

Master in Advanced European and International Studies

European Integration and Global Studies

***What kind of Britain? British
national identity and the first
application debates on EEC
membership, 1961-1963***

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Abstract

This thesis centres around the question how the construction of different notions of British national identity influenced the parliamentary debates on the first application of Great Britain to the European Economic Community between 1961 and 1963. The historiography so far has sought to explain Britain's movement towards Europe due to political, strategic, or pragmatic reasons. This study, based on a discourse analysis of the three key parliamentary debates, argues that national identity played a more important role in the debate over Britain's entry into the EEC than previously has been assumed. Both sides of the political debate appealed to British national identity. The anti-Marketeers constructed a static vision of Britishness that was incompatible with the EEC, using emotional appeals to Britain's traditions that were grounded in war memories and its history. As opposed to these critics, the proponents of entry redefined British national identity by making it less emotionally laden and more inclusive so that EEC accession seemed a natural next step in the changing international context. These findings illustrate that British national identity itself was politicised during these debates, and helps to understand the troubled relationship between Britain and Europe that has developed ever since.

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List of abbreviations

CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EDC	European Defence Community
EEC	European Economic Community
EFTA	European Free Trade Area
FTA	Free Trade Area
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OEEC	Organisation for European Economic Co-operation

Introduction

The application to the European Economic Community (EEC) in August 1961 constituted a turning point in British foreign policy. Throughout the 1950s, successive British governments refused to participate in the supranational organisations of ‘the Six’.¹ British politicians felt more attachment to the British Commonwealth, as well as the ‘special relationship’ with the United States. Despite the ambiguity within governmental circles prior to the official application, the second Conservative cabinet of Prime Minister Harold Macmillan prepared to join the EEC ‘if acceptable terms could be secured’.²

In a broader sense, the desire to join the EEC had opened one of Britain’s fundamental dilemmas over Europe.³ British politicians were keenly aware of Britain’s changing international position and of public fears that EEC membership might threaten its national identity. Macmillan tried to assuage these worries in a television broadcast in January 1962. While the speech was intended to deliver a broad assessment of Britain’s prospect for the next few years, in a brief side note, the prime minister responded to these concerns:

‘There’s one thing I think people mustn’t be frightened about. Some people think that if you enter into one of these alliances or groupings, you will lose your identity. Well of course if you enter into any kind of contract [...] you hand over to the common pool something of your own liberty. But that doesn’t mean that if we join one of these, that Britain will cease to be Britain or British people to be British.’⁴

Although Macmillan tried to downplay the consequences of European integration on the national identity, the leader of the Labour Party, Hugh Gaitskell, spoke dramatically about ‘the end of a thousand years of history’ and the end of Britain as an independent state.⁵ The request to join the EEC therefore had major implications for the way in which Britain perceived itself.

Even though the first application was seen by contemporaries as a watershed moment, historians so far have largely overlooked the role of national identity in this process. Only in a passing note do historians refer to the tensions or incompatibility between British national

¹ ‘The Six’ refers to the six founding members of the European Coal and Steel Community, and subsequently the European Economic Community. These are France, West Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg.

² Cited from John W. Young, *Britain and European Unity, 1945-1992* (London, 1993), p.85.

³ There are more than six different ways to describe the nation of Great Britain. In this thesis, the preferential term used is ‘Great Britain’ or ‘Britain’ instead of the United Kingdom for semantic reasons, even though formally, there are different meanings attached to each term. Unless indicated otherwise, the term Britain refers to all the constituent units of the United Kingdom, consisting of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

⁴ Harold Macmillan, ‘Conservative Party political broadcast’, 24 January 1962, *British Broadcasting Corporation*, Written Archives Centre, Caversham, Film 35/36.

⁵ Labour Party National Executive Committee, *Britain and the Common Market* (London, 1962).

identity and the process of European integration. Historian George argues that, in the desire to join the EEC, there was ‘no abandonment at either official or popular level of a commitment to a strong sense of national identity, which remained the basis for the electoral appeals of politicians in all parties’.⁶ Moreover, political scientists Marcussen, Risse, Engelman-Martin, Knopf, and Rosche contend that British national identity has a more problematic relationship with European integration than in other countries because of deeply held beliefs about what it means to be British.⁷

Dewey remains one of the few historians to have examined specifically the role of British national identity in relation to the first application to the EEC. In particular, his approach is centred on the ‘low political’ protest and populism of anti-European pressure groups.⁸ However, Dewey focuses exclusively on the opponents of British entry, as he tries to explain the sentiment of the anti-Marketeers.⁹ More importantly, the scope of analysis does not take into account how constructions of British national identity have been formed and shaped by politicians in the House of Commons. Against this backdrop, *this thesis seeks to understand how the construction of different notions of national identity influenced parliamentary debates on the first application of Great Britain to the European Economic Community (1961-1963).*

While this thesis focuses on the role of British national identity in parliamentary debates on the European accession process, it speaks directly to the larger historiographical debate on Britain’s first application to the EEC. The sheer volume of works on Britain and Europe reflects the highly contested nature of the subject. Few aspects in postwar British politics have been as divisive as British involvement in European integration, not least because the European cleavage has consistently cut right across party lines. Within the historiographical debate, there are roughly three schools of thought that seek to explain why Britain sought to join the EEC in 1961.¹⁰

⁶ Stephen George, *An awkward partner. Britain in the European Community* (Oxford, 1998), p.40.

⁷ Martin Marcussen, Thomas Risse, Daniela Engelman-Martin, Hans Joachim Knopf and Klaus Roscher, ‘Constructing Europe? The Evolution of Nation-State Identities’, in Christiansen, Jorgensen and Wiener (eds.), *The Social Construction of Europe*, pp.101-120.

⁸ Robert Dewey, *British National Identity and Opposition to Membership of Europe 1961-1963: The Anti-Marketeers* (Manchester, 2009), p.7.

⁹ Ibid., p.5.

¹⁰ See for an overview on the historiography of Great Britain and European integration, Oliver J. Daddow, *Britain and Europe since 1945. Historiographical Perspectives on Integration* (Manchester, 2004) pp. 58-154. Daddow makes a distinction between three schools of thought on the relationship between Great Britain and the European continent since its inception in 1945. These are the orthodox school of thought, the revisionist school, and the post-revisionist historians. Since this thesis focuses exclusively on the first application process, a different typology is utilised based on a thorough reading of the secondary literature. A selection of (in some measure dated) historiographical articles dives deeper into different aspects of the first application period: John W. Young, ‘Britain and “Europe”. The Shape of the Historiographical Debate’ in: Brian Brivati, Julia Baxton and Anthony Seldon eds., *The Contemporary History Handbook* (Manchester, 1996), pp. 207-214; August Wurm Clemens,

