Chapter Thirteen: The Future of the UK and the Problem of Little England

The implicit assumption behind the discussion in recent chapters is that a way needs to be found of providing a constitution that will hold together the United Kingdom. During the discussion it has been suggested that there needs to be a form of devolution whose focus is upon joint decision-making by the four nations, rather than upon which extra powers can be 'given away' to the devolved members. It was also pointed out that this would entail a radical rethinking of the idea that the sovereignty of the Westminster Parliament was the unshakeable foundation of any arrangements that could make devolution work. But it has to be recognised that there is an implicit assumption behind this approach, namely that there is an overwhelming desire to make devolution work, not only in the devolved nations but in England itself. It is not clear that this is so. As pointed out already, whilst about half the Scots want independence, about half the English want it too. The 'Very well, alone!' mentality, once turned upon Europe, can also be turned upon the other members of the United Kingdom outside England. The present chapter therefore considers the problem of what it calls 'Little England.'

The term has a long pedigree. When the UK made its second application to join the European Economic Community in 1966, the Labour Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, declared at the Lord Mayor's banquet in London that 'there is no future for Britain in a Little England philosophy.'[1] One of the dangers of Brexit is that it will encourage 'Little Englanders' not only to disentangle their country from Europe but to disentangle themselves from the rest of the UK. There are some who would welcome this as a sign of England finally discarding its inner empire in the way it has (almost) discarded its outer empire, enabling it

1 Preston, Christopher *The Enlargement and Integration of the European Union: Issues and Strategies*, p. 29.

at last to be at ease with itself (as Professor Edgerton put it in a podcast entitled 'Brexit, Ideology and the Decline of the British State' posted in April 2021).[2] But another possibility is that having broken away from its internal union as well as its association with the EU, it will become more introverted and possibly more intolerant. At the very least it will discover that what it has tried to achieve by removing apparently extraneous elements is a chimera. If real homogeneity is what it's looking for, it can't be found anywhere. It is precisely this that so enrages the nationalist, convinced that discarding another layer will enable the true nation to emerge, that prising open the oyster will reveal the pearl, when in fact all that happens is that another part of the onion is stripped away, and nothing ever emerges except a further layer to tear off.

Seeking 'national purity'

The last century has seen a considerable re-drawing of the boundaries of Europe, but it would be wrong to consider the process as akin to tidying up a house, an operation in which things that do not 'really belong' in one room are removed and other things that have been put elsewhere regain their rightful place. The present discussion of the European and British unions takes place within a Europe which has continued to see an increase in the number of nation-states within the continent. The three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania became independent nation-states (as they once were before between the first and second world wars) in the 1990s and in 2004 joined the European Union. The end of the Soviet Union has meant a number of nation-states emerging in Eastern Europe, whose dependence on Russia is clear but who have a theoretical independence, namely Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine; and of course the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine shows how difficult it is to realize its entitlement to independence. One might also include some of the new states in the Caucasus region, such as Georgia and Armenia, within this list, depending on where Europe is deemed to begin and end (both countries, alongside Azerbaijan, are members of the Council of Europe, as is the Russian Federation itself).

Sometimes separation has been relatively successful and has happened without bloodshed. The 'velvet revolution' which ended communism in

2 You can hear the podcast at https://euromovescotland.org.uk/podcast/brexit-ideology-and-the-decline-of-the-british-state/

Czechoslovakia in 1989 was followed by a 'velvet divorce' between the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993. The two countries then applied separately to become members of the European Union. Other break-ups were less successful. The former Yugoslavia saw five wars in the 1990s, resulting in thousands of deaths and tens of thousands of refugees. The Western Balkans is now host to several states, two of which, Croatia (since 2013) and Slovenia (since 2004), have become part of the EU and four of which, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania, are candidate countries to join it. About other parts of the Western Balkans – Kosovo and Bosnia – there are differing opinions on whether they can be considered states at all.[3]

Part of the problem is that linked to the idea of smaller communities as a form of progress is the idea that it is ethnicity or language that defines the nation-state, a principle which has encouraged expulsions and even exterminations as nation-states seek to 'purify' themselves of extraneous elements. The problem (quite apart from the sheer barbarism of such a procedure) was that such 'purity' was as impossible to achieve inside most of the smaller nation-states into which Europe appeared to be resolving itself in the twentieth century as it had been within their larger forbears. The small states were not in fact more 'ethnically' or 'linguistically' pure than the larger states or empires that they had emerged from.[4] More rooms might have been created in the house, but this didn't mean that objects had at last found their 'rightful place'. It was also a view of nationality that made life very difficult for groups that were not linked to any particular nation, like the Roma and the Jews. Instead of enriching the state they lived in, they were seen as foreign elements infecting it. Moreover, the very impossibility of achieving ethnic or linguistic purity encouraged the view that some 'foreign' element was perpetually sabotaging the state and preventing it from achieving its 'natural' condition.

