707. What did happen was the growth of certain ideological discourses around which a common sense of ‘Britishness’ emerged. Colley rejects the notion that British identity emerged as a blending of all the different cultures within the British Isles. Undoubtedly internal migration took place, for instance of the English into South Wales during the expansion of the coal industry there in the early years of the twentieth century, which significantly altered the demography of such regions (William’s, 1989). However, a British nation, unified in law, language and religion was not created from the top down. Rather a sense of ‘Britishness’ emerged around commonalities such as Protestantism, empire and war with imperial rivals (Colley, 1992).

**Empire-nation: Anglo-British Identity**

Rowley points to the absence of a specifically Russian, as opposed to a metropolitan imperial, nationalism, until the emergence of Yeltsin as a political figure and Solzhenitsyn’s conversion to Russian nationalism in the 1990s. This he puts down to the imperial frame of reference employed by the Tsarist state, Russian communists and the intelligentsia (Rowley, 2000: 34). This frame of reference was a casualty of glasnost, perestroika and the smaller Soviet republics’ bid for independence. Similarly, a specifically English nationalism, amongst all the nationalities in Britain, has, until recently, been conspicuous in its absence. The terms ‘England’ and ‘Britain’ have often been conflated; at least by the English. Bernard Crick (1989)
explains this conflation in terms of the underlying politics of Great Britain. Since its creation in 1707, English politicians and state functionaries had been concerned to protect the state from threats, both internal and external. Therefore any ‘non-British’ nationalism was discouraged. In fact, the nationalism of the largest nation was of particular concern. Thus the anti-Scottish, English radicalism of John Wilkes and his followers during the mid-eighteenth century was dangerous to the British state. Nairn (1997) refers to this state-based politics as ‘occluded multi-nationalism’. The multi-national structure of the British state hides the distinct identities of all the nations in Britain, at least until a measure of self-government was devolved to Scotland and Wales in 1999. However, with England as the most powerful and conspicuous of all the nations in the Union, the statist and imperial framework for discourses of nationalism and national identity would not so much submerge Englishness, but feed into it. This situation gave Englishness much of the character of Britishness, ‘hiding’ English identity by making it implicit in manifestations of ‘British’ identity.

Therefore, during much of the nineteenth and twentieth century, English identity would be expressed through the ideology of ‘Britishness’. Often, this imperial based ideology was expressed through the language of ‘national character’, which itself was a means of integrating diverse interests and cultures within an overarching British national identity. ‘National character’ continued to be influential in legitimating systems of governance up until the Second World War. Writing an Introduction to a new edition of William Bagehot’s *The English Constitution* in 1936, Earl Balfour described the British character in terms of the institutions of governance, relating his thoughts to the debate on the extension of the Westminster system to other parts of the Empire:

It matters little what other gifts a people may possess if they are wanting in those which, from this point of view, are of most importance. If, for example, they have no capacity for grading their loyalties as well as for being moved by them; if they have no natural inclination to liberty and no natural respect for law; if they lack good humour and tolerate foul play; if they know not how to compromise and when; if they have not that distrust of extreme conclusions which is sometimes misdescribed as want of logic; if corruption does not repel them; and if their divisions tend to be too numerous or profound...

(quoted in Bagehot, 1936: xxii)

Here we see an expression of the defining features of the ideology of ‘Britishness’. It was British institutions, particularly those of governance embodied in the Anglo-British Westminster system of constitutional monarchy, which truly defined what it meant to be British and English. But this system of governance could not operate without the idea of the British nation as a unified people, a people unified across time by the perceived continuity of those institutions of governance and across space by notions of state-wide ‘national’ and racial kindred. Earl Balfour continued, ‘...it is evident that our whole political machinery pre-supposes a people so fundamentally at one that they can safely afford to bicker; and are so
sure of their moderation that they are not disturbed by the never-ending din of political conflict. May it always be so’ (quoted in Bagehot, 1936: xxiv)

But here again was a source of confusion. Given its reliance on institutions of governance as a source of definition, ‘Britishness’ could easily be conflated with those same themes so important in English nationalist discourses that had emerged before and during the creation of the British state. By this time, the dominant discourse in radical English nationalism – liberties guarded by the state – meant that the concept of nation in English national discourse was not far removed from the concept of the state. Corrigan and Sayer go so far as to claim that in English nationalist discourse, the state was perceived as ‘the nation made manifest’ (Corrigan and Sayer, 1985: 195). When the English and Scottish parliaments joined in 1707, the boundaries of this state-based identity expanded further, creating British politics dominated by an already established English framework at Westminster, but maintaining distinct civil societies in the former realms. This meant that British identity would be characterised by a series of multiple identifications, both within the British Isles and later the far reaches of Empire, but least of all in the Empire’s political heart, England.