Traditionally, historians have portrayed Britain's position with the continent as an 'awkward' or 'reluctant' partner who has remained 'on the sidelines' of the European integration process.¹¹ According to George and Wall, the status as a difficult partner results on the one hand from the fact that British policymakers believed in a sense of British exceptionalism after the Second World War. As a victorious power, Britain perceived itself as a global power rather than a European power.¹² Both political parties, according to this view, attached significant importance to the British Empire (later Commonwealth) that would serve British interests. Wall argues that even in the 1950s and 1960s, British political actors harboured the idea that West Germany was a potential threat and that the European continent could not be trusted. Moreover, the issue of British parliamentary sovereignty precluded participation in international bodies where the pooling of sovereignty was a requisite for entry.¹³ As a result of this mental frame, these authors argue that Great Britain has always been out of step with the reality of Western Europe since 1945. When the EEC proved to be a success story, Macmillan opted only out of pragmatism to issue the first application to the EEC.¹⁴

A second group of scholars challenges the overtly negative image that Great Britain was an awkward partner. Instead, these historians place Britain's European policy between 1945 and 1961 in a broader strategic context relating to national security priorities.¹⁵ Camps, who has written a detailed monograph on Macmillan's government policy towards the EEC, argues that British governments acted entirely rational in the 1950s in relation to Europe.¹⁶ For successive British governments, the Atlantic relationship remained the most important link in its foreign policy. There was also no reason to assume that the European project would become a success.¹⁷ Kaiser concludes that British policy was not so much 'awkward' as it was a tactical

'Britain and European Integration, 1945-1963', *Contemporary European History* 7:2 (1998), 249-261; Gabriele Clemens, 'A History of Failures and Miscalculations? Britain's Relationship to the European Communities in the Postwar Era (1945-1973)', *Contemporary European History* 13:2 (2004) 223-232; Wolfram Kaiser, 'A never-ending story. Britain in Europe', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 4:1 (2002) 152-165.

¹¹ George, *An awkward partner*; Stephen Wall, *Reluctant European. Britain and the European Union from 1945 to Brexit* (Oxford, 2020); David Gowland, Arthur Turner and Alex Wright, *Britain and European Integration since 1945. On the sidelines* (Routledge, 2010).

¹² George, *An awkward partner*, pp.19-22; Wall, *Reluctant European*, p.3.

¹³ George, *An awkward partner*, pp.19-25.

¹⁴ Related to this line of argument are those historians who contend that Great Britain 'missed the European boat' during the initial phase of European integration, which prevented Britain from influencing the EEC's trajectory to suit its own interests. See Roy Denman, *Missed Chances. Britain and Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1996).

¹⁵ Alan Milward, *The UK and European Community: Vol. 1, The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy 1945-1963* (London, 2002), pp.1-10.

¹⁶ Miriam Camps, *Britain and European Community, 1955-1963* (Princeton, 1964), p.513.

¹⁷ Miriam Camps, 'Missing the boat at Messina and other times?' in: Brian Brivati and Harriet Jones (eds.), *From Reconstruction to Integration. Britain and Europe since 1945* (London, 1993), pp.135-136.

manifestation in which Britain was ‘using and abusing the Europeans’.¹⁸ He emphasises that the turn to Europe was based on a dual appeasement strategy. On the one hand, the application served to maintain the special relationship with the United States, as the Americans desired a closer cooperation with Europe. On the other hand, Kaiser argues that the course towards Europe served to resolve internal disputes within the Conservative Party, where a vocal pro-European wing was causing serious defection on party political matters. The policy actions of British governments over the first application was therefore understandable when viewed from this strategic perspective.

More recent studies argue that British attitudes towards European integration were determined by the country’s gradual political and economic marginalisation after the Second World War. Internationally, the country became more isolated, especially after the Suez Crisis of 1956. Grob-Fitzgibbon demonstrates that this isolation was reinforced by the declining economic and political importance of the British Commonwealth.¹⁹ British politicians therefore had to readjust their concept of Britain’s place in the world, which coincided *grosso modo* with the successful development of the EEC in the late 1950s. For Steinnes, the move towards Europe should primarily be found in this readjustment process.²⁰ Her detailed study on the Macmillan government showcases that Britain wanted to join the EEC in order to regain its political role in the world, not simply as a device to keep the Americans happy. For Tratt, the notion of economic decline was pivotal in reorienting Britain towards the EEC.²¹ For these three historians, the application to the EEC was seen as a solution by the British political elite to reverse the trend of political and economic decline in the postwar era.

This study is distinguished by its attempt to specifically integrate how national identity shaped and influenced the parliamentary debates on European accession between 1961 and 1963. As such, the present thesis has two goals in mind. First, it situates national identity as a central element in the discussion of Britain’s application to the EEC. This cultural (or identitarian) approach is distinctive from the bulk of the historiography, where, as Crowson observed, the main focus has been on the political and policy-making aspects of the relationship, ‘with relatively little on popular and cultural aspects of the relationship’.²² The

¹⁸ Wolfram Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans. Britain and European Integration, 1945-1963* (London, 1999), p.108.

¹⁹ Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift. Britain and Europe from the End of Empire to the Rise of Euroscepticism* (Cambridge, 2016), pp.6-7.

²⁰ Kristian Steinnes, ‘The European Challenge. Britain’s EEC Application in 1961’, *Contemporary European History* 7:1 (1998), 63.

²¹ Jacqueline Tratt, *The Macmillan Government and Europe. A Study in the Process of Policy Development* (London, 1996), p.199.

²² Nicholas J. Crowson, *Britain and Europe. A political history since 1918* (London, 2011), p.15.

goal of this thesis is to include the presence and dynamics of identity narratives on the British question of European integration, if only because identitarian narratives continue to play a significant role in contemporary European politics.

Second, this thesis employs the underused source of parliamentary debates as an exploration of a key sub-theme in the first application debate. Recently, more studies focus on a particular element of the first application period, looking at for instance the relationship between the first application and local circumstances or at Commonwealth opinion.²³ This thesis adds to the scholarly literature by applying a combination of underused source material and a cultural approach to better understand the often troubled relationship between Great Britain and the EEC.

In doing so, the central argument contends that national identity played a larger role in the debate over Britain's entry into the EEC than previously assumed. Constructions of 'Britishness', whether reflexive or calculated, conscious or unconscious, were used by both sides of the political spectrum to argue for or against alignment with the European bloc. For the anti-Marketeers, it was a process of defining a strict line between 'us' versus 'them', juxtaposing Britons against the continental 'others'. It also included sentimental manifestations of what Billig has conceptualised as banal nationalism, in which 'unwavering flags' and symbols of nationhood were widely employed to serve the anti-European cause.²⁴ The pro-Europeans, in contrast, had to find subtle means to construct a particular form of Britishness that was suitable with process of European integration. These parliamentarians invoked rational elements of Britishness by transforming old notions of British identity, and presented Europe as an exciting future. However, these arguments did not satisfactorily erase the concerns of the sceptic anti-Marketeers. The reliance of the EEC opponents on deeply emotional arguments partly explains why European integration has remained a contentious issue in British politics and society, as was adequately reflected in the Brexit referendum of 2016.