3 22 of the 27 EU countries currently recognise Kosovo as an independent state.

4 One of the most disturbing books on the power of small differences to generate mass slaughter is Niall Ferguson's *The War of the World*. Ferguson takes H.G. Wells' classic science-fiction novel of a century ago, *The War of the Worlds*, and suggests that the destructive force Wells imagined coming from outside the world came in reality from within it in the most brutal and violent century we have yet lived through.

Black and Asian English?

We can find evidence of this outlook in more recent times. The preceding section suggested that if you insist on ethnic or religious or linguistic sameness as the essential force holding your nation together, then you are likely to see those whose ethnicity or religious and cultural values are different as something less than true citizens of your nation. Perhaps for that reason a multinational state might be thought to represent a more comfortable home for people from BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic) communities than one which threatens to associate a particular ethnicity with citizenship.

In March 2021, the Labour MP for Tottenham and later Shadow Foreign Secretary, David Lammy, criticised the wording of the English census, observing that there was no option to be Black and English. He noted that the Welsh Census allowed respondents to identify as Black Welsh or Asian Welsh as well as Black British. But Black English or Asian English didn't seem to be an option.

From the perspective of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), most of England's black and minority ethnic population identify as more British than English. On the other hand, a significant minority, like Lammy, identify as English. As Professor John Denham, former MP for Southampton Itchen and later Director of the *Centre for English Identity and Politics* at the University of Southampton pointed out,

> When the state Census denies ethnic minorities the right to declare their identity as English, it simply reinforces the message that 'this identity is not for you'.[5]

A spokesperson for the ONS (Office of National Statistics) explained to *The Times* (August 3rd, 2021) that it had 'reviewed the wording of the high-level categories in the ethnicity question and, after testing different options in England and Wales, we recommended a change in the Welsh questionnaire to include Black Welsh and Asian Welsh, alongside Black British and Asian British.[6] The evidence did not support a change to include Black English in England.' What is not clear is what 'the evidence' amounted to. But we can perhaps guess.

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5 The comments by Denham can be found at https://www.southampton.ac.uk/ceip/publications/ethnic-identity-in-the-census.page

6 See David Sanderson's article in *The Times,* https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/why-isnt-black-english-a-census-option-asks-david-lammy-qxn00zcg9

In March 2021, Lammy debated the topic with a caller on his LBC radio show who insisted he couldn't be English.[7] She told him: 'You will never be English, you are African-Caribbean.' 'I'm of African descent, African-Caribbean descent, but I am English,' he replied at the time. The caller then went on to insist that it was 'fine' for Lammy to say he was British, but that he was 'not English'.

The conversation might have simply been another illustration of racial prejudice, and yet the willingness of the caller to accept that Lammy was British but not that he was English is striking. It suggests that whereas for some people Britishness is seen as something that can embrace people of any background, Englishness is something else. It is no wonder that many people from minority ethnic backgrounds will tell the census that they prefer to be British rather than English.

In his radio discussion Lammy pointed out:

> Here I am, having grown up in this country, have been born of this country, and actually the truth is it's a myth there's one English ethnicity – there's not… England has always been a country in which Huguenots, Danes, all sorts of people have passed through.

Lammy is quite right to point out the diversity of background and ethnicity implicit in being English. One can understand his hostility to the suggestion, implicitly made by those who were formulating the census, that you somehow have to be white in order to be English. The result is that many Black and Asian people associate being 'English' with the sort of Little Englander mentality displayed by the woman referred to in the phone-in. They therefore prefer to call themselves Black British or Asian British despite the fact that even as a percentage of the population of each nation there are far more BAME people in England than in Scotland and Wales. They see a mark of exclusivity in the term 'English' that does not apply to 'British' or even to 'Scottish', 'Welsh' or 'Irish,' and this is why they prefer to talk about 'Black and Asian British'.

