**British Identity in Crisis**

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**1 Introduction**

May I start with a quotation**:**

‘We have the character of an island nation – independent, forthright, passionate in defence of our sovereignty. We can no more change this British sensibility than we can drain the English Channel.’

That was David Cameron, announcing the referendum on EU membership.

When DBG kindly invited me to talk about British identity – little more than a year ago – it seemed a good time for reflection. Admittedly the referendums on independence for Scotland and membership of the European Community were on the horizon.

Last month the British establishment panicked in the face of ‘a national humiliation of catastrophic proportions’ (senior Conservative). A yes vote for Scottish independence would have dismantled the United Kingdom and consigned Britain to history.

After ‘10 Days to Save the UK’ (Independent headline) the humiliation was averted, at 5:4 quite decisively: but the anomalies of the variable geometry of the British constitution have been exposed. National identity and cohesion is at risk.

[One commentator quoted Macbeth: I have known hours dreadful and things strange, but this sore night hath trifled former knowings.]

And then UKIP (the United Kingdom Independence Party) [committed to taking the UK out of the European Union] won a seat in Parliament. The UK has belatedly woken up to the fact that the EU’s ‘ever closer union’ adventure is not mere rhetoric – and many British do not like it.

**2 English Identity**

A perceptive observer of the English, the Hungarian émigré, George Mikes, writing in the 1950s wrote:

‘When people say England they sometimes mean Great Britain, sometimes the United Kingdom, sometimes the British Isles – but never England.’

Mikes caught the ambiguity of British identity. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, to give it its full title, has neither a federal nor a unitary constitution. The Westminster parliament is the Parliament of the UK. But devolution has given Scotland and Northern Ireland their own parliaments, and Wales its assembly.

It has ceased to be acceptable to say ‘England’ when referring to the country as a whole. The English no longer act as though Britain were a larger England! We are British now, as in Team GB at the Olympics, though strictly speaking omitting the Northern Irish.

This change has put English identity in question. Traditional images of thatched cottages and cricket on the village green may still be a reality in the countryside but do not resonate for city dwellers. Tension between the cities, especially London, and country prompted the largest demonstration ever seen in Britain when the Countryside Alliance marched through London against legislation threatening rural pursuits and economy.

The trouble is that England is by far the largest part of the UK. The governance of the UK therefore is inevitably outweighed by the interests of England, and London within it.

Behind ‘national’ identities lie a mix of regional and ethnic identities, made ever more diverse through mass immigration. Many doubt whether Britain does have cohesion. The readiness of so many Scots to abandon Britain has been a painful sign of this. Hostility to yet more immigration another.

**3 The British and Foreigners**

Mikes called his book: ‘How to be an Alien’, catching the British attitude to foreigners. ‘Alien’ was, and in nationality law still is, the legal term for non-British – and non-Commonwealth (and non-Irish!) citizens. Keeping foreigners – aliens – out of the country was the purpose of immigration control when I joined the Home Office. How difficult to adjust from European ‘aliens’ to fellow European citizens at the expense of Commonwealth ‘kith and kin’ in one generation. Can tolerance outweigh xenophobia?

**4 The English Character, Class and Openness**

Mikes listed stereotypes of the English character – reserve, lack of emotion, class consciousness, distinctive humour, self-deprecation, pragmatism, the stoicism of the ‘stiff upper lip’. Polls suggest that many of these remain perceptions of the English – though how ‘unBritish’ the national expression of mourning at the death of Princess Diana. Older people blame the ‘permissive 60s’ and call, a la Thatcher, for a return to Victorian virtues.

 [Raymond Aron expressed amazement that the English had gone from Roman discipline to Italian indulgence in one generation!]

One product of the English public school system wrote that it ‘inculcated a sense of fortitude and a capacity for bearing the harsh realities of life …one valuable lesson that in life every man (sic) has to learn that… injustice is inevitable and that … it is better to bear it without complaint than to moan and seek difficult or impossible redress’.