To answer the research question, this thesis draws on parliamentary debates between 1961 and 1963 from archives of the House of Commons. It consists of three large debates, where Parliament discussed the decision of the Macmillan government to apply for the EEC. These debates, comprising more than three hundred pages of political speech, form key moments for Members of Parliament to voice their opinions and construct a notion of

²³ See Nicholas J. Crowson, 'Lord Hinchinbrooke, Europe and the November 1962 South Dorset By-election', *Contemporary British History*, 17:4 (2003), 43-64; George Wilkes, 'The Commonwealth and British European Policy: Politics and Sentiment, 1956-63' in: Alex May (ed.), *Britain, the Commonwealth and Europe: The Commonwealth and Britain's Applications to Join the European Communities* (Basingstoke, 2001), pp.53-81.

²⁴ On banal nationalism, see Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London, 1995), pp.1-20, 99-100.

Britishness in relation to European integration. In approaching the sources, the method used is a historical qualitative study in which a discourse analysis is the main framework of analysis. Political statements are examined to understand how certain forms of British national identity are shaped, and in turn, how these statements reflect the political priorities and ideological positions of these politicians. The analysis goes beyond merely describing what kind of identity is being formulated. Instead, this study is concerned with how narratives shape and influence political decision-making, an aspect that has been overlooked in the historiography.

The main difficulty of studying British national identity and European integration based on parliamentary debates is that not every argument is necessarily tied to identitarian convictions. British politicians had multiple reasons to declare themselves for or against the EEC, be it economic, political, or even strategic reasons. This makes it difficult to exactly quantify the extent to which these beliefs are related to identitarian narratives and how these factors co-determine political positions. It ties into question of whether a speech act by a political actor is intentionally made, or whether he might use a form of discourse that does not directly correspond to his inner motives. However, this problem falls beyond the scope of the study, since this thesis is mainly interested how national identity was publicly mobilised during the accession debates, and is less interested in the intentionality of the political speech.

Furthermore, due to time constraints, it is only possible to look at the issue of national identity for the first British application, even though the story of Britain and Europe continues after the first French veto of president Charles de Gaulle. That said, a cultural approach to this topic is justified because, as previously stated, studies in this direction have been sporadically taken.²⁵ This study therefore helps to better understand attitudes of postwar British politicians on the issue of European integration.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. In the opening chapter, a deeper theoretical inquiry is made on the issue of nationalism and British national identity. It is one thing to label expressions and arguments as nationalist, but it is another to understand its appeal and pervasiveness. The chapter helps to illuminate the construction of British national identity and what dynamics sustain visions of British exceptionalism. The second chapter gives an historical overview of British involvement with Europe between 1950 and 1963, outlining a brief chronology that led up to Britain's official request to join the EEC and the subsequent French veto. The third chapter deals with how the anti-Marketeers used of notions of British national

²⁵ For a historical overview on the concept of culture, as well as the link between 'identity' and 'culture', see Megan Vaughan, 'Culture' in: Ulinka Rublack (ed.), *A Concise Companion to History* (Oxford, 2011) pp. 227-247.

identity in the parliamentary debates between 1961 and 1963. Chapter four does the equivalent from the perspective of the proponents of European entry.

1. National identity and Britishness

The main argument of this chapter is that British attitudes towards European integration cannot be understood without examining the ways in which national identity was constructed, contested, and politically mobilised in the postwar period. A theoretical discussion of nationalism illustrates that the concept of national identity is a more flexible framework through which political actors interpret and mobilise nationalist thought on a daily basis. Within this perspective, 'Britishness' is a particularly complex concept to define due to the coexistence of established subnational identities within the United Kingdom. As a consequence, British national identity emerges not as a fixed or coherent identity, but as a historically contingent construct that is shaped by domestic and external points of reference. It is formed through the ongoing processes of interpretation based on a shared national symbols, such as history, geography, the British Empire, the war experience, and sovereignty. These elements of British national identity were utilised in divergent ways during the EEC accession debate, enabling both pro- and anti-Marketeers to articulate a particular vision of Britain's place in Europe.

Theoretical perspectives on post-1945 nationalism

The end of the Second World War marked a watershed moment for the support of political nationalism in Western Europe.²⁶ After the wars of aggression and the genocidal policies of the Nazi regime, nationalism was considered a politically and intellectually offensive doctrine. For Western European leaders, European integration could offer a way out as a major antidote to the exalted nationalism and racial theories. Through the ongoing integration and globalisation of the European economy, the traditional lines of division between states and societies could gradually fade away.²⁷

In practice, however, nationalist tendencies did not erode after the Second World War. While the colonies of the imperial European states were seeking national self-determination in the postwar period, similar nationalist tendencies reappeared at various moments in the older nation states. The need to reconcile an age of globalisation with the persistence of nationalist

²⁶ André Gerrits, *Nationalism in Europe since 1945* (London, 2016), p.1. Political nationalism is defined as political action that is guided by a distinct idea of what the nation is with a strong sense of national identity.

²⁷ Ibid., p.4. For a complete overview on postwar developments of nationalism from a global perspective, see Eric Storm, *Nationalism. A Global History* (Oxford, 2024), pp.225-281.

fervour therefore poses a great challenge to understanding nationalism and national identity after 1945.²⁸

The modernist strand in nationalist studies regard the postwar manifestations of nationalism as negative reactions to the inevitable globalisation. According to the modernist view, the origins of nationalism can be traced toward the end of the eighteenth century as a consequence of the rise of modernity and its associated developments, such as print capitalism, industrialisation, and the evolution of the nation state.²⁹ The most outspoken among the modernists is Hobsbawm. In *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (1992), Hobsbawm argued that nationalism 'is simply no longer the historical force it was in the era between the French Revolution and the end of imperialist colonialism after World War II'.³⁰ Breuilly also declared nationalism to the domain of the past. To the extent that nationalism was still relevant, it applied primarily to separatist movements in Ireland and Catalonia.³¹ According to Breuilly, the diminishing appeal of this doctrine was the result of the political damage that virulent nationalism had inflicted on Europe in the twentieth century.

The modernist view helps to explain why extreme forms of nationalism were rejected after 1945. Yet, the decline of nationalism thesis fails to account for the continued appeal of national identity in contemporary Europe. For instance, the modernist view struggles to explain why the integrative agenda of the EEC provoked such a strong nationalist backlash in Britain.³² Moreover, the analysis of Hobsbawm and Breuilly is problematic for three additional reasons. Firstly, the modernists underestimate the social and cultural elements that play a significant role in generating nationalist sentiment. Smith points out in *Nations and Nationalism in the Global Era* (1995) that historical and cultural ties within societies have deeper roots than the birth of modern nation states. These identitarian expressions of nationalism, Smith contends, become stronger as globalisation processes accelerate.³³

Secondly, the problem with the modernist interpretation is that nationalism is approached as a marginal phenomenon. This is because Hobsbawm equates nationalism with its most extreme forms, which is known as 'hot' nationalism.³⁴ His analysis is correct in that the allied powers rejected exalted forms of nationalism and began to focus on international cooperation and liberal internationalism. At the same time, as Storm highlights, the nation state

²⁸ Dewey, *British National Identity and Opposition to Membership of Europe 1961-1963*, p.17.

