

Eighty Years of „The Lion and the Unicorn“ – Society and Identity in Great Britain since World War II

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The conference on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of George Orwell's essay „The Lion and Unicorn“ took place digitally. While Orwell and his ideas were central to the discussions, the conference predominantly focused on the historical evaluation of debates about national identity, especially British identity post 1945. By approaching the subject from an interdisciplinary angle, the conference aimed to shift the historiological perspective from defining identity to the mechanism of identity formation. As Nikolai Wehrs' introduction made clear, Orwell's essay was used as an entry point for debates about national identity post 1945: it addresses themes such as imperialism, class, and patriotism that were relevant in the debates about identity to come. The conference was consequently structured around four of Orwell's topics, namely the linkage of national identification and class identities, insularity vs. globalism, decolonisation, and democracy. In the aftermath of Brexit, this conference also touched upon the rising nationalism in Scotland and Wales. „Britishness“ after 1945, as it concluded, cannot be captured precisely. But these one and a half days might have contributed approaches to further ideas on this topic.

It was not until the 1980s that the topic of identity gained a foothold in the print media, as PETER MANDLER (Cambridge) said in his keynote. After World War II, the national character declined as it was too fixed. Smaller forms such as identity were established. In the period up to 1980, scientists mainly pursued the question of what had gone wrong in the war. Group identity back then was seen as a threat. After World War II, the UK perceived itself as a lonely victor, a belief that separated them from the European mainland – a recur-

ring narrative that ultimately also found expression during the Brexit debate. During the 1950s and 1960s, in the face of decolonisation, social scientists increasingly researched nationalism. Nationalism had long been considered as alien to the British experience, as something that applied to Germany in the Second World War, then the colonies and ultimately Ireland during the Troubles. Scottish and Welsh nationalism put an end to this perspective. Focusing on the relationship between Englishness and Britishness since the 1980s, Mandler demonstrated that identity is a fluid concept dependent on being mobilised, often by political actors. The remaining question is, therefore: who mobilises identity?

In panel I, two papers analysed mechanisms of identity in formal settings. STEPHEN FOOSE (Marburg) examined the mechanisms of colonial inclusion and exclusion embedded in the British passport from 1948 to 1962. While the passport demonstrated British citizenship across the Empire, the addition of the issuing territory paved the way for immigration restrictions in the years that followed. Based on these discussions about the British passport, Foose revealed a notion of identity that was related to ethnic background and thus oftentimes skin colour.

ISABELLE-CHRISTINE PANRECK (Dresden) focused on how citizenship education was embedded in the English school curriculum in the late 1990s. Under the umbrella term „Britishness“, civic education was intended to strengthen shared values and community cohesion. Being under constant change, the school curriculum added a fourth pillar to its citizenship education program in 2007, „Identity and Diversity. Living together in the UK“, to counter criticism of lack of diversity. However, most teachers are still unsure of what exactly is meant by „shared values“ that they are supposed to teach.

As Emily Robinson (Sussex) remarked in her comment, both talks portrayed an ambiguous and contradictory British identity. Constituted through a set of habits, behaviors, and codes, British identity is used as a tool to construct belonging in this context. Both Foose and Panreck depicted how British identity is defended while simultaneously challenged as being uncertain, unfinished, and

unstable, and were trying to answer the same ultimate question: Who gets to control belonging?

In Panel II, responses to imperialism and decolonisation were discussed, as Julia Angster (Mannheim) pointed out in her comment. THEO WILLIAMS (Durham) outlined Orwell's opinion towards imperialism. Having been a police officer in Burma during the 1930s, Orwell developed anti-imperialist views later in his life. In an exchange with the International African Service Bureau and the Independent Labour Party, of which he became a member, Orwell became part of a socialist Pan-Africanist movement that combined anti-colonialism with global proletarian solidarity. However, his anti-imperialism was partial and conditional, as Williams mapped out: Orwell attempted to reconcile both Englishness and anti-imperialism, thus taking on a typically paradoxical viewpoint.

By looking at adoptions of coloured children from 1940 to 1980, LENA JUR (Marburg) examined, from an intersectional perspective, the process of decolonisation in the interface of the private and the public sphere. She found out that the skin colour of children, as well as age and gender, influenced their adoptability. In this adoption process, Black British subjects were commonly treated as aliens and foreigners. Both talks highlighted the exclusion of Empire in official understandings of Englishness and Britishness, as Angster remarked. Britishness remained local, bounded, and exclusive. Even though the metropolitan society was anything but homogenous, British identity was often tied to conceptions of whiteness.

A round table then moved Orwell back to centre stage. PETER STANSKY (Stanford) and STEFAN COLLINI (Cambridge) opened the discussion by referring to Orwell's paradoxical opinions, his attempt to connect socialism and patriotism. Collini raised the question where Orwell would situate himself. Orwell treated intellectuals as „un-English“ because they would get their ideas from Moscow and Paris while he himself is considered one of the great intellectuals of the 20th century. Even if Orwell was prone to exaggeration and to „verbal bullying“ in his texts, Collini pointed out the plain and simple political truths that

gave his work its lasting power, namely the Orwell factor.

The papers in panel III devoted themselves to the topic of popular culture, thus offering a counterpoint to the focus on the formal settings of identity and belonging in panel I. SINA SCHUHMAIER (Mannheim) investigated the relationship between Englishness and British pop music. Britpop presented an alternative conception of Englishness: Facing the dwindling of the empire and an economic shift, Britpop promised a „cool“ and rebellious Englishness, which, however, remained predominately White and without reference to Britain's imperial legacy. Identity was either conceived as pre-imperial, associated with a pastoral imagination, or expressing nostalgia for empire.