Two things about this quote: It expresses an experience of the ‘privileged’ classes ‘enjoying’ private education – education for the establishment, for the rulers of the Empire.

Class was a central feature of English society. Equally important is the quite distinct working-class history – of solidarity and socialism – and its demise with the British industrial decline,

The second point is the author - Max Mallowan, husband of Agatha Christie. Quintessentially English – except that his parents were Austrian-Slav and French. This illustrates a feature of English identity, namely that it is open to all comers (even aliens!) willing and able to join it, provided they sign up to the rules.

English history is a history of migration. Invasion by the Anglo-Saxons, the Danes and the Normans. Immigration by the Flemish, the Huguenots, and so on. Writing in the 17 century Daniel Defoe called the English ‘a mongrel half-bred race’! This is an important feature of Britishness.

**5 British Identity and the Concept of National Identity**

Identity is multifaceted. How to create cohesion out of diversity is the burning question. National identity has to provide the legal and emotional glue. A sense of ‘us’ and the Other is necessary. Language, culture and religion are often singled out as necessary determinants of national identity.

To seek pure identity is fool’s gold. At every level rivalries and tensions arise. Rivalry between Edinburgh and Glasgow – not to mention Shetland – in an independent Scotland would have caused the English what the witty German ambassador called that favourite English word schadenfreude!

British identity succeeded historically – a success not unrelated to British economic, diplomatic and military success. The crisis of British identity is not unrelated to British decline.

A feature of British identity is its capacity for providing an overarching identity within which personal identities can be expressed. Often this is a subjective, essentially emotional, issue. It is common for people in England, especially London where so many do not feel rooted in this anonymous melting pot, to claim their ‘real’ identity in other parts of the country, be it say from Cornwall, or Yorkshire; from Wales, Scotland or Ireland; from the Empire or elsewhere.

[David Hume, himself a Scottish ‘citizen of the world’ resident in London, noted the peculiarity that British identity was an empty vessel into which all comers could pour their own identity. This] openness has served Britain well.

**6 Dual Nationality and Identity**

The fact that dual nationality is permitted in law, underpinning hyphenated identities has been important in encouraging identity and cohesion. Thus immigrants can become British in law while retaining their citizenship of birth.

Surveys show that immigrants and the children of immigrants rarely regard themselves as English but are happy, even proud, to call themselves British. Like Americans we are relaxed with hyphenated identities – Black British, Asian British and so on. The prospect of consigning British identity to history made the possibility of Scottish secession so painful.

**7 The Forging of Britain**

Chosen identity, real or imagined, is one thing; nationality quite another, defined in law and carrying obligations as well as privileges. Accepting obligations is more acceptable when underpinned by emotional expression.

Linda Colley, in her classic account of the ‘forging of Britain’, calls Great Britain ‘an invented nation, superimposed, if only for a while [prescient words!] on much older alignments and loyalties’. She emphasises the importance of the ‘other’ – the French, Catholicism – against which the British could unite in their self definition.

[National rituals binding citizens together above their differences, are vital. Saluting the flag is fundamental in the USA - very unBritish behaviour, though these days at times of sporting fever the Union Jack or even the English cross of St George come out. The British have always been rather good at ceremony, like coronations and royal weddings. While many found the Millennium celebrations, and the absurdity of ‘Cool Britannia’ embarrassing, the opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympics was much admired. But how deep do such ceremonies now reach?]

Contrasting the passion of the ‘yes’ campaign for independence an Irish commentator called the failure of the ‘no’ campaign to articulate a coherent, passionate and convincing case for the UK ‘quite staggering’. Has diversity finally proved too much for cohesion? Has Britain lost its ability to find ways of celebrating identity meaningful to all its citizens?