²⁹ See for the debate between the modernists and its critics, Storm, *Nationalism*, pp.11-15.

³⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (Cambridge, 1992), pp.169-170.

³¹ John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester, 1982), pp.1-10.

³² Dewey, *British National Identity and Opposition to Membership of Europe 1961-1963*, p.18.

³³ Anthony D. Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* (Cambridge, 1995), pp.70-75.

³⁴ See for the distinction between hot and cold nationalism, Gerrits, *Nationalism in Europe since 1945*, p.6.

was paradoxically taken for granted as a point of orientation for states and politicians.³⁵ In some respects, the postwar consensus in Western Europe strengthened the identification with nations because of the material benefits the nation state provided. Nationalism was increasingly focused on the nation state, and it now became increasingly banal and cultural, which is called ‘cold’ nationalism.

A final problem lies in the lack of conceptual distinction between nationalism and national identity. Anderson states in *Imagined Communities* (1983) that ‘nationness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time’.³⁶ Extending this line of argument, Smith postulates that it is a futile endeavour to understand the power and appeal of nationalism as a political force without establishing a broader analytical framework that centralises around the notion of national identity, which has deeper roots than nationalism.³⁷ For Smith, national identity contains ‘the continuous reproduction and reinterpretation by the members of a national community of the patterns of symbols, values, myths, memories, and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations, and the variable identification of individual members of that community with that heritage and its cultural elements’.³⁸ This suggests that national identity is an important vehicle for fuelling political nationalism. However, Gerrits argues that a strong national identity based on a persuasive narrative of the nation, its past and its present, does not necessarily translate into a strong sense of nationalism.³⁹ The modernist framework that connects nationalism to violence is therefore unsuitable for this study, because it reinforces the tendency to relegate arguments about nationalism to an irrelevant extreme.

While modernist scholars primarily understand nationalism as a product of the French Revolution and modernity, this thesis is preoccupied with the concept of national identity. Unlike nationalism as a political ideology, national identity is not limited to moments of political mobilisation. It provides a suitable framework for analysing how appeals to the nation continued to shape political thought after 1945. Smith and Gerrits’ approach suggests that nationalism in the postwar world proved more resilient and flexible than the modernists acknowledge. It would take different forms in different periods, and people attached different identities to the nation. This is especially so in the case of ‘banal nationalism’, a term coined by Billig. Banal nationalism encompasses a complex form of ideological habits by which the

³⁵ Storm, *Nationalism*, pp.225-226, 278.

³⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983), p.3.

³⁷ Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London, 1991), p.vii.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.18.

³⁹ Gerrits, *Nationalism in Europe since 1945*, p.12.

nation is attached through politics, culture, and daily life. The term nationalism is used because it appeals to representations of nationhood and it is banal because of its recognisability in daily life.⁴⁰

Billig's concept is particularly useful as it brings nationalism out of the margins and allows research into nationalism under more ordinary circumstances – that is, in the absence of war or conflict. Banal nationalism is not a flag that is constantly being waved with passion. Rather, it is 'the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building'.⁴¹ A wide range of signifiers, such as language, metaphors, geography, history, and traditions, contribute to the conception of a natural and stable order of the imagined nation.⁴² It is therefore a false assumption to suggest that nations progress beyond nationalism, or that nationalism ceased to exist after 1945.⁴³ Throughout much of postwar European history, nationalism took a more passive and restrained form, such as saluting the flag or identifying with national symbols, and it could therefore manifest itself in various context, as can be observed in the British debate on European accession.

Additionally, it is important to underscore the political function of national identity, especially in the context of European integration. The constant reaffirmation of the nation's identity motivates political action, influences political ideas, and legitimises specific political behaviour.⁴⁴ Consequently, banal nationalism is relevant to analysing the British accession to the EEC because it speaks to the ease with which opponents of EEC entry could play the national card.⁴⁵ They did not have to search endlessly for flags to wave, but had them widely at their disposal. For instance, Hugh Gaitskell could employ the 'thousand years of history' metaphor without mentioning any historical detail. According to Billig, these historical facts are so commonplace in themselves that they do not require much explanation for the audience.⁴⁶ It was enough to remind the public (or 'us') that 'we' existed for a thousand years in 'our' unique manner. Gaitskell could therefore assume that the audience would understand that Britain had a distinctive national identity, and by going into Europe, it would lose that identity. In other words, nationalism politicises the nation and turns the nation into a political subject that can be mobilised by waving certain flags.

⁴⁰ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, pp.1-15.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.8.

⁴² Dewey, *British National Identity and Opposition to Membership of Europe 1961-1963*, p.20.

⁴³ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, pp.65-73.

⁴⁴ Gerrits, *Nationalism in Europe since 1945*, pp.12-13.

⁴⁵ Dewey, *British National Identity and Opposition to Membership of Europe 1961-1963*, pp.20-25.

⁴⁶ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, pp.70-75.

But the effortlessness of mobilising banal nationalism should not be overstated. Billig argues that not all flags are waved in the same way.⁴⁷ The use of national symbols also acquires different meanings depending on who uses them, as will be shown in third and fourth chapter. Even though the Common Market supporters had much more difficulty using patriotic symbols – due to the dilemma between globalisation and nationalism –, they were nonetheless successful in certain cases in transforming banal elements of British national identity into a rationale for joining the European club.

Imagining Britishness

The mechanisms through which national identity in Great Britain is imagined also deserve brief attention here. If nations are imagined communities, as Anderson presupposes, then contemporary forms of national identity are not only an original expression thereof, but are also a derived perception of that national identity.⁴⁸ The way in which a country reflects on its own identity is at least as important as that identity itself. Nations are therefore not static and are not merely imagined, but are affirmed and renegotiated on a daily basis.

A central difficulty in analysing British national identity lies in the lack of agreement over how the concept of ‘Britishness’ ought to be defined.⁴⁹ Since the 1960s, many historians have fiercely debated whether something like a British identity exists and how it is constructed. This debate is primarily the result of domestic and international developments that have influenced the British position in the world after 1945.⁵⁰ Furthermore, many of the institutions that embodied elements of national successes, such as the monarchy, the Church of England, and the British Parliament, have gradually lost their sense of purpose as a marker of shared identity.⁵¹ This is further complicated by the question whether Britishness is rooted in the four constituent national identities of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, or whether it constitutes a distinct, overarching identity that is superimposed.

There is a slight danger in placing so much emphasis on the significance of terminology. To speak of Britain (or Great Britain) was often simply a matter of linguistic conventions. But behind the seemingly innocent use of terminology lies a deeper debate on the identity that is attached to such a term. Some historians have seen Britishness as a form of economic or cultural

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp.100-110.