It would be wrong however to deny the existence of moments of tension between the imperial version of Anglo-Britishness and notions of England as a distinct entity within Britain. As noted above, John Wilkes made the distinction between England and Britain during the latter half of the eighteenth century. He linked his version of Englishness to a radical critique of the governing classes and the threat they posed to ‘English liberties’ and bolstered this critique with a strong Scotophobia. However, it is possible to see Wilkes’ radicalism as being little different to radicalism in other parts of Britain, but rather motivated by competition for positions of influence at home and abroad with a highly successful cadre of Scots within the British Empire (Davidson, 2000: 84).

A contrast between England and imperial Anglo-Britishness also began to develop during the era of high imperialism. Bernard Porter identifies the 1870s as a moment when a split on attitudes to the Empire (at least in rhetoric) emerges between the Conservatives and the Liberals and their radical allies. The Liberal landslide election victory of 1905 seemed to mark a shift away from the strident imperial policy of Cecil Rhodes and Lord Milner and towards a position expounded by the Little Englanders. The distinction between England and Britain surfaces again during periods of radicalism as a counterweight to imperial Britishness. One respondent to a Mass-Observation survey carried out in 1941 on attitudes to Britain replied ‘The term Britain is more easily associated in my mind with missionaries, gunboats and prestige than with any of the “good” qualities I should more easily associate with England’ (M-OA, FR878: 2), whilst a young government employee picked up on the tension between the rhetoric of English liberties and governing an empire:
“Land of Hope and Glory, Mother of the Free.” Yes, mother of the free Indian people, of the free unemployed without a dog’s chance, of the free... and so on, the old, old tale. Yes, land of hope and glory, hope for capitalist exploiters and glory for reactionary governments and muddling, self-seeking politicians...

But I love England, her fields, her woods, her homes, her Wordsworth. I love her soil and some of her cities. I love her rain and her sunshine (when I can get it). That’s all mine and I’m proud of it. “England” means home. But “Britain” conjures up another picture - the one I have tried to paint above (M-OA, FR878: 3).

The rural idea of England which emerges here also provided a means of speaking about ‘England’ contrasting it with, in particular, the imperial metropole and its wealth generating capacities occasioned by trade with Empire, Europe and the Americas. Alun Howkins has identified an idealised version of rural England as far back as the Middle Ages, but another version of rural England emerged at the end of the nineteenth century with the relative decline of the industrial north of England (Howkins, 1986: 64). At this time, imagery of ‘England’ drew less and less on Engels’ Manchester, a city covered in ‘dirt and revolting filth’ (Engels, 1971: 58) and more and more on an idealised version of the non-metropolitan parts of southern England. William Blake’s Jerusalem (set to music in 1915) directly contrasts ‘the dark satanic mills’ with ‘England’s green and pleasant land’ (Davis, 1999: 1029), and it is in the latter setting where the New Jerusalem will be built. William Morris combined his socialism with a notion of a futuristic, rural England where the horrors of nineteenth century city living have been banished. In News from Nowhere (originally published in 1890) Morris transposes rural imagery onto areas of London in creating his Utopia. Thus the locality around Woodford and Walthamstow is described as ‘a very jolly place, now that the trees have had time to grow again since the great clearing of houses in 1955’ and King Street in Hammersmith runs through ‘wide, sunny meadows and garden-like tillage’ (Morris, 1919: 17, 25). The idea of rural England seemed to grow during the two World Wars, no doubt in contrast to the mechanised, industrial warfare experienced by the participants. Paul Fussell cites one correspondent based in Cairo during 1942 writing that ‘sweating in the sultry nights of this soulless, venal, cynical city, it is refreshing to be with Cobbet’s ‘Rural Rides’ in the changing weathers and seasons of the English countryside’ (Fussell, 1975: 232).

However, even this notion of rural England was itself greatly influenced by the imperial experience. Rural England with its green spaces, sense of community and imagined peace was in direct contrast to with the tensions of colonial rule in sometimes isolated outposts (ibid: 281). When Rudyard Kipling was not writing about the Empire, it was to the Sussex of Puck of Pook’s Hill (1917) that he returned. On a political level, the radicalism of the Little Englanders also stopped short of an outright anti-imperialism, but rather disputes over what type of imperialism to pursue and the method of actualising
imperial policy (Porter, 1984: 194). The experience of government appeared to have dissipated some of the radicals' drive, turning the issue from one of principle into one of administration.