**8 Citizenship: British Particularism**

Modern constitutions are based on clear categories of state, nation and citizenship. None of these concepts easily fit the British experience. Constitutional experts comment that the British have never really embraced the idea of the state. This ‘obfuscation’ permeates British nationality and citizenship laws. England and Scotland are separate nations in their own right with many of the trappings of nationhood, like their own legal systems (and sporting teams).

There was no British citizenship until 30 years ago, when the British Nationality Act was enacted in 1981. Indeed until 1948 Britons were simply subjects of the monarch, reflecting the paradox that, rather than having a constitutional entity of the State, power in Britain focussed on the Crown, but the monarch had strictly limited power with a progressively circumscribed role.

**9 Crown and Monarchy, Church and Language**

The monarchy in Britain is actually among the least English of institutions – regularly imported – Danish, Norman, then Dutch in 1688, German in 1714 – 300 years ago this week.

Linda Colley calls it a ‘serviceable monarchy’, chosen, bypassing many with greater claim because they were Catholics, to serve the Protestant nation.

 A good half of British monarchs did not speak English as their mother tongue, some not at all. French was of course the language of the Normans – for them English was suitable only for cursing! George I spoke no English, George II little. And even Queen Victoria spoke German at home.

The first king to rule over the whole of Britain as James 1 of England and VI of Scotland was Scottish - happy revenge for the killing of his grandfather. James IV, by the English in the battle of Flodden.

Flodden highlights the fact that the creation of the United Kingdom was a process of conflict and conquest – Wales absorbed in the 16th century, Ireland added in the 17th and Scotland joined the union unconquered, and then only after further conflicts over the rejection of the Catholic Stuarts for the Protestant Hanoverians after the formal creation of the United Kingdom, initially of Great Britain in the Act of Union of 1707, and finally in 1801, with the futile attempt to absorb Ireland, Catholic and Protestant, Britain became the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. That was the point Linda Colley identifies as the moment when the British adopted a ‘layered’ identity, as British and Scots, English, Welsh or, at least for the Protestants, Irish.

The single kingdom with its single monarchy thus created provided a focus for national identity. But that constitutional basis could only be held together by ‘myths’ and rewards to bind together the disparate peoples of the United Kingdom. The Spanish Armada was one heroic event, even if the defeat owed as much to English weather as to English seamanship. The enemy of centuries, the French, was celebrated by Shakespeare and gave us heroes like Nelson and Wellington. It rested on the threat of Catholicism, a unifying force right up to, and into, the 19th century. We still celebrate bonfire night. (The last Prime Minister to fight a duel was Wellington, over Catholic emancipation.)

The Church of England, still the Established Church (in England), was the embodiment of English Protestantism and contributing the language of the King James Bible to English. Still a force in the world, but in a country of many faiths and none, neither constitutionally secular nor whole-heartedly religious, the Established Church can no longer be a unifying symbol.

Language and literature is an English glory, with Shakespeare towering over our ‘sceptred isle’. As Wordsworth wrote:

We must be free or die who speak the tongue that Shakespeare spake.

Shakespeare quickly came to represent England throughout Europe. Some wondered how so philistine a nation could produce such a genius. Heine lamented that he belonged to ‘that most revolting of peoples whom God, in his wrath, ever created’!

The greatness of the English language is precisely that it is not the expression of a single nation, but a ‘mongrel’ language bred out of Germanic and Romance roots with many imports from the wider world, in particular from the Empire. (A metaphor for its people!) English has however long since escaped the control of the British. Too late to establish ‘une academie anglaise’! That it has become a, even the, world language is of course thanks (if a matter of thanks it be) to the Americans, who kindly allow their language still to be called English.

The genius of English is that writers from all parts of the world have been able to use it, to develop it in distinctive ways for their own purposes. 1922 saw the publication of the seminal works of modernism - Waste Land, by TS Eliot, an American, and Ulysses, by James Joyce, an Irishman writing in Trieste.