⁴⁸ Dewey, *British National Identity and Opposition to Membership of Europe 1961-1963*, p.21.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp.24-26.

⁵⁰ David Cannadine, ‘British History as a “New Subject” in Alexander Grant and Keith Stringer (eds.), *Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History* (London, 1995), p.19.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.20.

imperialism imposed on Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland by the English ruling elites.⁵² Haseler argues, for instance, that what is often meant by 'national identity' in the British case, should be defined as 'state identity'.⁵³ Citizens of Great Britain did not identify themselves politically with the four countries of the British Isles, but with the overarching nation state of the United Kingdom. Weight supports this view, and sees Britishness as a typical product of capitalism, imperialism, and Protestantism that was enforced upon lower classes, colonies, and non-Protestants, who largely resisted these pressures at home.⁵⁴

Colls, however, sees Britishness as a much weaker force than it does in the accounts of Haseler and Weight. In his reading, the multiple identities in Britain have been subject to constant change and instability over time that they were doomed to fail in the long-run.⁵⁵ There existed a British state, he contends, but not a British collective identity in any real sense. The Unionist movement was limited to the political rather than the cultural sphere, and this identity was wrought with tensions from the start. It was impossible to be authentically Scottish and loyally Unionist at the same time. Writing in the 2000s, Colls foreshadowed that the crisis of Britishness would lead to constitutional disputes between Westminster and the subnational parliaments in the different nations.⁵⁶

In contrast to the aforementioned approaches that focus on defining Britishness, Colley's interpretation highlights the relational and externally constructed nature of this concept. In Colley's view, the emergence and construction of British national identity is the result of the constant struggle between Britain and Catholic France in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁵⁷ All the major wars with France challenged the political and religious foundations upon which Great Britain was based, as it threatened its internal security and its commercial and colonial enterprise. The British came to define themselves as a single people not because any consensus at home, but rather in reaction to the 'other' beyond the Channel.⁵⁸ She does not view Britishness as a mix of the older national cultures of the British Isles. Britishness was superimposed over an array of internal differences in response to conflict with the other. Identification with Britain served, according to Colley, as a bandwagon on which

⁵² Paul Ward, *Britishness since 1870* (London, 2004), pp.2-3.

⁵³ Stephen Haseler, *The English Tribe: Identity, Nation and Europe* (London, 1996), pp. 39-40.

⁵⁴ Richard Weight, *Patriots. National Identity in Britain 1940-2000* (London, 2002), pp.1-11, 730-735.

⁵⁵ Robert Colls, *Identity of England* (Oxford, 2002), pp.370-380.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.195-200.

⁵⁷ Linda Colley, *Britons. Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven, 1992), p.1.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.6, 311.

different groups leaped in order to steer it into a direction which benefitted them. That also allowed room for inconsistencies, contradictions, and flexibility of daily identity formation.⁵⁹

Taken together, these examples illustrate that Britishness has never been a stable category of analysis, precisely because it is not a static concept. Rather, it should be understood as a concept that is continuously in the process of formation. The British case also shows that identification with Britain does not preclude other forms of identification. As Samuel argues, Britishness can, on the one hand, be conceived as a collective and abstract identity that is primarily associated with military, diplomatic, and institutional symbols.⁶⁰ On the other hand, it operates on a personal level, learned by individuals who subsequently embrace that identity. This personal variant can coexist with other identities, such as religion, family, class, region, or ethnicity.

These historiographical insights help to explain how British identity is utilised in political discourse. In many of the imagined versions of Britishness, there is a persistent belief in the national exceptionalism of Britain, meaning that Britain occupied a special role that set it morally and politically apart from the historical experiences from the continent. This process of identification does not exist *a priori*. According to Billig, this identification is a relational process. In order to imagine 'our' nation in all its particularity, it must be imagined amongst other nations within an international context that needs to be imagined as much as the national community itself.⁶¹ The question here is not whether Great Britain is actually unique by having a specific *Sonderweg* vis-à-vis other countries. Kaiser has convincingly argued that the *Sonderweg* thesis of British postwar history is a myth created by the British political elite to showcase their British exceptionalism.⁶² The point here is that beliefs about exceptionalism, which the British view as an integral part of their identity, can actually arise by distinguishing themselves from other countries. As will be shown in the chapters on the parliamentary debates, both proponents and opponents of the EEC accession selectively invoked these narratives to sustain a particular version of British exceptionalism that related to Britain's place in Europe.

Key pillars of Britishness

In order to understand how national identity formed and shaped the EEC debate, this section illustrates various elements that have contributed to a particular sense of Britishness. This

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.5.

⁶⁰ Raphael Samuel, 'Introduction: Exciting to be English' in Raphael Samuel (ed.), *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity. Volume 1: History and Politics* (London, 1989), p.xv.

⁶¹ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p.83.

⁶² Kaiser, *Using Europe*, pp.209-212.

process serves as a reminder that Britishness is a collection of identities instead of a singular entity. National identity typically overlaps with other characteristics that may be points of identification. The following section is therefore not an exhaustive list of all the mechanisms that form a part of that identity. Rather, it is a representation of key pillars of Britishness that were used by both sides to position themselves for or against accession to the EEC.

The first component is the role of history in the formation of national identity. Although history is a transcendence of the present, it remains a product of its own time in narrative and interpretation. It is also a product of the methodology employed by the historian.⁶³ Consequently, the application of history and the past is a powerful force in determining what is defined as the national identity. For instance, the relatively recent development of nation states stands in stark contrast to the belief in the timelessness of nations.⁶⁴ This has to do, among other things, with the idea of ‘invented traditions’. Many traditions that seem eternal are in fact from quite recent origin or are sometimes invented to invoke a feeling of nationness.⁶⁵ There is, as a result, a contradiction between the emergence of the British nation state in 1707 with the Acts of Union between England and Scotland, and Gaitskell’s reference to a ‘thousand years of history’. If national identity is simultaneously about remembering and collective forgetting, then historians, who shape the narrative of the past, are crucial in the process of identity formation.⁶⁶

If identity is about ‘who we are’, then it is also determined by the question ‘where exactly we are’. Geography plays a role in defining national identity and how countries relate to other countries.⁶⁷ The geographical component of identity also has a unique duality by the fact that it is defined by both the physical elements of space as well as by the imaginative geography. In many writings, there is an emphasis on the mystical bond between a group of people and a physical place.⁶⁸ Each landscape evokes a geographical area, each region a narrative, thereby creating a sense of national pride.⁶⁹ This imagined geography is important in the construction of Britishness. While Great Britain is geographically located in Europe, the British have always had a strong idea that they were different from the continental Europeans. In this, the physical separation between the British Isles and the European mainland plays an

⁶³ Dewey, *British National Identity and Opposition to Membership of Europe 1961-1963*, p.27.

⁶⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp.11-12.

⁶⁵ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), p.1.

⁶⁶ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p.37.

