

National identities: are they declining?

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Abstract

The main question addressed in this review is whether national identities are likely to remain an important feature of our societies in the coming decades. Some have argued that national identities are declining, due to increasing globalisation, the growth of supra-national organisations such as EU, the increasing multicultural nature of our societies, and, in multi-national countries like the UK, the presence of separatist movements with substantial political support. However, the review of current evidence and current practices (as well as their likely evolution) suggests the following points: national identities (including British identity) are likely to remain important in the next **decades, despite the alleged 'fragmenting' effects of globalisation and advances in** technologies of communication; European integration and the possible development of a European identity are unlikely to lead to the disappearance of existing national identities, especially in the UK; The impact of strong sub-state national identities, devolution and separatist movements in the UK remain uncertain, but the scenario of an upcoming break-up of Britain does not seem the most likely; national identity is not necessarily incompatible with, or threatened by, multiculturalism, though it may be increasingly perceived as such in the UK. This review will also address the question of the consequences of national identities in term of their relationship with others, arguing that this impact depends on how the boundaries and content of national identities are defined, and that such definitions are open to argument and political contestation. The review will conclude with some reflections on the possible role of national identities in future educational practices.

Keywords: identity, globalisation, europe, multiculturalism

The literature and research on national identities is vast, and, for the purpose of this review, a selection was necessary in terms of the questions, arguments and data to be discussed. The main question that this review will address is whether national identities are likely to remain an important feature of our contemporary societies in the coming decades. This question arises because it is often argued that national identities are on the decline, due to increasing globalisation, the growth of supra-national organisations such as the EU, and the increasing multicultural nature of our societies. In the UK, there has been much talk of a **crisis of 'Britishness'** (eg see **Bechhofer and McCrone, 2007; Gamble, 2003**), compounded by the fact that it is also seen by some as threatened by devolution and separatist movements in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. In terms of what the plausible scenarios for the next few decades are, it will be argued, however, that current evidence and trends suggest the following points:

- National identities in general are still a key feature of our contemporary world and are likely to remain so in the next decades, **despite the alleged 'fragmenting'** effects of globalisation and advances in technologies of communication
- European integration and the possible development of a European identity are unlikely to lead to the disappearance of existing national identities, as national identities are (and are likely to remain in the near future) the main basis on which (pro or con) attitudes towards the EU and a sense of European identity (if any) are built upon. What is possible is that the process of European integration may lead to a re-definition of national identity, but this may not be the most likely scenario in the UK
- The impact of strong sub-state national identities, devolution and separatist movements in the UK remain uncertain, but the scenario of an upcoming break-up of Britain does not seem the most likely
- National identity is not necessarily incompatible with or threatened by multiculturalism, though current trends in the UK suggest that they may be seen as increasingly so.

The main theoretical argument that will be followed throughout the review is that **national identities are intimately bound with the existence of 'nationalist' practices** (ie practices that are framed explicitly or implicitly in national terms and within which nationality makes a difference), and with the extent to which these practices shape **people's everyday experiences. As long as nationalist practices endure, we are likely to** retain national identities, whilst the particular meanings of national identities are also shaped by these practices. Although partial, the choice of this argument is not arbitrary. Indeed it enables the creation of a number of scenarios as to the future evolution of national identities, by providing a concrete basis on which to do so. It is arguably easier and more realistic to postulate about possible change in everyday practices - including those driven by technological developments - that could affect national identities than, say, trying to predict long-term changes in nationalist ideology or reactions to essentially unpredictable future political events.

The issue of the consequences of national identities will also be addressed in this review, an issue which is all the more important if national identities are not in decline. In particular, the review will ask how national identity impacts on relationships with foreigners or immigrants. Of course, whether the consequences of a sense of national identity are seen as positive or negative, and thus whether it should be encouraged or discouraged and in what ways heavily depends on the nature of political objectives which are open to political discussion and contestation. But even if there were to be a consensus at that level (eg reducing intergroup prejudice and discrimination is important), the consequences of national identities in attaining or undermining these objectives are not necessarily obvious. In this respect, the key argument will be that these depend on how national identities are defined, both in terms of content and boundaries.

1. Nationalist practices and banal nationalism

It is easy to argue that nationalism is still one of the most potent political forces in our contemporary world by pointing to such phenomena as the multitude of separatist movements across the world (including in the UK), the so-called 'resurgence of nationalism' in Eastern Europe following the collapse of the USSR, as well as the strength of anti-European feelings amongst part of the British population.

Yet it can be argued that limiting nationalism to such phenomena still underestimate its **impact and omnipresence, as it tends to equate it with expressions of 'hot nationalism'** (Billig, 1995). That is, nationalism is often exclusively associated with separatism, bloody conflicts, extreme right-wing politics, parochialism and prejudice against others, and with extraordinary, irrational and dangerous emotions. But, as Billig (1995) has shown, **most nationalism is, in fact, 'banal'. It lies in the myriads of institutions and practices** that shape our everyday experiences and which presuppose and reinforce the idea that the world is organised in terms of nations. We have become so accustomed to these practices that we end up taking them for granted and fail to take notice of their nationalist dimension. This also applies to education, mass media, television and newspapers to maps, sports, weather forecasting, alimentary products, and so on. When **the news bulletins talk about 'the' economy or the weather forecast about 'the' weather,** they are implicitly referring to the national economy or the national weather – but that fact does not need to be mentioned. The flag on British beef or on a French baguette in the supermarket may not have to be waved or saluted - nevertheless it implies the relevance of national differences in the choice of what to eat for dinner.

To take another example that concerns education, in teaching history at school, and putting aside the perhaps understandable bias towards prioritising national history, there is still the fact, taken for granted, that it is each nation that has a history, albeit one that can include being relations with other nations, or being divided internally. That is, nations are the relevant categories around which history is organised and told. In the same spirit, Brubaker (1996) also underlines the role of state policies and administration which tend to take nationhood as a natural given.