**10 British Empire and Common Institutions**

British economic and military success in the 18th and 19th centuries gave material opportunities to citizens from all parts of the new Union. The Scots (now ‘North Britons’) in particular played a large role in creating the British Empire – never called the English Empire. And while the Irish resisted being called ‘West Britons’, they also shared in the enterprise. Parliament was the distinctive and unifying British institution. Britons, Protestant Britons anyway, have been able to share in domestic advancement, even up to the office of Prime Minister. (Some 14 have been Scots, including the last three, though they demonstrate degrees of assimilation, from Gordon Brown, unmistakeably Scottish – and impassioned advocate for the Union - through Tony Blair, wearing his Scottish private school education lightly, to David Cameron, hardly Scottish at all beyond his name and sporting pursuits.)

Common institutions are an important part of national identity. Scandal may have put Parliament under a cloud, but popular commitment to such institutions as the NHS – set up by a Welshman, Aneurin Bevan – and the BBC - developed by its first – Scottish - Director General, John Reith – remains high.

 Sufficient sense of shared common interest addressed by a shared political system is vital. The increasing political and economic division between north and south, and especially Scottish disenchantment with Conservatism, particularly after feeling used as a guinea pig for the poll tax by the Thatcher government threatens this unity.

**11 End of Empire**

The loss of the American colonies through the failure to find a form of home rule which would keep their allegiance was the first major trauma of the United Kingdom enterprise. The hurt lingered, even till modern times, when Churchill still hankered after a union of ‘the English-speaking peoples’ – an unrealistic idea in the face of US power, not to mention the growing proportion of Americans of non-British origin (and the fact that many of ‘British’ origin, notably the Irish, emigrated to escape British allegiance). The trauma of American independence lingers on in British fantasies of our ‘special relationship’ with the USA.

Undeterred the British continued empire building, and learnt from the American experience how to handle home rule aspirations in the colonies developed in the 19th century, smoothly allowing the colonials settled in Australia and New Zealand, together with Canada and South Africa, to become independent ‘Dominions’, retaining allegiance to the monarchy. This became a successful model as colonies in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean became independent, some retaining the Queen as head of state, some becoming republics.

The Empire has been transformed into the Commonwealth, an institution with real vitality. As the Queen said on coming to the throne:

‘The Commonwealth bears no resemblance to the Empires of the past. It is an entirely new conception built on the highest qualities of the spirit of man: friendship, loyalty and the desire for freedom and peace. a part of British identity.’

But the Commonwealth can hardly be any longer a focal point for national identity, particularly in the face of Europe and the EU.

**12 Citizenship**

The peculiarities of British citizenship historically have been an important influence on the nature of British national identity. In particular its openness, and its lack of territorial focus, have had a profound affect on the way Britain has developed. The fact that to be British was determined by connection with a Crown possession through birth or parentage. Such a person was a “subject of his (or her) Britannic majesty’ (as our passports still describe us). Many British subjects had no direct connection with the British Isles.

When, led by pressure from the Dominions, a form of citizenship was created it was not confined to Britain. A complicated arrangement was set up by which the notion of British subject was equated to being a citizen of the Commonwealth – any Commonwealth country, be it Australia, India or elsewhere. Those British subjects who did not become citizens of a Commonwealth country became citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies. Countless people born and living around the Empire were ‘British’. There was no distinction between citizens in the UK and those in the Colonies or elsewhere.

**13 Immigration**

The complexities had one enormous unintended consequence. It meant that citizenship of the UK and Colonies entitled anyone who wanted (and could afford) to emigrate to Britain to do so. And many did, from the Caribbean starting in the 1940s from the Indian sub-continent from the 1950s, and later the traumatic expulsion of ‘British passport holders’ from East Africa from the 1960s. Once in Britain all had full citizenship rights, such as the vote. (They were no “guest workers”, even if it was initially single men in search of work who came.)