**Institutions of Anglo-Britishness**

As state that was created and existed in a ‘multi-national’ form, much of the ideology of ‘Britishness’ was bound up with the overarching institutions of the state. Rather than attempt to establish a common ‘national’ culture at the level of civil society, the British state was content to let the institutions of its constituent parts be. In this regard, it came to be regarded as something of a ‘nightwatchman state’ (McCrone, 1997: 585). As a result of the Treaty of Union negotiations, no attempt could be made to constitutionally replace Scottish systems of law and education, or to attempt to replace the Anglican and Presbyterian churches with a single ‘British’ church. In Wales, attempts to impose the English language were ultimately unsuccessful (Williams, 1989). This over-arching state resting lightly on top of Britain’s constituent nations proved a useful model for control over the colonies and later maintaining a workable, if sometimes weak sense of ‘Britishness’, throughout the ‘white’ Dominions. Thus it would be possible to claim a dual identity that was British and Scottish and British and Welsh or British and Australian without any clash of aspirations or ideals. Only the English, closest to the centre of economic, financial and cultural power, articulating their own nationalism in terms of the state and its empire, would be able to discern little difference between the categories of English and British.

An important corollary to this process of state formation was the post facto creation of an ideology justifying the events of 1688-1707 and the resulting system of governance. This task was given particular urgency by the revolutionary events in France from 1789 onwards and was sustained throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Edmund Burke provided one of the most cogent expressions of this ideology in 1790 in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Burke, rejecting some of his earlier critiques of the British system, maintained that the best vindication of the British system was its evolutionary nature and apparent continuity. Its seeming (though illusory) absence of ideology meant, according to Burke, that the governance of Britain avoided the danger of being ‘entangled in the mazes of metaphysical sophistry’ which were beginning to emerge in revolutionary France (quoted in Hill, 1975: 285). Dating the emergence of this system from the ‘Glorious Revolution’, Burke argued that ‘the Revolution [of 1688] was made to preserve our ancient and indisputable laws and liberties, and that ancient constitution of government which is our only security for law and liberty’ (ibid.). These ‘ancient liberties’ were concepts that had been appropriated from *English* radicalism of the 1640s and were now, according to this emerging discourse, guaranteed by the *British* system of constitutional monarchy which had emerged from the end of the eighteenth century onwards.
Following on from Burke, Walter Bagehot gave the ideology of ‘Britishness’ a further boost with his treatise on government, *The English Constitution*, first published in 1867. Bagehot argued that constitutional monarchy, with power residing in the Crown in Parliament, was the best form of governance for ‘the vacant many’ as it is the most easily comprehensible of all forms of government (Bagehot, 1936: 34). Thus he combined Burke’s ‘ancient liberties’ with patrician control of the system of governance, adapting this method of rule to the emerging conditions and tensions of the day. In this manner, ‘Britishness’ would avoid the notion of popular sovereignty, a notion as Rowley points out, deeply troubling to a multi-national empire state (Rowley, 2000: 32). Therefore, in common with the Tsarist Empire and in order to legitimate itself in the age of nationalism, the monarchical British state was forced to adopt the language of nationalism without adopting the notion of popular sovereignty which was contained in the French model of nationalism (Rowley, 2000: 25), and the Monarchy became a crucial symbol of Imperial unity and loyalty.

Contemporaneously with Bagehot, John Stuart Mill was reflecting on the workings of representative government. Mill also reflected the imperial, ‘British’ nature of governance. For Mill, nationality was a necessary underpinning for free institutions, but nationality was best defined not by language, religion or law, but by ‘a considerable amount of common political antecedents’ (Mill, 1926: 360). That is to say, the nation he was referring to was ‘Britain’, an identity based around the state. He also had a salutary warning to non-state nationalists as to where their loyalties should lie:

Nobody can suppose that it is not more beneficial to a Breton, or a Basque of French Navarre, to be brought into the current of the ideas and feelings of a highly civilised and cultivated people - to be a member of the French nationality, admitted on equal terms to all the advantages of French citizenship, sharing the advantages of French protection, and the dignity and prestige of French power - than to sulk on his own rocks, the half-savage relic of past times, revolving in his own little mental orbit, without participation or interest in the general movement of the world. The same remark applies to the Welshman or the Scottish Highlander as members of the British nation. (Mill, 1926: 363-4)

The British state then, was created as a unitary entity, albeit based on multi-state origins, with interests in a large, overseas empire. Its economic strength derived from the industrialisation that took place towards the end of the eighteenth century. Britain maintained this dominance as an industrial and imperial power until the end of the nineteenth century. However, nationalist and revolutionary movements were a constant threat to European imperial states, and Britain, like the Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union, was no exception. The British state attempted to legitimate itself by encouraging a sense of ‘British’ identity. In this regard it was largely successful for a long time. But as the state was dominated by a patrician class, this type of nationalism had to eschew the notion of popular sovereignty and instead emphasise the virtues of the institutions of governance embodied in the British state. What this meant for
discourses of English nationalism, which also emphasised the role of the state as protecting ‘English liberties’, was a conflation between the two categories of nation and state and consequently a blurring of the distinction between England and Britain.