Billig's point is that the potency of nationalism, that can be seen most clearly in expressions of 'hot nationalism', can nevertheless only be explained if we take into account all of these practices that (banally) maintain nationalism and a sense of national identity on a regular basis in our everyday life. The strength of banal nationalism resides precisely in going unnoticed, and only its daily maintenance of nationalism can explain why nationalist sentiments can seem to surge suddenly and so strongly in times of crisis such as wars. He also points out that the difference between banal and hot nationalism is often the difference between our nationalism, which is taken for granted in the UK, and the more visible nationalism of others.

It is also clear that the practices that maintain the nation in existence (or indeed any large-scale social group) and our sense of national identity on an everyday basis are only possible because of technological devices. Indeed, Anderson (1991) has linked the very birth of national awareness in the 18th century to the invention of print, which, together with the rise of capitalism that lead to the production and distribution of printed goods on a mass scale, allowed people to imagine themselves as members of a community, sharing the same experiences and information when, for instance, reading the same morning newspapers. Today we must add radio, television, internet, and all other means of mass communication and mass transport which make it possible for people to both imagine and relate to others as fellow members of the same national community, despite geographical distances (Adam, 1992; Calhoun, 1991; Condor, 1996a; Giddens, 1990).

It follows that the development of new technologies in this area has the potential to alter both the sense and meanings of national identities. What these technologies will be

capable of, who has access to them, who controls the content that goes through them, and how they are used in practice will determine how national identity can be shaped and by whom. This will be explored in some more detail below.

As for nationalism, the fact that national identities are amongst the most potent collective identities individuals can have can be illustrated by resorting to examples of hot nationalism and bloody conflicts. There are, indeed, few identities that can lead people not only to kill other human beings, but, even more spectacularly, to die for others (Elshtain, 1993). At the same time, this may again underestimate the importance of national identities where such phenomena are not present and where the impact of national identity is less visible. There are indeed many reasons why overt expression of national pride and identification can be avoided, including its frequent association with ethnocentrism and parochialism, racism, prejudice and discrimination – all of which can lead to an underestimation of the prevalence of national identities.

For instance, Condor has shown that English respondents with liberal individualist values typically show great reluctance to talk about and define English identity. They overtly condemn expressions of nationalistic pride, and often deny that being English defines them in any important way (Condor, 1996b, 1997, 2000, 2006). Condor shows how such reluctance can be explained by the fact that, for these respondents, overt expression of nationalism are associated with Anglo-British xenophobia which conflict with their liberal individualist values. **But Condor's point is that this way of talking about English national identity is so frequent and so typical that it becomes, paradoxically, a characteristic way of expressing English national identity – only one whose content is to condemn overt expression of nationalism. England is, or should be, a place where 'hot nationalism' and its deplorable consequences should be avoided.** Likewise, Billig (1992) showed how English people can use the downplaying of national pride as a way to distinguish themselves from Americans and their overt claim of national pride and greatness (ie 'we are not like that, we don't do that here').

Condor acknowledges that this may be specific to English identity, at least when compared to other national identities in the UK, and certainly her own research (Condor and Abell, 2006) shows that Scots typically have no quarrel with asserting their national identity. More generally, other research suggests that group identity often is less salient, and individualism more prevalent, amongst dominant groups compared to minorities (Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1988; Oyserman and Markus, 1993). One factor may precisely be that identity can more easily be taken for granted in the former case, whilst the specific practices of minorities are **made more 'salient' (less 'banal') in contrast to those of the majority.**

The result is that, in the UK, nationalism and having a strong sense of national identity is often seen as the exclusive property of either Scottish or Welsh separatists - or else, of those who still believe in old-fashioned British imperialism and/or are particularly hostile to foreigners. The SNP, Plaid Cymru, and the BNP are nationalist parties (though of a very different kind), but the Conservatives or the Labour Party are not, and their **politicians can freely talk about the interests of 'this country' without calling upon themselves the label of 'nationalist'.** However, the argument here suggests that separatists appear as the only nationalists because their nationalist political project of separation is made salient by going against the established, taken for granted, nationalist project of maintaining the unity of Britain. As for the BNP, we may say that what differentiates it from other British parties is not the absence or presence of British nationalism but a very different definition of it (see the argument on the content of national identity, in sections 5 and 6).

2. Globalisation and technology: are national identities on the decline?

Although it has been argued that nationalism and national identities are important features of our contemporary world, there are nevertheless those who argue that nationalism and national identities are in decline as globalisation progresses inevitably and relentlessly (eg Kennedy and Danks, 2001; Dogan, 1994). A discussion of the cultural, economic, social and political changes that are grouped under the label of **'globalisation' is well beyond the scope of this review. However, an important part of the** argument relies on the effect of developments in technologies of mass communication and transport. The increased ease with which, thanks to these developments, people are exposed to and can access information and consumption products from all over the world (through newspapers, TV, internet and well-provided supermarkets), learn about different cultures, travel in various countries and even settle in them if they wish to, means that cultural differences between nations are becoming more and more blurred while cultural homogeneity within the nation is becoming more fragmented (Hannerz, 1996). The psychological effect of this is that national identities are losing their psychological significance for individuals both as a system of categorisation and as locus of attachment.

To put it in the language of practices, the argument is that everyday life is less and less **framed by nationalist practices and more and more by 'global' ones, and therefore that nationality and national divisions are less and less important parts of people's** experiences. People are exposed and can access information about what is happening outside as much as within their nation – thus the feeling of shared experience and information with others is no longer concurrent with the limits of the nation. The availability of consumption products from all over the world mean that consumption patterns are crossing national boundaries, while the extension of multi-nationals and international markets (from Coca-Cola to Hollywood movies, and so on.) also means that these patterns are becoming more homogeneous worldwide. The increased ease with which we can communicate instantly with anyone anywhere in the world means that social networks of acquaintances and friendship do not have to be limited by geographical factors as they used to be, and can easily extend beyond national boundaries. The idea is that such changes in practices lead a growing number of people **to develop a 'global' or 'cosmopolitan' rather than national identities (Gergen, 1991; see Doering's review).**

At the same time, the same factors can promote differences within nations, as they provide people with more choice. People can develop specific lifestyles (Giddens, 1991) based on mixing up consumption products and leisure activities imported from a variety of different nations. These patterns of consumption and activities can develop into **"lifestyle-based" identities (eg from Rappers and Goths to Yuppies) that cross national** boundaries and contribute to undermining the sense of shared experiences at the national level. These new identities, not bound to a sense of place, compete with and can become more important than national identity.