Compare an observation made by Jeremy Paxman in a book published in 1998. Though the book came out a generation ago, it is interesting that Paxman wrote as follows about an earlier black MP for Tottenham, Bernie Grant:

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7 See Lucy Campbell's report for *The Guardian on 29th March 2021*, which includes a recording of the actual interview. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/29/david-lammy-praised-for-response-to-lbc-caller-who-said-he-was-not-english

> …it is still noticeable that while you will often meet a person who describes themselves as 'Black British' or 'Bengali British', you rarely come across someone who says they are 'Black English'. Bernie Grant calls himself British, because 'it includes other oppressed peoples, like the Welsh or the Scots. It would stick in my throat to call myself English.'[8]

Whilst it would be welcome to suppose that over a generation 'English' has become a more inclusive and therefore acceptable term, reflecting a greater inclusiveness in English society, it is not clear how far this is so – and if it is so, it may be much more evident in the London represented by these two MPs than in the rest of England. Polls suggest that those with the greatest consciousness of being English as opposed to British were far more enthusiastic about Brexit than those who thought of themselves as British rather than English.[9] It would imply that people with a strong sense of being English find it much more difficult to think of belonging to a wider community, something that the smaller nations – as we have seen in the case of Wales – have had thrust upon them through their association with England within the UK. If the Scots could accept a Union with the English without ceasing to be Scottish, they were unlikely to fear the consequence of becoming part of the European Union. The caller speaking to David Lammy in March 2021 represented a perspective from which Britain can be stormed by 'outsiders' but the inner sanctum, England, cannot be. For her, with what one guesses to be a rather nostalgic view of England's 'green and pleasant land', the English core must remain unsullied. Even though on any definition of ethnic or racial diversity England is more diverse than the other nations within the UK, the perspective of the caller remains a powerful one. She is still convinced that somewhere inside the shell there's a pearl of Englishness waiting to be discovered, cherished and protected.[10]

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8 Paxman, Jeremy *The English*, p. 74.

9 John Denham's blog for the LSE (London School of Economics) has some useful analysis. He suggests that 'those most open to non-English identities, including European, were most likely to vote Remain.' Note that the blog was written in 2019, after the referendum but before Brexit had finally taken place. See https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2019/02/14/is-it-the-english-question-or-the-british-question-the-three-strands-of-britishness/

10 See the insights of Curtice and Montagu in their 2018 study. http://natcen.ac.uk/our-research/research/do-scotland-and-england-wales-have-different-views-about-immigration/ For analysis, see Kenny, *The Politics of English Nationhood*.

Sitting on the rock

In his *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, the economic historian Eric Hobsbawm pointed out that in the nineteenth century there were many who believed in a 'threshold principle,' according to which a nation-state had to be of a certain size.[11] For this reason, Mazzini, despite championing Italy as an independent state, did not think that Ireland would achieve statehood. The presumption was that human progress naturally meant expanding into larger units, as families became clans, clans became tribes and tribes became nations. To split larger communities into smaller ones was to go against the tide of progress. There was a clear connection between acquiring broad-mindedness and belonging to a larger community. Hobsbawm quotes a section of Mill's *Utilitarianism*, published in 1861:

> Nobody can suppose that it is not more beneficial for a Breton or a Basque of French Navarre to be… a member of the French nationality, admitted on equal terms to all the privileges of French citizenship… 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.[12]

One imagines that talk of a Scotsman or a Welshwoman 'sulking on a rock' might not go down too well today. Such comments were made at a time when a 'small state mentality' was seen in negative terms. Terms such as 'balkanisation' (as applied to the crumbling Ottoman empire) were used to highlight not an achievement of independence but a retreat into narrow-minded isolation, resisting the march of progress.[13] Yet whatever the limitations of such an approach, I would argue that it recognises something important about the dangers of trying to create nation-states on the basis of an imagined cultural, religious and/or ethnic identity which certainly doesn't exist within the dozens of nation-states making up the European continent.

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11 Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, p. 31.

12 Mill's *Utilitarianism, Liberty and Representative Government* quoted in Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, p. 34.

13 See Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, p.31. On the same page he also notes the use of the German word *Kleinstaaterei*, the system of mini-states, as derogatory.

