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Instructor: Kirsten Kearney

Presentators: Aleksej Golowerda, Anne Schuster, Katrin Attermeyer, Kerstin Schmitz

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Englishness

General Agreements

The Identity of England

Generally, an identity is created by what others see. People see themselves through others' eyes, and if individuals have no contact with other people they have no identity. So what characterizes the English identity?

Historical characteristics

Historically, the certain themes that characterize English identity are the Gothics, The Landscape, The Empire and Temper. Soldiers, sailors and imperial bureaucrats were the capacities in which most of the world knew the English people. Englishness was seen as curiously static, despite the fact that between 1650 and 1850 England changed from a predominantly rural, isolated, heavily religious country dominated by the aristocracy into a quasi-democratic, increasingly urban and secular industrial society, and the centre of worldwide empire.

Present characteristics

Today, things that are often considered to be typically English are for example: cricket, patriotism, tea, class, public schools, bowler hats, sexual repression and village green. But this image is very old fashioned and male gendered- it is a constructed image. This particular point of view is the dominant ideology of the ruling class. But there are people who are not part of the dominant class which take on these notions and feel proud to be English, especially when it is unlikely that they will ever become the person represented by the dominant ideology. In fact, the idea of national identity is based on observations of social, economic, political and cultural nature.

The concept of "Englishness" tends to flow into the idea of nationalism on the one side and patriotism on the other. The future of the English identity lies in acknowledging the multiple realities of national identity, inclusive all the different points according to Englishness in all it's diversity.

The feeling of national unity and pride emerged from various quintessences of Englishness which are the result of a study in stereotypes, for example the Royal Family, the Manchester United Football Club, the Union Jack, Shakespeare, Gardening, London Taxis, Magna Carta... The Beatles, James Bond, London as England's great cultural centre and Princess Diana are for an uncountable mass of people in the world the most powerful cultural icons.

So what is Englishness?

Englishness is hard to describe clearly because of the divergent and sometimes contradictory qualities that are ascribed to it. This led us to the conclusion that Englishness is purely a construct because nearly everybody has, beside the things in common, different points in mind when he or she thinks of the general image of England and the English people.

Englishness (in opposition to other 'Europeannesses')

Continuity in the Formation of the Political System

- 9th century: Round Table (based on legend);
 - 1215: Magna Carta Libertatum:
 - “No freeman shall be taken or imprisoned or disseised or exiled or in anyway destroyed, nor will we go upon him nor send upon him, except by the lawful judgment of his peers or by the law of the land.”
 - 1628: Petition of Rights;
 - 1642-1649: ‘Puritan Revolution’, Civil War, Execution of the King Charles I.;
 - 1649-1658: Dictatorship of Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell;
 - 1660-1688: Restoration of the Stuart’s Monarchy; Banishment of the King James II.;
 - 1679: Habeas Corpus Act;
 - 1689: Glorious Revolution; Declaration/Bill of Rights:
 - Kingdom from the Parliament’s mercy;
 - England – first constitutional monarchy of Europe.
 - 1792-1815: Napoleonic Wars:
 - Other than continental countries no reflection and no ardour of the French Revolution;
 - Tories conservative government – Struggle against Napoleon and French hegemony;
 - From 1815: Participation in restoration of absolutistic regimes in European countries.
 - Nowadays: UK is (still) a constitutional monarchy.
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- ✓ From the very beginning the British Parliament (or its predecessors) played an inevitable role in the inner and outer political process and making decisions in the particular social and political acts;
 - ✓ But: Britain has an ‘unwritten’ constitution, the monarchy and the House of Lords;
 - ✓ Hardly influx from the Overseas on the political and social system.
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- ❖ Features: gentleman, relying on the oral agreement, master of diplomacy, snobbish, self-confident.

Origin of Anglican Church

- 1521: Henry VIII. wrote „Assertion of the Seven Sacraments Against Martin Luther”;
- 1521: Leo X. declared Henry VIII. to the “defensor fidei”;
- 1532: Henry VIII. divorced Catharine of Aragon and married Anne Boleyn;

- 1533: Pope Paul III. excommunicated Henry VIII.;
 - 1534. Act of Supremacy made the king supreme head of the Church of England;
 - From 1547 until 1689: many attempts to re-establish Catholicism in England.
- ✓ Reformation in England is the matter of national independence.

Isolationism/Insularity/Notion of Great Power

- 1337-1453: Hundred Years' War → Lost of huge properties in France → nationalism;
 - 1588: Destruction of Spanish Armada → Great Britain – dominating naval power;
 - 19th century's policy towards Europe: Balance btw. Great Powers; Splendid Isolation:
Winston Churchill: "England has no friends, only its own interests."
 - 19th century's Empire policy: Colonialism; Victorian Age; Imperialism:
Joseph Chamberlain: "In carrying out this work of civilization we are fulfilling what I believe to be our national mission, and we are finding scope for the exercise of those faculties and qualities which have made of us a great governing race."
 - 1833: Slavery Abolition Act;
 - 1904: Entente cordiale;
 - 1973: Britain joins to the European Economic Community.
- ✓ Thanks to its insular geographic location Great Britain avoided (and avoids) to be involved into Continental affairs;
- ✓ But: Partial realisation of concept of splendid isolation;
- ✓ Racism and nationalism, especially in the age of colonialism and imperialism;
- ✓ English people are regarded as masters of diplomacy and excellent traders.