However, the decline of the nation-state and the idea of a fragmentation or blurring of national identities have been long-standing topics in the sociological and political science literature (cf. eg Arendt, 1951; Held, 1989), only for analysts to be routinely surprised by their continuous persistence. The claim thus needs to be looked at critically and with caution.

First of all, one fundamental question regarding the supposed fragmenting effect of globalisation is whether so-called **'global' practices really transcend the nationality-based** system of categorisation and make it irrelevant. Does the fact that they are marked by an international dimension **mean that they are really 'transnational'? We may have** access to food and restaurants from a multitude of countries, but they are still mainly identified by nationhood (Italian, Chinese, etc) as opposed to any other basis of categorisation. Newspapers may contain international information, and perhaps more so than they did in the past, but as long as news are categorised as national vs

international (or home vs away), the system of national categories remains. And while one can order goods on the internet from various countries in the world, posting charges will soon be a reminder that which nation one is residing in still matters. Likewise, one may be able to call anywhere in the world from anywhere with a roaming mobile phone, but the price of the call will change as soon as it crosses the national boundary, even where the actual geographical distance may be less than for a national call.

Moreover, where national markers are explicitly missing from practices and products, there is the question of whether this reflects a true nationality-blind cosmopolitanism or whether it is the expression of taken-for granted, banal nationalism and/or of hegemonic nationalism and cultural imperialism (Tomlinson, 1991; Billig, 1995; Smith, 1998) – such as when American products or practices are presented as global or English ones as **British. Thus American movie stars are just 'stars', and whilst there is 'google.co.uk', there is no 'google.co.us', just 'google.com'** - which perhaps does not make it less a product of American culture.

Secondly, one important aspect of the 'fragmentation' argument relies on the fact that the improvements in technologies of communication and transport give people more choice and freedom in terms of the ability to express, develop, and maintain the identities they want, be they national or not. But this also means that people may well choose to use this increased freedom in order to reinforce their national identities as much as to develop alternative identities.

Research on the internet can be taken as a paradigmatic case to answer that question, **as it is arguably the media that currently offers choice, freedom, 'interactivity' and ease** of access to the greatest extent. Indeed it is often taken as the prototypical medium through which national boundaries are becoming less relevant, turning the planet into a **'global village'**. **However, research in this area shows that the internet has so far mostly** been used to strengthen rather than weaken nationalist identities (Eriksen, 2007; see also Schlesinger, 1987, 1991; Richmond, 1984). For instance, a study of internet usage amongst Trinidadians led Miller and Slater (2000) to conclude that

"Trinidadians' national identity and culture is central to their use of the Internet. Contrary to all expectations of a global new medium, they anchor their encounter with **the Internet in their specific place ... Trinidadians on the net are always aware of representing Trinidad, and use the net to expound the virtues of their Island ...** Trinidadian business on the Internet includes a powerfully nationalistic aspiration that translates commercial success into evidence for the presence of Trinidad on a global stage." (p24).

Instead of leading to the development of a new 'global' identity, people often use the internet as a place to express and maintain their national identity. It can be used to promote nationalistic goals, to access information on national culture, to facilitate the maintenance of ties and a sense of common identity between people sharing the same nationality, etc. The particular characteristics or advantages of the internet over older means of communication and publication (eg they are cheap to set up, they can be the work of one person in their spare time, etc; all of these aspects being likely to increase **as technology progresses even further; see Reich's review**) **are being used to that effect.** More than that, the new possibilities offered by internet can be used to counteract the effects of other potentially fragmenting factors (eg diaspora nations, immigrants maintaining contact with their country of origins, etc; see Eriksen, 2007). Whatever the reasons, national identities matter to people, and, when given the choice, many are **committed to 'cultivate' it. It is therefore quite possible that similar trends** will be observed with other media such as TV and mobile phones, as they develop new technologies aimed at offering more choice and interactivity to their users in the future – something which they often aspire to.

Finally, data from large-scale surveys does not provide clear support for the claim of a strong decline in national identity. For instance, data from the Eurobarometer 65 (2007) show that the great majority of people in the EU (90%) and in the UK (88%) declare themselves to be attached or very attached to their country, with 52% in EU and 53% in UK belonging to the last category – suggesting that, if indeed there is decline, it still concerns only a small minority of people (see also Smith and Jarkko, 1998). A recent report (Heath and Roberts, 2008), based on survey data in the UK over several years (such as the British Election survey and the British Social Attitude Survey), and included **as part of Lord Goldsmith's "citizenship review", concluded that, whilst there is evidence of some decline in the strength of British identity over the last decades, "a sense of British identity nevertheless remains widespread and in all three territories the majority of British residents continue to have dual identities, as both British and Scottish, British and Welsh or British and English" (p2). To date, only a minority of 10% of the population seems to reject all four national identities.** Even so, there is a debate as to the meaning of this reject: whilst Fenton (2007) would argue that it reflects a real disengagement from nation identity, Condor's research (see section 1) raises the question as to whether explicit indifference to nationality (or national self-derogation) has to be taken at face value.

The most important factor for the relative decline of British identification is actually not growth in exclusive sub-state national identities but age - younger people feel less British than older people. Admittedly, this is the most important category of people in terms of predicting the future. However, as the author point out, it is unsure whether this may reflect life-cycle processes (ie people developing a stronger sense of national identity as they get older) or generational differences (ie rooted in different experiences of the world and therefore more likely to remain as people get older). The author favours the last interpretation (Tilley and Heath, 2007), but even so it remains to be shown that this is an effect of changes due to globalisation (McCrone, 2002). It could as well, for instance, reflect the **particularity of older people's experiences (such as growing up during or just after the Second World War)** as much as the experience of younger ones.

In any case national identity remains strong amongst the youth, and it seems that, if there is a decline, its effects are still modest at best. Even if that trend should confirm itself in the coming years, national identities will nevertheless remain, for the foreseeable future, a prominent feature of our world as well as a primary locus of identification for a great number of people.