The self-image of superiority portrayed by Britpop can also be found in fashion. Just as Britpop made fun of the backwardness of continental European music, fashion in the 1960s found its new home in London. Presenting itself as a new global cultural capital, fashion became the driving force for several societal developments in London. FELIX FUHG (Berlin) argued that while fashion increased cultural exchange with continental Europe and the wide world, London's willingness to accept otherness and difference, made influences from, for instance, Morocco and Indonesia, and an extended presence of Black models possible. While fashion freed beauty from its restrictive association with whiteness, it was, however, not enough to achieve a real effect on the notion of race in Britain.

Finally, panel IV turned to European integration and Britain's difficult relationship with mainland Europe. MATHIAS HÄUSLER (Regensburg) analysed the debate between the Daily Mirror and the Daily Express concerning Britain's first application to join the European Community from 1961 to 1963. These two best-selling newspapers took fundamentally different positions with the Mirror being in favour of European integration and the Express strongly opposing it. Their debate was conducted on two levels. Firstly, the economy: while the Daily Mirror promised greater prosperity and therefore more jobs, the Daily Express predicted the

ruin of small factories and farms. Secondly, in the political sphere, in which both newspapers tried to react to a portrayal of the UK as a country slowly declining in international power. For the *Mirror*, EC membership was a possibility to preserve Britain's place in a post-imperial, interdependent world. However, all of that, as Häußler remarks, was rendered void in the face of Charles de Gaulle's infamous veto.

While Häußler's paper exemplified a generational and societal divide, ROBERT SAUNDERS (London) concentrated on the concept of sovereignty in both the 1975 and the 2016 referendum. Although sovereignty was the single most important idea of the *Leave* campaign in 2016, it could not function as an explanation on its own. With the slogan „Take back control“, *Leave* presented sovereignty as positive and intrinsic to British identity. Nevertheless, sovereignty failed to resonate in the 1970s. As Saunders argued, this was largely due to the context of the referendums. Political and economic circumstances were different in 2016, and thus, sovereignty functioned differently to benefit supports and opponents of British membership.

Brexit, its development, and its consequences will keep researchers busy for a long time to come. As Martina Steber (München) pointed out in her comment, both talks depicted a multitude of British visions about itself and Europe, with Brexit just being the recent tip of the iceberg. The British-European relationship can be traced back to the Roman Empire, creating two big historical narratives in research today. While medievalists and early modernists underline the otherness of the UK and draw on its insular state, contemporary historians emphasise the similarities. Steber proposed to locate Brexit in the global rise of conservative right-wing movements, such as France's Marine Le Pen and Donald Trump.

In her concluding remarks, Almuth Ebke identified three strands of debate that had crystallised over the course of the workshop: a first one, which discussed the more formal settings and power structures of belonging, a second concerned with how belonging is negotiated in different cultural fields, and a third, more conceptual strand, which focused

on the history of meaning of the concept of identity. As Angster and Steber pointed out in the final discussion, when dealing with the term identity, it is important to differentiate between the analytical uses of the term and the historical meanings attached to it. It is thus of great interest to investigate the fields in which question of identity are discussed without the explicit use of the term.

Conference overview:

Nikolai Wehrs (Konstanz), Almuth Ebke (Mannheim), Daniel Larsen (Cambridge): Welcome and introduction

Keynote

Peter Mandler (Cambridge): What (and When) is „National Identity“? The History of an Idea in British Public Discourse since 1945

Introduction & Moderation: Almuth Ebke

Panel I: „England Your England“ – National Identity and the Question of Citizenship

Chair: Daniel Larsen

Stephen E. Foose (Marburg): The British Passport – an Object of Identification between National and Imperial Belonging in England and Jamaica, 1948-1962

Isabelle-Christine Panreck (Dresden): Englishness, Scottishness and Britishness in the Curriculum. How Discourses on National Identity Shape „Citizenship Education“ in the UK

Comment: Emily Robinson (Sussex)

Panel II: „Empire Builders Reduced to Clerks“? The Experience of Decolonization

Chair: Martin Rempe (Konstanz)

Theo Williams (Durham): Pan-Africanism, George Orwell, and Reconciling Antiimperialism with British Patriotism

Lena Jur (Marburg): Children of Decolonization – Adoptions of Coloured Children in the United Kingdom, ca. 1948-1980

Comment: Julia Angster (Mannheim)

_Roundtable: The Orwell Factor – British In-

tellectuals and the Issue of Collective Identity
since World War II

Chair: Anja Hartl (Konstanz)

Stefan Collini (Cambridge), Charlotte Lydia
Riley (Southampton), Peter Stansky (Stan-
ford)

_Panel III: „The Gentleness of the English Civ-
ilization“ – Marking National
Identity in Popular Culture_

Chair: Sven Reichardt (Konstanz)

Sina Schuhmaier (Mannheim): Competing
Stories – On the „Englishness“ of British Pop-
ular Music

Felix Fuhg (Berlin): Made in Britain? National
Identity, Transnational Fashion and the Rise
of Multiculturalism in the 1960s

_Panel IV: „The English Revolution“ – British
Democracy, Brexit and the
Question of Sovereignty_

Chair: Sina Steglich (London)

Mathias Häußler (Regensburg): Bras, Beers,
and Empire: Images of Europe and British
Identity Constructions in the Early 1960s

Robert Saunders (London): „Losing
Sovereignty“: Democracy and Identity
on the Road to Brexit

Comment: Martina Steber (München)

Final Discussion

Almuth Ebke: Input

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