Thirty years on from Hobsbawm's claim that the 'Wilsonian system' (President Woodrow Wilson's attempts after the First World War to make state frontiers coincide with frontiers of language and nationality) 'demonstrated to no great surprise that the nationalism of small nations was just as impatient of minorities as what Lenin called great-nation chauvinism,'[14] there is still no reason to dispute his claim. Indeed, it is noteworthy that Professor Vernon Bogdanor, despite a very pungent critique of the structures of the European Union in his recent works, was a self-confessed 'Remainer' in the 2016 referendum precisely because he saw the EU as essentially being a peace project. He believed that conflicts such as those which broke out in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s could be mitigated if the different groups had what he called 'a roof over their heads', something he compared to the Austro-Hungarian Empire a century earlier.[15]

Can the United Kingdom also be a roof over the heads of different parties in the Isles? Optimists suggest that if England leaves the British Union there will no longer be resentment against its other members. No more complaints about their 'exploiting' the Barnett formula to receive 'subsidies' (though Joel Barnett himself denied that the system which bore his name was a needs-based formula, something that he would have personally preferred), just as there are no longer complaints about the UK 'subsidising' Brussels with its contribution to the EU budget.[16] But one could also take a more pessimistic view, suggesting that those who acquire the habit of resentment never cease to find something or someone to be resentful about. 'I find it instructive,' writes Gavin Esler, 'that the former Yugoslavia could survive Croat, Bosnian, Slovene or Kosovar nationalism, but it could not survive the nationalism of the biggest player, Slobodan Miloševic's Serbia. Perhaps a lopsided union becomes especially vulnerable when nationalist passions grow strongly in the most powerful component.'[17] It doesn't sound so different from the typically strident language of Tom Nairn in 1977 when he talked about how England had become 'culturally and politically isolated, imprisoned within her dying imperialism' and therefore 'vulnerable to Enoch Powell's nationalist demagoguery… a mushrooming carica-

14 Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, p. 31.

15 See his recent *Britain and Europe in a Troubled World*.

16 Bogdanor gives a good account of the formula in *Beyond Brexit*, pp. 224–228. As he notes, English complaints about England supposedly not receiving its fair share tend to come from poorer regions of the North and Midlands.

17 Esler, Gavin. *How Britain Ends*, p. 64.

ture of patriotic destiny."[18] Nearly half a century on, one might consider this exaggerated, but both these somewhat pessimistic analyses need to be taken seriously in their concern about how a dangerous English nationalism could emerge. At least we might note the measured tone of Professor Keating's remarks:

> The threat to unions has, indeed, often come not from complaints from the smaller components but from a growing reluctance of the larger one so to subsume its identity into the whole to accommodate the smaller ones.[19]

The principle of self-determination associated with Woodrow Wilson's approach to the post-war settlement at the time of the Versailles treaty in 1919 was not a case of allowing people who shared the same values, beliefs and language to be together at last in the way they wanted, as if families were at last being re-united after a long separation. To some extent it was a question of establishing buffer states to keep the new Soviet Union with its Bolshevik government at bay. Nationalist feeling could be a means of insulating countries against communism.[20] But ignoring the geopolitical considerations, it wasn't and isn't possible to 'sort out' Europe's differences by simply redrawing a few lines.

It might be tempting to conclude from a consideration of the break-up of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires, not to mention the collapse of the Soviet Union, that the end of the British Union would simply represent a further illustration of a trend which is visible elsewhere in Europe. Such a position is further encouraged by the 'thin end of the wedge' view of devolution which concludes that it is bound to lead eventually to independence. But whatever the fissiparous tendencies of former empires, there has been no consistent pattern of states breaking up. Sometimes, indeed, movement has gone the other way. There have been strong movements for separatism that have even-

18 Nairn, Tom *The Break-up of Britain*, p. 277.

19 Keating, *State and Nation in the United Kingdom*, p. 19.

20 See Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, pp. 132–134. Hobsbawm points out (p. 134) that 'the nationalism of small nations was just as impatient of minorities as what Lenin called "great-nation chauvinism."' See Hobsbawm's *Age of Extremes*, pp. 31–34 for an account of the motives behind the Treaty of Versailles. He suggests that the best way of dealing with Bolshevism's triumph in 1917 was seen as being the creation of what he calls a '*cordon sanitaire*' of anti-communist states around it (see *Age of Extremes* p. 32).