3. National identity and the EU

Another aspect of globalisation is the growth of supra-national economic and political organisations which can, to a greater or lesser extent, put demands on, and limit the sovereignty of, nation-states (Held, 1989). This, according to some, also threatens to undermine national identities and favours the growth of cosmopolitanism (eg Dogan, 1994). The most notable example is the European Union. However, as for the impact of technologies, questions can be raised as to how much the process of European integration and attempts at building a sense of European identity has actually led or will lead to a decline in national (and British) identity.

First of all, it is true that the EU can be seen as threatening existing national identities, and, in the UK, this actually seems to be the case for a majority. According to the Eurobarometer 65 (2007), 39% of people in the EU say they are afraid that the building of Europe may lead to a loss of national identity and culture, the UK reaching the top of the list of EU members with a score of 63%. But, perhaps in part for this reason, it is also the case that attachment to Europe remains much weaker than existing national attachments, with only 63% of Europeans declaring themselves attached or very attached to Europe (**46% in the UK, with only 9% of 'very attached')** compared with the 90% of national attachment (see section 2). It is worth noting that this is despite the

fact that attempts at strengthening a sense of European identity have been in place for a few decades through the establishment of common practices and symbols (eg the EU driving license, the appeal to Roman and Greek heritage, etc; see Marks, 1999; Risse, 2001, Sindic, Castano and Reicher, 2001).

Secondly, whilst the idea of a European identity may be seen by some as competing with and blurring existing national identities, for others there is no necessary incompatibility between the two (as a strong Scottish, Welsh or Irish identity is not necessarily incompatible with a sense of British identity and support for the Union. (See next section). In fact, according to the Eurobarometer 56 (2002), this seems to be the case for a slight majority of Europeans; with an average of 50% of Europeans saying that they feel both European and nationals compared to 44% identifying with their nation only and 3% feeling Europeans only – although in the UK, only 26% of people professed a dual identity compared to 71% feeling British only, confirming once again the more **'Euro-sceptic' tendency of the UK majority.**

Thirdly, not only can European and national identities be seen as compatible, but the development of a European identity, where it takes place, most often operates through national identity. Indeed, those who support the European Union typically argue that instead of posing a threat it actually enhances national identity and interests (Sindic, 2005; Hopkins and Reicher, 1996). One example is provided by the French Minister for European Affairs Michel Barnier, **when he stated that Europe is "essential for our country's future, its safety, its prosperity, its influence and identity" (1997, p.1).** As Risse (2005) points out **"the evidence suggests that socialization into European identity works not so much through trans-national processes or through exposure to European institutions, but on the national levels in a process whereby Europeanness or 'becoming European' is gradually being embedded in understandings of national identities" (p.1).** Indeed, European and national identification are somewhat positively correlated in the majority of European countries, (Huici et al, 1997; Duchesne and Frognier, 1995; Marks, 1999), though this does not seem to be the case in the UK (Cinnirella, 1997)

As regards the future, it is possible, of course, that European identity will gain strength over time in the next decades. The efforts that the EU has made over the past decades to build a stronger European identity may be seen as doomed by Euro-sceptics as these try to strategically **create an 'artificial' unity out of an irreducible diversity: Europeans do not speak a common language, do not share a common history, collective myths and symbols, or common religious and ethnic backgrounds (Risse, 2001; Smith 1992).** However, the planned and strategic character of these efforts does not make them essentially different from typical strategies of nation-building that have been used all over the world for the last two centuries (Rochat, 2001; see also section 6), some of which have proven quite successful in the long-term.

Furthermore, the question of whether Europeans possess enough of a common history and symbols is very much a question of argument and perception. For instance, the use of historical figures such as Orwell, Bach, Mozart, Erasme, etc as European icons does not necessarily have to be seen as a distortion of history or the convenient denial of their national origins, but can also be seen as the recovery of the cosmopolitan influence they once had before they were appropriated by nationalist projects (Reszler, 1992). As Reichler (1992) points out, one of the difficulties in the European construction of Europe may not be the lack of possible common symbols but on the contrary that there are too many too choose from.

Nevertheless, the data above shows that European identity has certainly still a long way to go before it can even compete in strength with national identities, if it ever will. Moreover, there are strong reasons to doubt that it will replace or supersede national identities in the near future. Indeed, whilst European integration has led to the establishment of some common practices, these are arguably still outweighed both in

terms of number and impact by the myriads of existing nationalist practices. In particular, electoral practices are still nationally-based, even for European elections, as it is through the nation that politicians gain their seats on the European Union. The audience to whom they have to appeal in these elections is national, and therefore it is no surprise that, as exemplified above, pro-European as much as anti-European arguments are still most frequently based on the national interest and identity instead of appealing to the interests and identity of Europe as a whole (see also section 6). As it stands, there is no election for, say, a European president, who would have to address the European audience at large, and where all Europeans would be involved in the same debates and shared experiences (and given the recent difficulties with the European constitution, it seems unlikely that anything of the sort will happen soon).

It can also be argued that Euro-sceptics are partly right when they point to language differences as a significant obstacle. As the existence of multi-language states such as Belgium and Switzerland show, language differences are not necessarily concomitant with national, ethnic or other identities, and they should therefore not be reified as insurmountable cultural differences. Nevertheless, language differences are a key factor in terms of the practices we have access to and take part in everyday life (such as, for instance, which media we follow), and thus in the development of distinct identities. There is, of course, the possibility that technological development may make language translation easier and faster in the future, through, for instance, the development of AI translation programs. But questions can be raised as to whether these will reach a level of efficiency more or less equivalent to human translation, so as to allow their regular use in daily, banal practices, such as watching TV or reading the newspaper.

Finally, whilst it has been argued that the development of a European identity does not generally act like a zero-sum game, requiring the effacement of national identity in the process, it may nevertheless require its re-definition. Where it is seen as a threat to existing notions of national identity, as is currently the case for the majority in the UK, the possibility of promoting a stronger sense of European identity would depend on re-defining either national or European identity so as to make them more compatible. But of course, attempts at doing so may fail and even backfire, as efforts at re-definitions may precisely be construed as part of why Europe is a threat to national identity and thus lead to widespread resentment and reactance. As it stands, the long history of the UK as one of the most Euro-sceptic countries in Europe (dating back to at least the 1970s), as well as the fact that common images of British specificity often relies on distinguishing itself strongly from the rest of Europe (eg British specificity as being rooted in the categorisation of British Isles vs the continent. See Abell, Condor, and Stevenson, 2006), mean that attempts at re-defining Britishness as more consonant with a European identity are faced with unfavourable odds.