While it cannot be said that mass post-war immigration was inadvertent – it was often through a process of organized recruitment by public authorities (in health and transport) and private employers (in the textile industry) - it was certainly not foreseen. Immigration controls were, amid much controversy, introduced in the1960s, starting a fraught process of separating citizenship status from immigration rights. This was only restored (and then only with complications and anomalies) when British citizenship, based on direct connections with the UK, was created in 1981.

Government was unprepared for the social consequences of mass immigration. Policies for integrating the new communities began to be developed in the1960s. Opposition to immigration, often overtly racist, was a prominent political issue. Governments sought to balance ‘firm but fair’ immigration controls with policies for successful integration of the new immigrant communities. While extremists fantasised about terminating immigration and even repatriating those who had already arrived, it was generally recognised that Britain had become irreversibly a multi-ethnic country.

**14 Integration**

The resulting policies had two broad strands: legal and social. Progressively stronger laws were passed to counter racial discrimination and enable formal equality to be realised in practice. And a patchwork of policies were developed to achieve integration into British life and institutions. Amid much debate over different approaches, a guiding principle emerged, namely that the new communities should have the effective right to equality of opportunity, but that they should be allowed to integrate into British society to whatever extent they chose. The principle was memorably expressed in the 1960s by Roy Jenkins, then Home Secretary, as not being “a process of assimilation but as equal opportunity accompanied by cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance”.

Tensions, even riots (incited by rhetoric of ‘rivers of blood) accompanied these fine words. (Riots, continuing sporadically to the present, have as much to do with policing as race as such.) But the Jenkins aspiration, later disparaged as ‘multi-culturalism’, held sway, and achieved much success. What had initially been right-wing misgivings however never went away. The wish for a deeper integration was strikingly caricatured by a member of Mrs Thatcher’s government, who called for a ‘cricket test’, measuring integration by support for the English cricket team when playing, as it may be, the West Indies, India or Pakistan (not a test my Sikh son-in-law passes!). More seriously opposition grew over policies to promote the language and culture of the country of origin.

The controversy over *Satanic Verses,* Salman Rushdie’s novel aboutmigration*,* focussed discussion on tensions between accepted rights of free expression and minority susceptibilities. It triggered a growing sense of identity among the Muslim communities and led to demands for equality over faith schools and even blasphemy laws. This highlighted the longstanding privileges granted to established religious schools – Roman Catholic and Jewish as well as Church of England – and highlighted the practical consequences of implementing the principle of equal rights for the new communities.

Positive, sometimes doctrinaire, ‘racial awareness’ policies, designed to improve intercommunal understanding, especially in the workplace, aroused controversy, even bitterness, but, with economic improvement, issues of race and immigration declined in political salience during the 1990s, encouraging an overoptimistic sense that policies based on multi-culturalism had achieved a (more or less) successful integration. This complacency was disturbed by a number of events around the turn of the Millennium. Communal tensions linked with economic decline in Northern English cities highlighted the lack of integration between the Asian communities and the indigenous population.

In 2000 a report assessed progress and made a series of recommendations for developing a cohesive society valuing and encouraging diversity and the social richness it brings. Launching the report the Labour Home Secretary felt obliged publicly to repudiate one detail, about the need to ‘reimagine Britain’s past story and present identity’. This had been denounced before publication by the right-wing press as anti-British.

Islamic terrorism in the new Millennium, especially the London bombings in July 2005, dramatically changed the debate. The laissez-faire approach to new communities and their cultures gave way to government-led policies for promoting ‘Britishness’. The claim that multi-culturalism had not addressed issues which conflicted with traditional British values became a focal point of criticism. While Sikh turbans for policemen and halal meat for Muslims had long been accepted, concern grew over the position of women, for example in relation to arranged marriages, the wearing of the burqa or niqab and FGM. Now there is an acute need to develop positive policies to prevent extremism and confront terrorism (not, of course, a new issue after decades of Irish terrorism).