tually been resolved by former separatists consenting to be part of a greater whole that affords them a high degree of autonomy. Hobsbawm comments:

> Even in regions where the classic aspiration for separate nation-states might be expected to be strong, effective devolution or regionalisation has pre-empted it, or even reversed it. State separatism in the Americas, at any rate south of Canada, has declined since the American Civil War. And it is significant that the states defeated in World War II, on which a high degree of devolution was imposed – presumably in reaction against fascist centralisation – lack most of the separatist movements of the rest of western Europe, though on paper Bavaria and Sicily are at least as obvious breeding-grounds for such movements as Scotland and the francophone parts of the Bernese Jura.[21]

Hobsbawm believes that the high measure of autonomy given to the fifty states in the USA, or to the Länder in Germany whose autonomy is protected by its powerful second chamber the *Bundesrat*, or the regional autonomy legislation passed in Italy in 1946, has helped to offset the sort of separatist pressure which is likely to be seen in more centralised states like (despite devolution) the UK and France. In other words, he believes that devolution can work and is not destined to lead to nations or regions, having once tasted a measure of autonomy, wanting more and more until eventually they achieve full independence.

The Churn and the Cathedral

As the comments of the lady in the phone-in with David Lammy make clear, it is easy to have a distorted vision of how the nations we live in came into being. We can recall Lammy's comment that 'England has always been a country in which Huguenots, Danes, all sorts of people have passed through.' We can also bear in mind Norman Davies' comment about the Isles, namely that we all like to believe that we 'possessed' our lands since time immemorial. In reality, he goes on, 'wherever one looks on the map of Europe, except perhaps Iceland, one sees layer upon layer of settlement, statehood and occupation.'[22] Rather in the way that a cathedral turns out to have been constructed and reconstructed

21 Hobsbawm, Eric, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, p. 187.

22 Davies, *The Isles*, p. 35.

over centuries, through adaptations reflecting new styles or theological developments, and in some cases rebuilt entirely because of fire or destruction in war, so countries (and continents) that like to parade their continuity with a distant past turn out to be amalgams born of migrations, invasions and conquests.

In his classic text *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson calls a nation an 'imagined political community'. It is a community because it is thought of in terms of 'a deep, horizontal comradeship,'[23] whatever divisions and inequalities may lie within it. It is 'imagined,' a word loaded with the idea of falsity, as in 'you're just imagining things,' but intended to mean that people will only ever encounter a small percentage of their fellow nationals and can only presume a common bond with them. Many motives might encourage people to seek such a bond. It may be the idea that their nation lives on after they die (it sometimes doesn't, as Davies' *Vanished Kingdoms* makes clear). They may be drawn by common religious commitment, a common dynastic heritage or a common language. They may sense that nations, like individuals and families, develop through linear time, their public spaces filling with clocks and calendars, with newspapers bought and sold for particular days and then immediately obsolescent as 'yesterday's news'. And they will develop a bond through myths and rituals, preferably ones that go right back to their misty origins.

'Imagined' might, as Anderson carefully points out, be something closer to 'consider oneself as', a phrase he takes from Seton-Watson's *Nations and States*, than 'invented'.[24] At the same time, there surely *is* a degree of invention in the way recently formed traditions are presented as ancient. As with the cathedral whose grandeur makes one all too easily think of a particular architect and a particular time of construction, there is a tendency to think of a nation arriving at a particular point with its columns and buttresses, in the form of its language, values and culture, already in position. But the Gothic pile that towers above the landscape may turn out to be a 'neo-Gothic' construction that emerged in Victorian times. The nation's ancient traditions may turn out to be much more recent than they are commonly believed to be. Indeed, the same can be said of communities and institutions within the nation. Hobsbawm's

23 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 7.