**Imperial-national Discourses**

It is important not to treat the development of such ideas about imperial-national discourse in isolation, but rather through a process of interaction between the colonial and metropolitan parts of the imperial experience. Concepts such as race, nation and empire were all closely bound up in Anglo-British discourse. Writing between the two Wars, the Earl Balfour argued that the process of continuity within change was the product of the ‘British temperament’. This was ‘a truth which those who recommend a wholesale adoption of British Institutions in strange lands might remember with advantage… Constitutions are easily copied; temperaments are not’ (Introduction to Bagehot, 1936: xxii).

In contrast to the Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union, Britain’s empire was an overseas one. Empire provided the British and colonial subjects of the Crown with an experience by which they could interpret their commonalities when compared to people of other ‘races’, who were coming increasingly under their control. Justifications for the extension of imperial rule were drawn from the supposed benefits of the extension of the Westminster-model of governance for the colonisers and colonised alike. According to Charles Dilke, touring the empire during the 1860s, the imperial experience provided ‘that element of vastness of dominion which, in this age, is needed to secure width of thought and nobility of purpose,’ as well as offering the ‘possibility of planting free institutions among the dark skinned nations of the world’ (Dilke, 1869b: 407). This belief in the perfection of the institutions of governance was crucial in the justification for governing other people, whether the lower classes at ‘home’ or other peoples ‘abroad’ and maintaining links with a disparate, overseas Empire. Such a mythology of governance allowed power to be devolved to the ‘white’ colonies and Dominions peopled by those of ‘British stock’, whilst also allowing those same colonies to pursue sub-imperialisms of their own ‘as a trust for civilisation’ (Kidd, 1898: 58).

Whilst the politics and practice of racial ideology could be very different in the imperial centre and at the frontier, they were nevertheless engaged in a self-supporting relationship. Frontier warfare throughout the Empire helped to create a racial boundary for notions of ‘Britishness’. Furthermore, this experience of racial warfare and ‘race’ also fed onto debates about social control of the lower classes in Britain itself (Rich, 1986: ch.3). Thus the experience of governing the Empire reinforced the apparent importance and efficacy of British institutions and methods of governance, which as an imperial-national discourse fed into meanings of what it meant to be English.
Empire, and the ‘white’ colonies in particular, played an important part in this racial ideology of governance and control. The Dominions were seen as vital to the preservation of the race-nation, those of ‘British stock’, which were feared to be declining in the crowded and polluted cities of industrial Britain. The colonies provided a source of hope to those who aimed at regenerating the vitality of the ‘British stock’. English academic, JA Froude visited Australia and other parts of ‘Oceana’ in 1885 and left with the conviction that ‘the life of a nation, like the life of a tree, is in its extremities’ (Froude, 1886: 387). Froude countered the growing argument about the financial burden of the Empire to the British Treasury, by arguing that it was these transplanted Britons who were the only people who could prevent the decline of the British race-nation and enable it to continue competing with other European empires. If the Empire were sloughed off, dire consequences for the British, at ‘home’ and in the colonies, would follow. ‘Still less would the race hereafter to grow there maintain either the strength of limb or the energy of heart which raised their fathers to the lofty eminence which they achieved and bequeathed’ (ibid: 386).

This relationship between England, Britain and the Empire allowed certain English nationalists to appropriate non-English space and peoples when defining and promoting England. During the Middle Ages and up to the end of the seventeenth century, English propagandists anxious to extend English suzerainty over Scotland revived the Brut tradition. This myth of the peopling of Britain by the followers and descendent of Brutus, the great-grandson of Trojan Aeneas, stipulated that Scotland was a mere province of England because of the manner in which Britain had been divided up between Brutus’ sons (Pittock, 1997: 29). After the Union of the Crowns in 1603, the notion of a British monarch residing in England blurred the distinction between England and Britain somewhat at a time when the ideology of nationhood was beginning to emerge. But it was the incorporating Union of the parliaments in 1707, however skillfully negotiated by the Scottish commissioners, which enabled the English to see England and Britain as co-terminous. After 1707, and a result of the equation of state and nation in English nationalism, what AV Dicey and RS Rait refer to as ‘the united state of Great Britain’ (Dicey and Rait, 1920: 347) became the political expression of the English nation. With the British state representing England, English nationalists developed an argument by which to resist the nationalist claims of other parts of Britain. Writing on Home Rule in 1886, Dicey argues:

If the parliamentary independence of Ireland threatened as little damage to England as the parliamentary independence of Victoria, an Irish legislature would meet in Dublin before the end of the year. Englishmen, it is true, do not believe that Ireland would in the long run gain by the possession of legislative independence. It is not, however, the doubt as to the reality of the blessing to be conferred on Ireland, but the certainty as to the injury done to England which causes their opposition to Home Rule (Dicey, 1886: 16).
The extension of self-government along Westminster lines to the colonies and dominions also allowed English nationalists to appropriate other nationalities in formulating definitions of the English. Viewing the Empire from the imperial centre, JR Seeley, a proponent of imperial federation, argued that Greater Britain ‘is a real enlargement of the English state; it carries across the seas not merely the English race, but the authority of the English Government’ (Seeley, 1971: 38). This extension of the English state overseas allows Seeley to overlook the developing nationalisms in the Dominions and consider Australians, New Zealanders, Canadians and South Africans as well as Scots and Welsh as part of the English population (ibid: 13).

In the wake of the Boer War, the belief in the imperial mission had been temporarily shaken. However, national and racial solidarity could still play a significant part in the politics of Empire and the imperial consciousness as Barrow (1989) has demonstrated with the British and imperial trades unions just prior to the Great War. However, from this point on more formal emphasis was now placed on the Westminster system and the institutions of governance that had been established in the ‘white’ societies of settlement as a defining and unifying feature of what it meant to be British.

The Statute of Westminster had provided for the Dominions the ability to enact their own nationality laws as early as 1931. British nationality, however, was not defined in a similar fashion and any subject of the Empire or Commonwealth was automatically a British subject. In the United Kingdom, it was not until the Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1962 that automatic right of entry to Commonwealth-born British citizens was restricted. However, as the imperial reference for British nationality declined, its racial content, largely defined by the imperial experience and post-imperial migrations, increased. The Immigration Act of 1971 introduced the notion of patriality into British nationality, whilst the Nationality Act of 1981 rejected the notion of ius soli by formalising the notion that parentage, not place of birth, was the main criterion for British citizenship.

This imperial experience would have implications for nationalist discourses in England. As argued above, English nationalism was inclined to see the nation in terms of state institutions and empire. A combination of the expansion of the English model of governance, first throughout the British Isles and then overseas, combined with the transplanting of English and other British nationalities to other shores, created a discourse of national identity very much bound up with the racialised experience of governing an overseas Empire. In Scotland, nationalists have been able to look to those preserved civic institutions such as the law, education, church and the media as means of distinguishing Scotland from Britain. In Wales it is the Welsh language which acts as a marker between Welsh speakers and the English. After devolution, political institutions can also be invoked as markers of identity. However, post-devolution, England’s governing institutions are Britain’s governing institutions, leaving expressions of English nationalism very little alternative but to remain within the previous British discourses of empire and nation.
Conclusion

The tendency to blur the distinction between state and nation was already present in English nationalism before the establishment of the British state in 1707. The creation and expansion of this state, within the British Isles as well as further afield, gave English identity a further boundary that was imperial in its frame of reference. Thus we should not seek to explain away the ‘absence’ of a particular nationalism due to imperial discourse, but should try and seek the wood amongst the trees. English identity was so explicit in ‘Britishness’ that its proponents saw the terms England and Britain as synonymous, appropriating non-English space and peoples when defining the English and articulating an English, or rather an ‘Anglo-British’, nationalism. What this did mean was that a particularist ‘English’ nationalism was often ‘hidden’ by such imperial discourses, whilst at the same time feeding off them. Thus discourses in English nationalism were both ‘imperial’ and ‘national’ in their expression, and there is no contradiction involved in this.

What the case of England seems to illustrate is that the imperial discourses can become intricately bound up with the ‘national’ identity of the nations at the core of the imperial structures. The categories of nation, state and race in English nationalism continued to support each other. The idea of a racialised national character was often invoked in arguments over the nature of the governance of the British Empire. Thus with the case of Russia today, discourses and symbols of English nationalism do not have to be entirely created de novo, but they do have to overcome deeply imbedded discourses of empire. It is not that English and Russian nationalisms have been absent, they have instead been somewhat ‘hidden’ by expressing ‘national’ discourses in ‘imperial’ language.
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