**15 Thickening the Texture of Britishness**

As a consequence governments in the last few years have tried in a number of ways to ‘thicken’ the texture of Britishness. Controversial attempts were made to reform the school history curriculum to focus on British history, emphasising its ‘greatness’. This had to be modified in the face of derision from historians. The comment of the London correspondent of Die Zeit is apt: Britain seems selective and one-dimensional in the way she deals with her past. The aim remains to use education to promote ‘Britishness’ to counter extremism to promote ‘British’ values. These include democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance. Eurosceptics seem to regard these as British, rather than European or indeed universal values.

The requirements for acquiring British citizenship have been strengthened. In addition to demonstrating good character and adequate command of English, a rather ludicrous ‘tick box’ test of knowledge of life in the UK has been added. The questions range over history, politics, social, cultural and sporting life. (When tried out on native born citizens they regularly fail, as did I despite having at one time been responsible for nationality in the Home Office!) Once the hurdles have been surmounted new British citizen take part in a civic ceremony at which the certificate of citizenship is bestowed. This ceremony is very popular.

**16 The ‘Progressive’s Dilemma’**

Intellectual underpinning to the attack on multi-culturalism has been developed under the tag of ‘the progressive’s dilemma’. The thesis is that social democracy depends on a rich sense of citizenship by which ‘belongers’ accept welfare obligations (financed out of taxation) towards their fellow citizens.

Our failure to create cultural cohesion, it has been said, needs to be addressed. Multiculturalism has allowed minorities to integrate but has not created the strong binding narrative that all citizens need.

The controversial claim behind this idea is that mass immigration is incompatible with cohesion. Personally I think this ‘dilemma’ is spurious. The enthusiasm for double Olympic champion, Mo Farrah, a refugee from Somalia, reflects an acceptance of the multi-ethnic nature of Britain today, represented in politics, the media and elsewhere, as well as in sport. This is not to claim that integration, however defined, has been fully achieved; but the high rate of mixed marriages – nearly 1:10 - is a positive sign. To quote Himza Yousaf, an Asian MSP:

An Asian Scot born in Glasgow to a father from Pakistan and a mother from Kenya, I married a white Scot born in England to an English father and Scottish mother. How should the identity of our children be defined?

**17 The British Constitution**

Two factors have revived the immigration controversy: pressure of asylum seekers, and uncontrolled rights of migration from the new accession states of the EU. The crisis of British identity is also a constitutional crisis. The European Convention of Human Rights has become a target for hostility to Europe. This is not confined to Eurosceptics. There is a serious constitutional issue behind the opposition.

Senior judges have asserted that the principles of democracy require that Parliament retains ultimate authority over the constitution, not a body of unelected judges. The ex-LCJ, Lord Judge, has called the attempts of the European Court to override Parliament a dramatic and unconstitutional extension of judicial authority’.

But the main target for reclaiming sovereignty is of course the European Union, with its perceived federal aspirations. UK entry into the then Common Market, in 1973 after rebuff by de Gaulle in the 60s, was motivated by the need to find ways of reversing Britain’s economic decline. In so far as the Treaty of Rome’s aspiration to ‘an ever closer union’ was noticed at all, it was discounted as rhetoric, and anyway something the UK could influence better from within than without. As the aspiration began to take real form, first through the Single Market and QMV, paying the cost in lost sovereignty was seen as the necessary price for the economic benefits; but opposition grew more vociferous and with the creation of the Euro UK detachment from the EU has become ever greater. The opening of the EU to Eastern European countries, encouraged by the UK government, has led to perhaps the largest wave of immigration Britain has ever experienced. With the banking crisis this has put opposition to immigration back at the forefront of the political agenda. This has sharpened the controversy over EU membership since government promises to set a low ceiling to net migration are manifestly not realisable with no control over the immigration of ‘fellow (EU) citizens’.