24 See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 6. He quotes Seton-Watson remarking in *Nations and States*, p. 5 that 'All that I can find to say is that a nation exists when a significant number of people in a community considers themselves to form a community or behave as if they formed one.'

remarkable autobiography *Interesting Times* describes his years as a student at Cambridge University and refers in the following terms to the experience that, he explains, later inspired *The Invention of Tradition*:

> Everything was designed to make us into pillars of a tradition reaching back to the 13th century, though some of the most apparently ancient expressions of it, such as the Festival of Lessons and Carols on Christmas Eve in King's College Chapel, had in fact been invented only a few years before I arrived in the college. Undergraduates wore their short black gowns to go to lectures and supervisions, into the obligatory collective dinner in college halls and (with caps) whenever out in the streets after dark, policed by more amply gowned and capped Proctors, assisted by their 'bulldogs.' Dons entered lecture rooms with their long gowns billowing and the squares planted with precision on their heads.… The Cambridge past, like the ceremonial fancy-dress past of British public life, was not, of course, a chronological succession of time, but a synchronic jumble of its surviving relics.[25]

Just as one likes to think of the cathedral springing up fully formed as an expression of one person's grand idea, so the beginnings of nations often have 'founders' whose activities are surrounded by myths and legends. In reality, a hotchpotch of traditions and customs will have emerged over time, some of them pointing back to a distant past that never existed. The chinks in their complicated development will be ironed out and they may even be treated as if nations somehow emerged without any outside influences at all. England, as Lammy pointed out, has been built up through waves of immigration. He mentions the Huguenots, Protestants fleeing waves of persecution in France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in many cases ending up in England. He also mentions the Danes, perhaps going back to the Viking invasions of the ninth and tenth centuries. This was not an instance of one fully formed nation invading another, but was part of a constant churn as various groups formed and re-formed, pushing each other aside or amalgamating in the process. He uses the term 'passing through', which some obviously did, while others stayed. But his main point is to stress the churn, the complexity of movement in and out even after borders become relatively secure, as waves of migration continued across the continent and the Isles.

Yet recognising the haphazard and even artificial manner in which nations have emerged does not take away the common bond engendered by patriotic

25 Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, p. 103.

feeling. Change is not the enemy of identity. In the case of cathedrals, there is nothing in the discovery that they have been damaged or razed to the ground, then to be patched up or even rebuilt by new architects, which alters the sense of encountering a single building. Even a change in the nature of the religion in whose name they were built (one thinks of the effects of the Reformation upon England's cathedrals and the way some of them lost their statues and their saints) need not mean that they lose their identity.

The same can easily be said of nations. In this instance too, it is easy to forget the way in which they have been 'damaged' and 'rebuilt' over time. Some of their traditions seek to create a fictitious past in order to strengthen an identity which tries to base itself upon rituals and customs going back centuries. *The Invention of Tradition* (originally written some forty years ago but reprinted as recently as 2012) contains essays on the highland tradition in Scotland, the 'hunt for the Welsh past in the Romantic period' and 'the British monarchy and the invention of tradition', in each case showing that what is presented as a tradition going back centuries is in fact something much more recent. The kilt is an eighteenth-century invention (by an Englishman), Welsh national costume is a nineteenth-century invention to boost tourist revenues from eisteddfods and the trappings of the British monarchy emerged only when monarchs had lost enough power to make their glorification through ceremonial acceptable, again in the nineteenth century.[26]

The Invention of Tradition applies the process of invention to Scotland and Wales as much as to England, as well as to the monarchy which tries to unite all three. But none of this needs to undermine their distinctive identity or the attachment their citizens feel. The 'horizontal comradeship' spoken of by Anderson is still able to develop across the nation.

The question is how far the haphazard and even artificial manner in which nations have emerged affects the question of whether the 'four nations' of the UK can reasonably continue to be part of a single nation-state. No definitive answer can be given, but the very complexity of the amalgam surely confirms the view made earlier that for the English to peel off the Scots and Welsh and

26 See Hugh Trevor-Roper's chapter 'The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland' for the kilt, Prys Morgan's 'From a Death to a View: The hunt for a Welsh Past in the Romantic Period' for Welsh costume and the eisteddfod, and David Cannadine's chapter 'The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the "Invention of Tradition," c1820-1977' for the monarchy. They are all chapters of T*he Invention of Tradition*, edited by Hobsbawm and Ranger.

arrive at some kind of pure kernel that can be regarded as the 'true nation' is a chimera.

For this reason, we might be a little less confident than people like Professor Edgerton are about a future England at last being 'comfortable in itself', as if it had just successfully come through an operation on conjoined twins (or triplets). It might well simply find that the prejudices and resentments have been transposed to a new level – and possibly even intensified. Like David Lammy's interlocutor, it may be that some people 'expect' that once they can be nothing but English they will be able to slough off the sort of multicultural associations that seem to give them trouble and at last reach the sort of inner purity they aspire to. When she says that the MP can be British but not English, it is as if she is willing to let the invader break down the outer wall but never the inner – forgetting that the inner core is just as 'corrupted' – in her terms – as the outer.