4. National identity and separatism

In multi-national states like the UK, the presence of strong sub-state national identities is sometimes seen as a threat to the unity of the country. The concern over the alleged loss of an unifying sense of British identity is also that it may be linked (as cause or effect) to an increase in sub-state national identity (Scottish, Welsh, Irish), and that such transfer of identification might lead towards political separatism and precipitate the break-up of Britain. This concern was already part of the political debates leading to devolution, and some still fear that devolution might promote this process. The question here is not about the possible decline of national identity per se, but about the strengthening of one national identity at the expense of another. But is a sense of sub-state national identity necessarily linked with support for separatism, and is it necessarily incompatible with a sense of state-level national (British) identity?

In Scotland, survey data – including data from the Scottish Parliamentary Election Survey since 1979 - show that there is indeed a correlation between Scottish identity

and support for separatism, as well as vote for the SNP (Paterson et al, 2001; Thomson, Park, and Brooks; 1999; Thomson, Park and Bryson, 2000, Brown, McCrone; Paterson and Surridge, 1999; see also Abrams, 1994). However, this correlation may be due to the fact that low identifiers are more likely to support the Union, whereas high identifiers may support the Union as well as separatism (Sindic and Reicher, in press). Indeed it is possible to defend the Union either on the basis of Scottish or British identities, whereas separatism can only be defended in the name of Scottish identity and interests.

Likewise, Paterson et al (2001) point out from the election surveys data that whilst (for instance), in 1999, 31% of Scottish identifiers supported independence, as opposed to 11% of British identifiers, this latter result also means that the majority of Scottish **identifiers did not support independence, and therefore that "... thinking of oneself as Scottish does not guarantee support for independence"** (p.112). These authors conclude **that there is a poor correspondence between identity and political attitudes "not because it is unimportant, but because it is all-pervasive, and not the property of any single political party"** (p.115-116) or any particular political project.

Political attitudes towards membership of a superordinate group may then depend on whether people feel that their identity is threatened by being part of that larger group (Hornsey and Hogg, 2001), and thus, on how such identity is defined. Indeed, Scots who do support separatism do so because they feel that being part of the UK undermines the Scottish way of life and the specificity of the Scottish ethos, as the UK practices are tailored to the interests and practices of the English. But strong Scottish identifiers may well support the Union if being part of the UK is seen as enhancing national identity and serving the Scottish interest (Sindic and Reicher, in press).

In that context, an interesting finding by Condor and Abell (2006) shows the very different relationship to British identity in England and Scotland. As indicated above, English people can often be reluctant to talk about Englishness; usually preferring to use British identity as they feel it is more inclusive of other nationalities in Britain, thus showing a lay understanding of the idea of identity threat. However, the use of British **identity can often be more threatening for Scots, who can see it as a sign of 'imperialism'** - of disguising English identity and interests under a more inclusive mask - and who would prefer English people to call themselves English.

But as noted in section 2, there is evidence that the majority of Scottish and Welsh people do actually have a dual identity, even though it is true that they are much more likely to choose Scottish or Welsh national identity over British identity as their primary identity, compared to English people vis-à-vis English identity (Heath and Roberts, 2008). Data from the Scottish Social Attitude Survey show that, in 2005, only 32% of Scots and 24% of Welsh people chose an exclusive national identity (ie feeling Scottish/Welsh, not British). Even amongst Scots who support independence, nearly half of them (49%) felt British to some extent (Bechhofer and McCrone, 2007).

As for the impact of devolution, it is difficult to make long-term predictions, because theoretical support can be found for both predictions made at the time that it would either increase or decrease the strength of Scottish identity and support for separatism. Proponents of devolution claimed that by giving more self-control to Scotland, it would **alleviate Scots' concerns as regards the expression of their specificity, thereby providing** a safety valve for separatist sentiments. Such a reasoning can find support in the research on identity threat mentioned above, the implication of which is that respecting the specificity of different identities is the best strategy to avoid increasing support for separatism.

On the other hand, opponents of devolution claimed that it would exacerbate differences between England and Scotland and thereby feed both a sense of exclusive Scottish national identity and the support for independence. Theoretical support for this position

can be found too. Indeed, if nationalism and nationalist sentiments are created and maintained by nationally-shaped practices (as argued in section 1), the fact that devolution did lead to the creation of differential practices North and South of the Border could lead to reinforce the sentiment of a separate Scottish identity. Although it has been argued above that (Scottish) national identification is not a sufficient condition to support the case for independence, it could nevertheless increase its likelihood if it is a necessary one.

As it stands, however, empirical data from the Scottish Social Attitudes survey (1992 to 2007) show that there is no real evidence that it has had a significant impact on either the strength of Scottish identity or support for independence, in either way. As regards Scottish identity, it seems that, if anything, there was some increase in Scottish identity before devolution was established, but it has since remained more or less constant (Heath and Roberts, 2008). As for support for independence, it was 28% in 1999 when the Scottish Parliament was put in place, did somewhat increased in 2004 (32%) and 2005 (34%), but then was down to 24% in 2007, virtually identical to the 23% of support found in 1992. At any rate, support for independence has so far never outweighed support for devolution which has ranged from 44% (2005) to 62% (2007), although it is true that the majority of Scots do favour increased powers for the Scottish Parliament.

Reviewing the evidence, Bechhofer and McCrone (2007) concluded in 2007 that "... the findings of our research over the past decade are such that we would be surprised if the break-up of Britain were to occur in the near future" (p.252). This, however, was just before the SNP was elected in the 2007 Scottish parliament election, with a mandate to conduct a referendum on independence. Nevertheless, support for independence and vote for the SNP are not necessarily identical phenomena (Paterson et al, 2001). Furthermore, even if an increase in support for separatism could be shown as an unequivocal fact, whether this is indeed due to devolution and the processes hypothesised above or to other factors would remain to be shown.