⁶⁷ David Lowenthal, ‘European and English Landscapes as National Symbols’ in David Hooson (ed.), *Geography and National Identity* (Oxford, 1994), pp.20-30.

⁶⁸ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, pp.77-78.

⁶⁹ Lowenthal, ‘European and English Landscapes as National Symbols’, pp.20-25.

inevitable role. Even so, it is the imagined division that is more important in the construction of British national identity than its physical equivalent.

Linked to geography and history is the significance of the British Empire in the construction of Britishness. Nowhere is the importance of Empire greater to the British mind than the historical experience of the Pax Britannica and the subsequent decolonisation. During the interwar period, Empire increasingly figured to the British public in new and often innovative ways, such as the cinema newsreel.⁷⁰ There were also specific ways in which the British Empire was popularised more broadly among society. These included public exhibitions, consumer propaganda, and popular literature. The popular expressions of Empire were so broad that many Brits had some form of acquaintance with the Empire through personal, professional, religious, or cultural experiences.⁷¹ For some, Britain's national uniqueness can be attributed to the experience of Empire. The gradual decolonisation and the subsequent application to the EEC did not only usher a new period in British history, but also required a radical different worldview in which Britain ceased to play a central role on the world stage.

Not only experiences of Empire, but also memories of the Second World War influenced British national identity. According to Morgan, the post war triumphalism left a deep mark on the British psyche.⁷² Across the political spectrum, politicians saw the war experience between 1939 and 1945 as the last fleeting vision of national greatness. In a variety of ways, the war supplied images that were self-confirming. In relation to the EEC, the ongoing fixation with victory played a negative role to confront the postwar reality.⁷³ The extent to which the 'never again' mentality influenced the thinking of both sides of the EEC debate revealed the intensity of the British experience of the world war and the fact that banal nationalism was used by both sides.⁷⁴ For the anti-Marketeers, the war provided them emotionally charged arguments to point out that the continent could not be trusted. It also reinforced the belief of isolationism in the face of the military failures of other European countries. But the war time experience informed the EEC supporters as well. For them, entry into the EEC was supposed to prevent a new war from arising on the continent.

⁷⁰ John M. MacKenzie, 'The Popular Culture of Empire in Britain' in Judith M. Brown and WM. Roger Louis D. Litt (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire. Volume IV: The Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1999), p.213.

⁷¹ Ibid., p.212.

⁷² Kenneth O. Morgan, *Britain Since 1945. The People's Peace* (Oxford, 2001), pp.4-6.

⁷³ Ibid., pp.8-15.

⁷⁴ Dewey, *British National Identity and Opposition to Membership of Europe 1961-1963*, p.36.

The most enduring feature in relation to the European debate was the concept of sovereignty. To a greater extent, however, sovereignty lends itself to deeper imaginations that relate to a country's national identity. If the nation is a political community that is both limited and sovereign, then entering an organisation that hints at federalism will indefinitely challenge the definition of 'us' at the most fundamental level.⁷⁵

European integration clashed especially in Britain because its national institutions were seen as a key pillar in the evolution of Britishness that was not contaminated by continental institutional developments. After all, the country has no formal constitution with a clear separation of powers. Due to the institutional characteristics of the British legal system, the concept of sovereignty is more complex than in other countries.⁷⁶ For instance, the principle of national sovereignty – referring to national independence in relation to external powers – overlaps with parliamentary sovereignty. Albert Venn Dicey formulated the dominant view of parliamentary sovereignty in 1885. The British Parliament, he contended, has the right 'to make or unmake any law whatever; and further, that no person or body is recognised by the law of England as having a right to override or set aside the legislation of Parliament'.⁷⁷ Consequently, the House of Commons has the unlimited power to make or break laws. In context of the EEC debate, British institutions were seen as preserving the national uniqueness of Britain because they were non-European in character.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that national identity, far from being marginal, is a defining element of postwar societies. National identities are constantly affirmed and reinforced on a daily basis, which is why it is a pervasive process. In the case of British national identity, it is argued that Britishness does not have a fixed identity with clear structures. It is better conceptualised as a vague idea to which multiple and competing meanings can be attached. Moreover, its significance lies in the way different actors mobilise and interpret the concept, drawing on a shared repertoire of symbols, narratives, and historical references. This interpretative openness helps to explain why the European question proved particularly difficult to solve in the British context. The unwillingness to sharply define British national identity made it difficult to situate Britain within the framework of a more integrated Europe.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.32.

⁷⁶ Iris Nguyễn-Duy, 'Sovereignty and Europe – The British Perspective', *L'Europe en Formation* 368:2 (2013), 79-85.

⁷⁷ Albert Venn Dicey, *An Introduction to the Study of the Law and the Constitution* (8th edition; London 1915 [1885]), pp.86-88.

As will be explored in the following chapter, this ambiguity was reinforced by the self-perception of Britain as a victorious and exceptional power that was distinct from the European continent. As a result, the construction of a more inclusive European identity was difficult to combine with prevailing understandings of British uniqueness during the debates on EEC accession.

2. The road to Europe, 1950-1963

This chapter provides a historical overview of Britain's relationship with the process of European integration from the Schuman Plan in 1950 to the French veto of the British application in 1963. The main argument is that British attitudes towards Europe during this time were deeply rooted in assumptions about Britain's national identity and its perceived role in the world. These assumptions were centred on Britain's status as a victorious power, its imperial legacy, and its special relationship with the United States. Especially in the first half of the 1950s, these conceptions contributed to the reluctance of British policy-makers to regard the European project as a serious alternative for their position in the international system. As the pillars that sustained Britain's identity gradually eroded, the narrative among British political elites shifted to one of political and economic decline. This sense of declinism did not merely reflect material changes, but subsequently shaped how these changes were interpreted. Against this backdrop, the Conservative governments headed by Harold Macmillan (1957-1963) came to view membership of the EEC as a means to reverse the trend of decline. By understanding how prevailing notions of Britishness were fundamentally contested in the period leading up to the British application to the EEC, this chapter lays the groundwork for the subsequent analysis of the parliamentary debates.

The three concentric circles

The Second World War had a profound impact on postwar attitudes of British politicians and policy-makers in their involvement with the European mainland. The wartime experiences reinforced the deep seated strength of British national culture and its institutions.⁷⁸ The 'standing alone' imagery against Nazi Germany also affirmed a sense of moral superiority and qualities that were not to be found in Europe. Meanwhile, Britain's status as one of the three victorious allies alongside the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as its vast Empire, outwardly confirmed its status as a global rather than a European power. International developments immediately after the defeat of Nazi Germany therefore prompted the Labour government of Clement Attlee (1945-1951) to anchor Britain closer to the United States instead of Europe.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Gowland, *Britain and European Integration since 1945*, pp.19-20.