A comment on immigration

Professor Vernon Bogdanor, in a lecture delivered to the Glasgow Philosophical Society online during COVID-19,[27] was unable to understand why the Scots might find the constraints of being inside the EU less overpowering than those of being part of the UK. He made some perfectly fair points. Inside the British Union, he pointed out, the Scots have 10% of the seats in Parliament; inside the European Parliament they would have far fewer. They would have to allow their economy to be regulated by the rules of the single market. As a country joining after the Treaty of Maastricht, they would be unable to retain their own currency. They would have to accept the free movement of people, one of the four unavoidable principles of the single market and one which effectively meant that they would be unable to control their own immigration policy. If the Scots really wanted independence, he continued, surely it made more sense for them to become an independent nation-state outside the Union like Switzerland or Norway (although he failed to make clear that these countries too were bound by many of the rules of the single market, including the free movement of people).

27 'The EU without Britain: Never Closer Union?' – a lecture and discussion given to the Royal Philosophical Society of Glasgow. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LO5olYIEzBw

What Bogdanor misses is the extent to which the other nations inside the British Union feel a pressure from England that England does not feel from them. Immigration from elsewhere in the European Union was undoubtedly a factor in the UK vote to leave the European Union. But Scotland and (in particular) Wales have a very good reason for not being too disturbed by immigration. As an earlier chapter tried to illustrate, Wales has had to endure waves of immigration from the English and has had to maintain its identity despite being part of a union which the English have effectively controlled.

Nothing that immigration from the EU could throw at the UK in the twenty-first century could possibly approach the effect of the 'Ulster plantations' upon one of Ireland's provinces. Nothing in the 'wave' of young Polish workers in search of jobs in the UK after their country joined the EU in 2004 could match the effect of thousands of English workers moving to the coalfields of South Wales in the first decade of the twentieth century. It is quite natural that someone from Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland could welcome EU membership as a way of lessening their dependence upon England. In an analogy which is questionable on many fronts, Professor Bogdanor suggested that a divorce between England and Scotland would make little sense if one of the divorcees (presumably the man) then went off with 27 mistresses. But from the perspective of the non-English nations inside the UK, it is more a case of seeking some sort of social life outside a marriage which has become intolerably oppressive. Indeed, what seems to be lacking in Bogdanor's approach (and is particularly evident in his address to the Glasgow Philosophical Society in 2021) is his lack of awareness of how European people in Scotland feel, something that has been observed by a number of writers and which obviously has roots in the history of a nation reaching out for alliances 'auld' and new against England.[28]

Conclusion

For the English, following Simms' description, the association with Scotland, Wales and Ireland was more a case of running to close the back door while

28 Bogdanor's address (and some discussion of it) can be found on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LO5olYIEzBw. For observations on a strong sense of European identity among Scots (not necessarily, it should be stressed, favouring independence) see McCrone, 'What Makes a European in Scotland?'

facing dangerous threats at the front of the house. They weren't enriching themselves by association; they were grabbing additional baggage from 'outside' with which to fortify their own house against their enemies. This makes it easier for them to slide into a view that new 'enemies' in the form of waves of immigration are threatening to storm the fortress in their turn.

No one denies that there are distinctive characteristics of England as of the other nations of the UK or the other states of Europe. But this 'imagined' community with many of its 'invented' traditions is being constantly re-fashioned from outside. To suppose that someone like David Lammy is not part of the remaking of England but someone interfering with it from beyond is not just a racist attitude but one with no sense of how England has always been made and re-made through the centuries.

The other nations inside the UK have more of a sense of being made from outside because of the influence of England on their making. But the narrative myth of England's survival, with its emphasis upon the island fortress seeing off waves of invaders, lays all the emphasis upon being *threatened* from beyond and thereby loses the sense that it has been *made* from beyond as well. It may be that the 'Little England' mentality can be cast aside by a nation once again 'comfortable with itself' as Professor Edgerton suggests, but this chapter has tried to show that it might produce a combination of introversion and resentment as the promised return to its 'pure core' proves illusory.