5. National identities and others

Beyond the concerns over the political unity of the UK, the recent angst over a possible crisis of British identity can also be explained by the fact that a solid, unifying sense of national identity is often seen as promoting solidarity, civic attitudes, a sense of citizenship and duty, and even as a key component of democracy by legitimising the representation process and the distribution of resources (Sears, Davies and Reid, 2008; Heath, 2007; Heath and Roberts, 2008; Marks, 1999). The downside of these political and social merits, however, is that the idea of a strong sense of national identity is also often associated with parochial, inward-looking and xenophobic attitudes and behaviours (see section 1). To take but one recent example, Kumar (2006) concerned by the possibility of a revival of English nationalism, does not hesitate to qualify nationalism as **"increasingly quaint, if not downright reactionary and backward-looking" and as the opposite of being "outward looking" and "committed to the great causes of humanity"** (p.10). But is having a strong national identity necessarily linked to parochialism, prejudice and hostility against others?

The anti-others reputation of national identity may seem to find some support in identity theories that emphasise the fact that a sense of identity is established by distinguishing oneself from others, and preferably in a positive way (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1978, 1981; Barth, 1969; Brewer, 1991). Thus discrimination and prejudice towards national outgroups may be seen as the expression of this quest for (positive) distinctiveness, especially where the target groups are seen as a threat to a cherished identity (Breakwell, 1983, 1986; Riek, Mania, and Gaertner, 2006; Brandscombe and Wann, 1984; Brandscombe, Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje, 1999; Stephan and Stephan, 2000; Stephan and Renfro, 2003). Indeed, if comparison to others is intrinsic to defining

oneself, then maintaining a distinctly positive ingroup identity seems to involve putting down others. And certainly, there is a vast amount of experimental studies that have **illustrated how 'easily' people can be lead** to discriminate against others, even where group distinctions are based on seemingly trivial and/or arbitrary differences, such as **categorising people according to paintings' preferences or the toss of a coin and asking** them to allocate resources to both groups (Tajfel et al, 1971; Billig and Tajfel, 1973).

Such experiments are undoubtedly food for thought. Nonetheless, the idea that identification with a group (national or other) necessarily leads to prejudice and discrimination has not always been supported by empirical studies (see eg Hinkle and Brown, 1990).

In light of these inconsistent results, some authors have argued for a distinction to be made between ingroup favouritism/love and outgroup derogation/hate (eg see Brewer, 1999), with the idea that group identification should lead to the former, but not necessarily the latter. Within the more specific context of national identities, a similar **distinction has been proposed between patriotism (the love of one's country) and nationalism (the dislike of foreigners;** see Mummendey, Klink and Brown, 1999; Blank and Schmidt, 2003; Rothi, Lyons, and Chryssochoou, 2005).

However, a criticism of these approaches is that they propose simplistic, rather **Manichean distinctions which try to identify 'good' and 'evil' forms of group identification** and nationalism. They therefore ignore the complexities of the meanings that can be attributed to national identities, where we can be tolerant of some people but not of others, and of some things but not of others (Hopkins, in press; Reicher and Hopkins, 2001). Moreover, even proponents of the distinction have to acknowledge that nationalism and patriotism are, in practice, correlated (Viki and Calitri, 2008).

Furthermore, even if we could accept such distinctions, we **could still ask whether 'mere'** ingroup favouritism or patriotism is necessarily always benign. In some cases, it may well lead to a more subtle form of passive discrimination. As Levine and Thompson (2004; Levine et al, 2005) have shown, seeing others as fellow members of the same group means that we are more likely to help them in times of need, with the implication that we are less likely to help those who are not, even if we do not get out of our way to **harm them. While we may perhaps find it 'fair game'** that each country favours their own first and accept to be on the downside of such preferential treatment when, say, we visit their country as tourists, it is certainly more problematic in the case of immigrant communities. This kind of passive discrimination, with which they may have to live on an everyday basis (from shop attendants taking more time to serve them to dealings with administration), together with the preferential treatment they may possibly get from their fellow immigrants (assuming that there is an immigrant community and that there are a part of it), can only reinforce the segregation of communities and of their daily practices.

Other researchers have emphasised that the consequences, in terms of intergroup behaviour, of identifying with the nation and of perceiving and acting on the base of national identity depend on the content of that identity (Livingstone and Haslam; 2008; **Smith and Postmes, in press**), as well as the **target group's identity (Billig, 1985) and how 'they' are seen to impact on 'us' (Reicher and Hopkins, 2001; Reicher, Hopkins, Levine and Rath, 2005).** Thus, whilst people may need to differentiate themselves positively from others, they may well do so by defining themselves as being more charitable, more egalitarian, or more welcoming to others and act accordingly (Jetten, Spears and Manstead, 1996, 1997; Reicher, Cassidy, Hopkins and Levine, 2006). To take a counter-example, saying that Nazi anti-Semitism was due to the desire to establish a positive and distinct German identity does not explain why the Jews were a particular target, nor why they needed to be eradicated. This can only be explained if we take into account the particular content of the Nazi version of German identity and their

whole theory of the world which defined the Jews as running an international conspiracy and as corrupting the master race.

Nevertheless, we should be careful to think that seemingly 'positive', pro-social contents of national identity necessarily lead to positive intergroup relationships. Rather, the consequences of any particular identity content depend on how they are inserted in larger narratives. In some cases positive content can even be used to justify hostility **towards others (eg "we are tolerant, but they are not, therefore we can't live together as** they threaten our value of tolerance). Likewise, it would be dangerous (in fact very close to legitimising segregation and/or discrimination) to think that due to their contents certain identities are, by nature, essentially incompatible and therefore can only threaten each other. Without ignoring practical difficulties that can arise from different interests and ways of life, what identities are seen as compatible or not and whether identity is threatened by others is very much open to argumentation and political debate (see next section).