⁷⁹ Young, *Britain and European Unity*, pp.17-22. That does not mean that British involvement on the continent during this period was wholly absent. Britain did take the initiative to organise forms of defence cooperation with France and the Benelux countries. For instance, the British government signed the Brussels Treaty with France and the Benelux, a defensive military pact to prevent a possible renewed aggression of Germany (and later the

The ambiguous behaviour that Britain showed in relation to Europe was reflected by multiple speeches of Britain's wartime leader Winston Churchill. Having lost the general election right after the war, Churchill used his time as leader of the opposition between 1945 and 1951 to promote European unity. At a speech delivered at the University of Zurich in 1946, he made the suggestion for a 'United States of Europe'. This 'act of faith', he proclaimed, had to be achieved through a 'partnership between France and Germany, with France restored to the "moral leadership" of Europe and Germany given absolution for its recent sins'.⁸⁰ Although Britain would be the 'friend and sponsor' of this postwar situation – he supported the founding of the Council of Europe in 1949 –, Churchill made it clear that Britain would not be a member of the European federation. Over the next years, he expanded his idea of British foreign policy, using the metaphor of the 'three concentric circles'.⁸¹ Within these three overlapping circles, the primacy of foreign policy lay with the United States, followed by the British Commonwealth. The European continent came in third place. In instances where Great Britain wanted to take the lead in forms of European cooperation, this had to be done on an intergovernmental basis.⁸²

When, on 9 May 1950, the French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman proposed integrating the West German and French coal and steel industries under a common organisation, Britain reacted dismissively.⁸³ Schuman's idea to create a supranational High Authority that would operate independently of the member states in these economic sectors sounded particularly alarming. The British government had no intention of relinquishing their economic sovereignty in sectors that were crucial for the conduct of war. Both the Conservative and Labour Party feared that the Schuman Plan, as it came to be known, would lead to a 'move towards a European political federation'.⁸⁴

Soviet Union). Moreover, the Attlee government issued its support for the establishment of the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC).

⁸⁰ Cited from Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, p.38.

⁸¹ Simon Burgess and Geoffrey Edwards, 'The Six Plus One. British Policy-Making and the Question of European Economic Integration, 1955', *International Affairs* 64:3 (1988), 396.

⁸² Wall, *Reluctant European*, pp.30-35.

⁸³ Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, p.124. For a detailed overview of the chronology of events and political actors that were involved in the preparation of the Schuman Plan, see Hartmut Marhold, *Europe Day. How European Integration Got Started* (Berlin, 2022), pp.1-75.

⁸⁴ Nicholas J. Crowson, *The Conservative Party and European Integration since 1945. At the Heart of Europe?* (Routledge, 2007), p.19. Another factor that contributed to the overly negative British response was the manner in which the Schuman Plan was devised and disseminated prior to its announcement. Ernst Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary, was not even consulted about the plan, although his American colleague Dean Acheson had been involved and approved it.

There was also no compelling political or economic imperative for the British government to enter into the negotiations on French terms. By 1950, the key features of British foreign policy were in place. Bevin had worked the previous five years to improve the bilateral relations with France in order to enhance stability on the European continent.⁸⁵ Support for European unity could only be sustained if it was subordinated within an Atlantic framework.⁸⁶ In addition, the timing of the Schuman Plan was unfortunate. After years of campaigning, the Labour government was successful in nationalising the British coal and steel industries.⁸⁷ Therefore, Britain chose not to participate in the negotiations that would eventually lead to the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC).

From Messina to Rome

The failure of the Labour government to come to terms with the Schuman Plan was compounded by the incoming Conservative government led by Churchill (1951-1955). Despite its pro-European rhetoric, the British government remained largely indifferent to the process of European integration. Part of this was due to the British self-perception and their identity as a world power. Harold Macmillan, at the time a rising star within the Conservative Party, ascribed the unwillingness to get closer to Europe due to 'the hostility of the Foreign Office and the indifference of the Treasury'.⁸⁸

In 1955, the British response to a major initiative by the Six was again a test of the extent to which the British were interested in European involvement. In Messina, the ECSC members came together to discuss a proposal from the Benelux countries to transform the European coal and steel market into a general single market, including a customs union.⁸⁹ In Whitehall, the invitation to join the discussions on a common market fell on deaf ears. In the historiography, this has retrospectively been viewed as the moment where Britain 'missed the European boat'. However, Camps has convincingly argued that 'no boats were missed at Messina'.⁹⁰ There existed a broad understanding among the British political establishment that

⁸⁵ Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, pp.124-126.

⁸⁶ Gowland, *Britain and European Integration since 1945*, p.34.

⁸⁷ George, *An awkward partner*, p.20.

⁸⁸ Cited from *ibid.*, p.22.

⁸⁹ Mark F. Gilbert, *European Integration. A Political History* (New York, 2021), pp.57-60. Trade liberalisation was a natural outlet for supporters of European integration. It also represented a more pragmatic approach to the unity of Western Europe after the demise of the European Defence Community (EDC). Furthermore, a French proposal was tabled to establish a community in the field of atomic energy, seen then as an energy source for the future. A committee of representatives, chaired by the Belgium Foreign Minister Paul-Henri Spaak, was charged with the preparatory work for the economic integration, with Britain also being invited to contribute.

⁹⁰ Camps, 'Missing the boat at Messina and other times?', p.136.

the engines of European integration had come to a standstill after a series of setbacks, with the failure of the European Defence Community (EDC) serving as a prime example. At the same time, Britain had achieved several important diplomatic successes in 1954. The Conservative government had taken the lead in solving the German problem of rearmament.⁹¹ Furthermore, the government had successfully concluded an association agreement with the ECSC, which gave Britain access to the European coal and steel industries. Prior to the Messina summit, the British government had satisfactorily settled its relationship with the continent without altering its world position in relation to the United States or the British Commonwealth.⁹²

Besides, it was not evident from the outset that proposal would result in a common market with a customs union.⁹³ The Eden government (1955-1957), headed by Conservative Prime Minister Anthony Eden, was not opposed to the idea of a common market, but thought it was for others, not for Britain. The then Foreign Secretary Harold Macmillan took the belief that the Messina negotiations would undoubtedly fail, owing to divergent interests between the member states.⁹⁴ British trading patterns suggested that staying out of the EEC was the most reasonable policy option. Only 14 percent of British exports went to the Six, with 25 percent to the whole of Europe. By comparison, goods traded to the Commonwealth accounted for about 50 percent of British exports, although that number was declining since 1945.⁹⁵

Just as important was the fact that the leading political actors had larger extra-European issues to contend with at the time of the Messina conference. Macmillan, as Foreign Secretary, had his hands tied in resolving insurgencies in various Asian and African colonies.⁹⁶ An even more pressing issue was the situation in Egypt, where a nationalist movement had overthrown the monarchy and formed a republic that was hostile to British interests. In November 1954, General Gamal Abdel Nasser ousted the first president Muhammed Neguib and put pressure to nationalise the Suez Canal, which was owned by the Anglo-French Suez Canal Company.⁹⁷ Thus, Britain's international pressures made the urgency of the Messina conference pale in comparison.