[Devolution has been a central part of constitutional reform, at first tentative and unsuccessfully proposed in the 1970s. The case for according Scotland political institutions appropriate for a nation with distinct law and identity within the UK aroused little controversy in itself. But the practical problems of the consequences for a polity lacking a federal constitution and not structurally suited to one surfaced early on, in particular through the ‘West Lothian’ question – how can it be right for MPs of the Westminster (UK) parliament representing Scottish constituencies to vote on English issues whereas their English colleagues have no say on Scottish matters devolved to the Scottish parliament? Devolution for Wales, culturally if not politically quite as much a nation as Scotland, has been far more muted; but now grievances of financial disadvantage are surfacing in the face of the ‘bribes’ offered to Scottish voters. Ireland is of course a separate complication, hitherto seen in the century long context of achieving and gaining acceptance for Irish independence.]

**18 In Lieu of a Conclusion**

The Scottish referendum, and the refreshing popular enthusiasm for the campaigning process it generated, has put constitutional reform irreversibly at the top of the British political agenda. A talk on national identity is no place for the intricacies it involves – the West Lothian question (English votes for English laws – Evel!) rivals the Schleswig Holstein question in complexity! Enough to say that a new balance in the arrangements between the nations of the UK is inevitable. The major problem is to solve the disproportionate weight of England, and London within England. Proposals for a regional tier of government in England were floated in the NE alongside Scottish and Welsh devolution – and were rejected by 4:1. Local government has been hollowed out in recent years. Perhaps the creation of a genuinely federal system of government, as the Economist has suggested, with English Laender-type regions, might be the answer.

I quoted the present Prime Minister at the beginning of this lecture. Let me now quote his predecessor, Gordon Brown:

No longer should we see Britain as a centralised, unitary state founded on an undiluted Westminster sovereignty, but as a diverse partnership of nations, cities and regions that pool and share risk, reward and resources as part of the United Kingdom.

This would transform the Westminster parliament. It would retain a shell of the ‘British’ nation as a constitutional and international reality. One can only speculate whether it would be a strong enough vessel to preserve a ‘thick’ sense of British identity which has been created out of the historic origins I have described.

It is significant that surveys show that Britishness is felt less among the English than other groups. Furthermore a majority of those who feel English only want to leave the EU. This must link with the way English identity has become problematic. This is critical to the UK’s relationship to the EU.

At the end of the day UK membership will probably come down to economic interests. But if so the gap between national feeling and national interest seems likely to grow. Maybe what Henry Kissinger calls the end of the Westphalian nation state system will reduce the importance of national sovereignty. Maybe a new ‘variable geometry’ for the EU can evolve to accommodate the political needs of the multiplicity of member states. But whether ‘the people’ will transfer their allegiance to a European identity, content with their English, Scottish – or British? – identity as a new form of regional identity is even more speculative.

Amidst the hostility to new immigrants there are grounds for optimism. Race is less of a problem; it is rather the pace at which newcomers from the EU, seen as non-belongers, have been settling.

Where there has been time for integration cohesion in diversity can be a reality. This was demonstrated by a recent TV documentary about a multi-ethnic community in Manchester, where, amid a vibrant cultural and religious mix the chef of a Jewish fast food restaurant was a devout Muslim!

The issues which originally forged British national identity [- the sovereignty of Parliament, monarchy, Protestant Christianity, Empire, industry -] have eroded.

Europe was clearly always about transnationalism, a tight union federalism….The British can think of themselves within this, but it wont be the Britain their parents and grandparents knew.

The vital point is that adjustment takes time – time for the sort of 4 point programme being developed by the organisation British Future – to promote:

 - an inclusive sense of **citizenship**;

 - **integration** where people from all backgrounds can contribute fully to British life;

 - understanding of the positive value of **immigration** while addressing the economic and social pressures;

 - shared economic and social **opportunity**.

But support for a lost past which delivered stability and prosperity disappears when it fails to deliver.

As President Clinton said: it’s the economy, stupid.