How national identities shape attitudes towards 'minorities' living in the country also depends, quite obviously, on whether they are included or excluded of the national category. The issue of who can and who cannot claim nationhood is related to the issue of content in that it may determine the criteria of belongingness. For instance, where national identity is defined in ethnic or racial terms, those who fail to fulfil these criteria will be excluded, whilst other criteria will present a different pattern of inclusion/exclusion. Whilst it may not always lead to open hostility, it will determine who enjoys solidarity (informal or not) and who does not. Like content, however, the issue of where the boundaries of belongingness are drawn and on what criteria they are based are very much open to argument and different interpretations.

6. The contested meanings and boundaries of national identity

If the nature of behaviour towards others based on a group or national identity is shaped by the content or meaning ascribed to this identity, investigating the content of national identities in the UK could help enlighten us about the risk and prevalence of nationally-based prejudice and discrimination in the UK.

However, such investigation is not simple because, as a lot of research has emphasised, national identity is constantly (re-)constructed through discourse, practices and everyday interactions (Condor, 2000; Hester and Housley, 2002; Johnston, 1999; McCrone et al, 1998; De Cillia, Reisigl and Wodak, R, 1999; Wodak et al, 1999). This means that identity definitions and boundaries are extremely flexible, so much so that doubts can be raised as to whether they can be attributed any fixed answer. Not only can people disagree over the meaning of being English, British (Condor, 1997; Jacobsen, 1997), Scottish (Reicher, Hopkins and Condor, 1997), Welsh (Fevre and Thompson, 1999) or Irish, and on who can legitimately claim to belong to these categories, but the same individual can make use of different definitions and/or criteria as a function of the context and/or of his/her current goals in specific interactions.

One of the main reasons for such variability stems from the fact that national identities and their definitions are primary rhetorical tools in terms of mobilising people towards specific political goals (Klein, Azzi, Brito, and Berckmans, 2000; Klein and Licata, 2003). For instance, Reicher and Hopkins (2001) have investigated in detail the variable constructions of Scottish identity and shown how history, heroes, icons and other symbols of nationhood can be used in flexible ways, as which of these elements are **taken as key to define today's national identity, and what these elements mean, is very** much open to discussion (see also Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983), as are stereotypes of Scottishness and generally what it means to be Scottish. Their point, however, which goes beyond the particular case of Scottish identity, is that such variability in identity definitions is due to the fact that constructions of national identity are aimed at

sustaining different political projects. As who we are defines what we want, what we need, and how we can and should act, these constructions are underpinned by attempts to shape interests, values and behaviour so as to create consensus and collective mobilisation in particular directions. In other words, accounts of what is national identity are underpinned by projects about what the nation should be.

For example, those who support Scottish independence may underline that Scots are fundamentally collectivists compared to the individualist English and that therefore the Scottish ethos will always be repressed as long as it is part of Britain. But those who support the Union can underline that Scots are entrepreneurial at heart and therefore that being part of Britain is an opportunity for such qualities to shine. Another example concerns the use of Scottish heroes like William Wallace and Robert the Bruce, whose popularity as national icons is attested by their overwhelming presence in all sorts of media from books to movies such as *Braveheart*. Not surprisingly, their popularity make them a useful resource for separatists who present them as men who were ready to fight for (and die for in the case of Wallace) Scottish independence and whose example should be followed. Yet, this is not the only meaning they can take nor the only use they can be put to. For 19th century unionist nationalists, the achievement of Wallace and the Bruce **was to make Scotland strong enough to enter the Union and thrive within it. Today's** unionist conservatives can draw a similar picture by pointing out that the Bruce, in particular, stands for a strong, confident and victorious Scotland, and that therefore any suggestion that Scotland is weak, threatened, and oppressed by being part of the Union is a demeaning and inaccurate attack on Scottish identity. Of course, when it is found in openly political discourses, the political nature of these interpretations may appear more clearly; but the point is that, intentionally or not, all interpretations of the significance of national heroes, icons or symbols have specific political implications, be they found in history books, movies or other media rather than in political discourse per se.

None of this undermines the importance of identity content. On the contrary, it is precisely because this content has such important consequences in terms of collective behaviour that it is such a hotly debated topic by politicians, intellectuals, the media and **the public alike. In that respect, Reicher and Hopkins' research confirms the point made** above that all political projects rely on using identity – at least when the audience they address is national and as they seek the mobilisation of that audience. Identity is too precious a resource to be left in the hands of separatists. As long as electoral practices and the media are nationally-shaped and addressed to national audiences, it is likely to stay that way (but for an argument that the British press is not so nationally shaped, see MacInnes et al, 2007).

If variability in conceptions of national identity reflects normal political and psychological processes, then the practical implication is that contestation and alternative constructions of national identities will always be with us and we should not expect it to disappear in the future. As long as people have different opinions as to the direction the nations should take, there will be contestation over the meaning of national identity. This **should not necessarily be taken as a sign of a 'weakening' of identity. On the contrary,** the more identity matters, the more various constructions will be deployed. Arguably, this is even the sign of a healthy democracy.

At the same time, there will also always be attempts at forming consensus and at **convincing others of the merits of one's construction over others. This, also, is part of** the normal democratic process. The concern in terms of democracy would be if contestation reaches the point where it paralyses any form of political action and/or when this leads some to look towards non-democratic means of imposing unity. As **Reicher et al (2005) points out: "...A distinction can be made between democratic** discourse, which makes explicit the grounds on which proposals are linked to identities and hence opens up space for debate and alternatives, and autocratic discourse which **takes the link for granted and hence rules out debate. " (p. 636).** Where doubt and

confusion reign, those who do not doubt have a surer but not necessarily more legitimate vision of national identity, and have a greater chance at success, even if it mean by-passing democratic debate and processes (Haslam and Reicher, 2005; Reicher and Haslam, 2006).

7. Multiculturalism and Britishness

One issue regarding the meaning of national identity that has received much attention (especially since 9/11 and 7/7) by politicians, journalists, scholars and the media alike, is the issue of multiculturalism as threatening the cohesion and unity of Britishness. As **Gilroy (2005) points out, following the onset of the 'war on terror' "from every part of the political spectrum, authoritative voices have pronounced multiculturalism dead ...**

Fearful, anxious views about corrosive immigration and failed assimilation are again being expressed openly. Solidarity and diversity are pitted against each other in a zero-sum game. The very idea of convivial cohabitation across cultural, ethnic, religious and racial divisions has been thrown into disrepute by the perceived breakdown of assimilation and the crisis of national identity that now frames it." (p. 432-433).