Some topics regarding Englishness in European historical context

- ✍ Conservatism;
- ✍ First constitutional monarchy;
- ✍ Expansive colonialism and imperialism;
- ✍ Dogma of superiority of English race and language in the age of imperialism;
- ✍ Isolationism/Insularity;
- ✍ Acceptance of (home made) liberal ideas;
- ✍ Constitutional monarchy with unwritten constitution;
- ✍ Devolution;
- ✍ Immigration (first of all from the former colonies);
- ✍ Multicultural society;
- ✍ English language as a mixture of different languages;
- ✍ Involvement to transformation processes and military conflicts throughout the world.

Englishness or Britishness

The term “Britishness”

The contemporary term ‘Britishness’ is a problematic one because of the many differences of identity and mentality between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Parameters of identity such as language, region, religion, politics, occupation, education, ethnicity, culture and history make it difficult to find a common basis for all inhabitants of the United Kingdom and call this ‘Britishness’. The distinctive ways of life and identities split identity on a national, regional and local level.

Reasons for identification differences

There are mostly historical reasons for the different development the four parts of the UK have undergone and consequently a different kind of identification of each part’s population, too. The term ‘Britishness’ only began to exist when the 4 different nations got united in 1707. In the 19th century concepts of ‘Britishness’ were more widely used under the Victorian monarchy; Great Britain’s imperial, industrial and military power was emphasized as one nation and its position in the world was established.

Confusion about the term

To some people the terms ‘British’ and ‘Britain’ seem artificial. Foreigners call Britain often England, though differences are huge; e.g. already their origin is dissimilar as the Scots, Welsh and Northern Irish are Celtic and the English are Anglo-Saxon. British identification is often equated with English norms because of England’s superior historical and present role:

- unification took place under the English Crown
- England was often more successful and powerful in the past
- English nationalism has historically been the most potent of the four nations
- the UK state power is concentrated in London today
- the English people dominate numerically
- England has the greatest cultural centre in London

The popular image of British culture is therefore often in reality more English than British, and most people do not know the difference e.g. between English and Scottish. Britishness and Englishness are interchangeable to people until they see obvious symbols of one of the other British nations, like men wearing kilts.

In London there is no single identity because so many identities co-exist; it absorbs into its own identity icons that have achieved world wide popular recognition but may well have come from somewhere else.

Difference between 'Englishness' and 'Britishness'

“To what extent do you think Englishness and Britishness are the same or different?”

- A Czech respondent: “I do not believe in any Britishness...no one identifies with such a general concept”
- “I do not believe it is frequently argued that Britishness has suppressed elements of Scottishness, Welshness and Irishness in a manner that is often seen in imperialistic/colonialist terms.”
- “I have a love-hate relationship with Britishness; I love to hate it.”
- A Welsh nationalist (Gwynfor Evans): “Britishness is...a political synonym for Englishness which extends English culture over the Scots, the Welsh, and the Irish.”
- Easthope: “The price England has had to pay for its imperial mission has been precisely surrendering a sense of particular national identity.”
- “While ‘Englishness has perhaps contributed most to the notion of Britishness’, it has also lost out through the arrangement.”
- A Scottish respondent: “English people have just as rich a cultural heritage and history as the Scots. But they've sold it in return for the symbols of Britishness, now becoming increasingly worthless... The final irony may be that the English people are those least able to define who they really are, because they were the first to be colonised by the British and remain the last 'British colony'.”
- “British is more elevated”; “Britishness is less tangible”
- “British refers more to the past, English more to the present”
- “Britishness possesses a broader and less insular appeal - more inclusive...something that black and Asian people are more likely to identify with than Englishness” or “more diversity and less anti-European feeling.”

In Polls it is clearly show that among the nations of Great Britain the sense of *British* identity was strongest among the English people surveyed. They also demonstrated a weaker sense of being specifically English than did Welsh respondents of being Welsh or Scots of being Scottish. Oakland claims that particularly among teenagers there is a resurgence in English nationalism that is not tied to traditional features.

Usually national identity is defined in opposition to being English...

There are also differences between the four nations on regional or local level themselves. Regional identity is mostly seen in sports, politics, food habits, competitions etc:

ENGLAND: great mix of people with different customs, accents, and behaviour

1. *North-east:* tries to act against London's influence
2. *North-west:* decentralizes political autonomy
3. *Cornish:* see themselves as a distinctive cultural element in English society, have an affinity with Celtic etc.
4. *Northern England:* feel superior to the southern English

WALES: cultural and political differences between

- Economic differences
 - *South*: industrial area, many labour supporters
 - *Rest of the country*: mostly rural
- Language
 - *Welsh* speaking in north-west and centre
 - English influence in *east* and *south west*, e.g.: Swansea and Cardiff (supporters of the conservatives)

Today many ancestries are mixed already. National and cultural identity is founded in history, literature, sports, language and festivals (dancing, music, poetry).

SCOTLAND: there is tradition to defend national identity towards the English, which is reflected in cultural festivals, different legal, religious and educational systems. Most people are against centralization of power in London. But there are also local differences:

- *Language*: Gaelic and English
- *Religion*: Presbyterian Church of Scotland (The Kirk), Roman Catholic, Free Church of Scotland, Scottish Episcopal Church
- *Culture*: Lowlanders, Highlanders, Edinburgh, Glasgow

NORTHERN IRELAND: greatest cultural, social, political differences based on religious differences: *Roman Catholics* and *Protestants*, reflected in geographical ghettos and big riots.

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