Without arguing that multiculturalist policies are a universal panacea to intergroup relations (eg see Verkuyten, 2006), and without denying the serious challenges and dilemmas entailed by putting it into practice through policies (not to mention the various meanings that multiculturalism can take both in theory and in practice), one can nevertheless question the necessity, as well as the desirability, of conceiving the issue of diversity and unity as a zero-sum game. In terms of necessity, one can point out that diversity and multiculturalism are not only essentially opposed to some unifying sense of identity, but they can even become one of its key aspects. Indeed it can be what defines and gives unity to national identity and even be used to differentiate ones nation from others, as Winter (2007) has shown in the case of defining Canadian identity as multicultural in opposition to American identity. Likewise, Condor (2006) has shown that, while English identity can be seen to embody homogeneity and xenophobia, British identity can be seen by some to embody pluralism, diversity and progressive social value, all aspects which can be used to differentiate oneself (positively) from other nations.

In terms of desirability, while attempts at forming consensus on national identity are to be expected, one can question the effects of doing so using constructions where unity can only be achieved at the expense of taming immigration and multiculturalism. The **effect of the 'zero-sum' game construction is to present immigration and the expression of cultural diversity as being, at best, something that can be tolerated, as long as it is kept in check and allowed in 'reasonable' proportion, and at worst as an inherent pernicious threat to the nation, with the implication that we should look for either truce or war.** It leaves little place for alternative narratives about how diversity can enrich a nation. As the war on terror is, according to its very proponents, a war without an end, it will be difficult to develop such alternative constructions as long as the issues of terrorism and immigration find themselves inextricably entangled in debates about national identity – be it in discourse that favours tolerance.

Such a trend in discourses on Britishness has already led to the instigation of the **'citizenship test' and may also affect the future of education if it is translated into concrete policies and programmes for the classrooms.** However such an approach may well produce unexpected and undesired effects. Indeed, if it is natural and proper for people to have different visions of national identity, then attempts at promoting a common vision of it may well lead to resentment and reactions towards what may easily come to be perceived as the imposition of an artificial unity - especially where it is done in a context where the place for democratic debate and contestation is limited, as is often the case in schools. The question is by no means limited to immigrant minorities, though the fact that their claim to Britishness can more easily be contested may make

them more sensitive to it. But as Bechhofer and McCrone (2007) note in relation to Scotland, **although the majority of Scots have a sense of Britishness, "politicians cannot assume that, if they wish to appeal to Britishness, it means the same thing in England than in Scotland, or indeed to different groups in either country" (p.260).** The same could be said of any school programme that wishes to appeal to Britishness.

Another possible scenario is that the coming years might see an increasing trend towards institutional acknowledgement of diversity, including the adaptation of school curricula. This has already taken place in the US where, for instance, teaching is provided in Spanish at some locations with a high concentration of population of Mexican origin. Although teaching in another language than English is already taking place in parts of Wales and Scotland, it seems quite unlikely at the moment that such an approach will be extended to immigrant minorities in the UK. But if Gilroy (2005) is right in thinking that the UK tends to look towards the US as representing the future of ethnic relations, it could perhaps lead the UK to import more and more of what Gilroy calls the **US 'color-coded' approach. The advantage of an institutional recognition of cultural difference** is that it may help managing problems of identity threat. However, as the **term 'color-coded' suggests, the strategy may also present the danger of promoting the segregation of community**, in particular when it is extended to language. As argued in section 4, language is a key factor in terms of the practices in which we take part.

Conclusion: national identity and education

The idea of promoting a sense of national identity through reforms of practices, policies and education is frequently associated with fears that it may promote xenophobia against foreigners and/or immigrants, leading to international quarrels and/or to the social and political exclusion of immigrants. Some may even see it as a melancholic attempt to recover the past greatness of the British Empire (Gilroy, 2004, 2005; Kumar, 2006). This fear is not baseless; national identity may not be automatically anti-others, but the potential for exclusion is certainly there, perhaps no more than for other types of identity but certainly with more large-scale consequences than most.

Nevertheless, as argued above, there are strong arguments to say that, for better or for worse, nationalism and national identities are here to stay for the foreseeable future. And if the everyday practices, including education, which contribute to the reproduction of national identity and transmit specific identity meanings in often implicit and banal ways, are likely to continue to so, then the question is whether it would not be better to make such transmission more explicit, so that specific meanings and their consequences can at least be opened up for discussion and debate. The question then becomes not whether or not to promote national identity, but how do we do it so as to avoid (politically, socially, psychologically) undesirable outcomes. As Heath and Roberts (2008) conclude in their review on **British identity "Any reforms need to consider not only how to strengthen British identity but also what form of identity should be encouraged."** (p.3).

Still, finding the 'right way' of teaching about national identity and/or the 'right form' to encourage is certainly going to prove a significant challenge. It is likely to be trickier than relying on Manichean distinctions by, for instance, making sure that we encourage patriotism **instead of nationalism. Equally, it cannot be reduced to teaching the 'right content', as specific symbols, events or other cultural resources can take very different meanings and be used for different purposes.** Besides, as Sears et al (2008) point out, this would mean a return to a **'pedagogy of acceptance' which treated "students as sponges whose main function was to absorb that material and release it again when squeezed at exam time"** (p.22). **Instead, Sears et al (2008; see also Barton and Levstik, 2004) argue that whilst the exploration of national identity should be part of an education to citizenship, a deeper understanding and political commitment to democracy can be reached by "involving students in the process of constructing the meaning of**

democratic ideas for their own time and place. In other words not telling them what it means to be Australian, Canadian or English but introducing them, in an informed way, to the discussion of what those identities have been, are, and should be in the future. This can best be done by engaging students with both the internal complexity of national identity in their particular context as well as will alternative constructions of national **identity across the world.” (p.23). One could add that this would also allow the** exploration of the consequences of different constructions of national identity - be it in terms of relationship to foreigners and immigrants or in other respects - as well as to put an emphasis on the fact that debating about national identity matters not so much because it is about finding the reality of our past but because it is about the future we want to build.

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