Consequently, the Conservative government decided to send an observer to Sicily. The representative, a senior civil servant named Russell Bretherton, was not given a clear mandate and did not have a final say over the British position. He quickly realised, however, that the

⁹¹ Wall, *Reluctant European*, pp.44-45.

⁹² Camps, 'Missing the boat at Messina and other times?', p.136.

⁹³ Wall, *Reluctant European*, p.46.

⁹⁴ Gilbert, *European Integration*, pp.62-64; George, *An awkward partner*, p.26.

⁹⁵ Crowson, *Britain and Europe*, p.71.

⁹⁶ Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, p.205.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.205-207.

common market negotiations were not only about trade matters, but were highly political.⁹⁸ It became clear to the British delegate that the member states were thinking of a customs union and not a free trade area.⁹⁹ Britain did not want to move beyond cooperation in the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC), keeping its own preferential tariffs with the Commonwealth.¹⁰⁰ In November 1955, owing to many disagreements between the British and the other delegations, the Eden government decided to withdraw completely from the Spaak committee.

But as soon as Britain pulled out of the negotiations, civil servants in Whitehall started to question the state of affairs in Britain's foreign policy. Especially policy-makers in the Treasury department were of the view that inevitably, Britain would have to engage in some type of economic arrangement with the Six.¹⁰¹ The president of the Board of Trade, Peter Thorneycroft, summarised the dilemma as follows: 'On any analysis, it seems clear that we cannot afford that the Common Market should either succeed, or fail, without us'.¹⁰² Were the EEC to crystallise, Britain would face economic isolation from the continent. However, the collapse of a European agreement would also be detrimental for the stability of Europe, and in turn, for British interests.

As the negotiations on the EEC were progressing, the British government launched a complementary economic project known as 'Plan G'. The plan sought to create a wider Free Trade Area (FTA) in which the Common Market of the Six was tied to an association including Britain and other European countries that were part of the OEEC.¹⁰³ This free trade area would provide Britain all the economic advantages of EEC membership without actually joining the organisation. One of the most pressing concerns for Eden and Macmillan was how Britain could make a closer tariff association with Europe while maintaining its system of Imperial Preferences.¹⁰⁴ Plan G was almost exclusively designed to protect Britain's trade links with the rest of the Commonwealth.¹⁰⁵ This was reflected in the fact that the FTA would only consist of

⁹⁸ Wall, *Reluctant European*, pp.46-47.

⁹⁹ In a free trade area, countries gradually eliminate tariffs with one another but have different tariffs ratios with third countries. A customs union on the other hand goes further, adding a common external tariff towards non-members to prevent the lowest common denominator in tariff policy.

¹⁰⁰ Camps, 'Missing the boat at Messina and other times?', pp.136-138.

¹⁰¹ Gowland, *Britain and European Integration since 1945*, p.42.

¹⁰² Cited from *ibid.*, p.43.

¹⁰³ James R.V Ellison, 'Perfidious Albion? Britain, Plan G and European integration, 1955-1956', *Contemporary British History* 10:4 (1996), 4-8.

¹⁰⁴ Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, p.212. Imperial Preference was a commercial arrangement of mutual tariff reduction throughout the British Empire. Introduced in 1932, following the Ottawa Conference, it enhanced trade inside the British Empire and allowed Britain to maintain its great power status. The Imperial Preference was based on the policy principle 'home producers first, Empire producers second, and foreign producers last'.

¹⁰⁵ Ellison, 'Perfidious Albion?', 8-15.

industrial goods in order for Britain to continue importing cheap agricultural goods from the Commonwealth countries. In a political sense, Plan G likewise represented a British view of cooperation. No supranational organisation would be enacted, and there would be no surrender of national sovereignty.

During the summer of 1957, it became increasingly clear that the EEC was abandoning the British FTA proposal. Earlier in March, the Six had signed the Treaties of Rome (1957), which formally established the EEC and Euratom. The EEC was more than an economic community. It also had a strong political component, which proved to be stronger than anticipated. In the end, it was the French President Charles de Gaulle, who had come to power in 1958 after a political crisis, who torpedoed the British free trade proposal.

Afterwards, Britain had to settle for a much smaller European Free Trade Area (EFTA), which came into being at the Stockholm Convention of July 1959.¹⁰⁶ Comprising only seven member states, EFTA's task to arrange a new relationship with the EEC.¹⁰⁷ The organisation embodied a specifically British vision of European cooperation of free trade that preserved Britain's sovereignty and its global commitments. Yet, this form of cooperation was not economically beneficial for Britain. Foreign companies from the smaller EFTA countries were able to compete on the large British market, while British companies were denied access to the largest common market in Europe. While externally the organisation held up a semblance of unity, the conflicting priorities between the seven members led to antagonism and suspicion. This largely had to do with the fact that by 1961, Britain, its most important member, was seeking EEC membership.¹⁰⁸

Turning to Europe

The decision to shift from closer cooperation with the continent towards seeking full membership to the EEC was not a snap decision, but rather the result of an evolutionary change of Britain's world role. A confluence of internal and external factors put these changes into context and explain Prime Minister Macmillan's decision to apply for membership in 1961. This reassessment was shaped not only by material changes in Britain's international role, but

¹⁰⁶ See for a detailed development of the Free Trade Area and the subsequent European Free Trade Area, Matthew Broad and Richard T. Griffiths, *Britain, the Division of Western Europe and the Creation of EFTA, 1955-1963* (London, 2022).

¹⁰⁷ These member states were – next to Great Britain – Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Austria, Portugal, and Switzerland.

¹⁰⁸ Young, *Britain and European Unity*, pp.67-68. Reginald Maudling, a member of the Macmillan government, therefore argued that the purpose of EFTA was that it should 'form a basis for negotiating a comprehensive European settlement'.

also by how these changes were subsequently interpreted by the Conservative policy-makers. On the whole, these changes were understood and assessed through the narrative of decline.

Before looking at the changes that motivated Britain's turn to Europe, it would be worthwhile to examine the concept of decline in greater depth, and how it became the dominating frame of reference for British political elites during this period. Telling a story about Britain's move towards Europe as one of British decline has become commonplace. However, historian Tomlinson contends this idea of decline is as real as it is imagined. Central in this idea of declinism is the emphasis on the place of individual states in the world system.¹⁰⁹ As Supple puts it, 'declinism is an ideology, and like all ideologies has a history'.¹¹⁰ Declinism appears in a number of forms, but for our purposes, the most significant to be discerned are, on the one hand, the focus on global status, and on the other the performance of the economy. The initial postwar perception of decline emerged in Conservative governmental circles at the end of the 1950s and early 1960s, exactly when the Macmillan government was considering joining the European club.¹¹¹ According to Tomlinson, decline is a politically constructed phenomenon that has to be understood through the political debates which interpret the causes, dimensions, and remedies of decline.

From this perspective, the Suez Crisis of 1956 served as a powerful symbolic example with regards to the gradual deterioration of Britain's international prestige. In that year, the Egyptian President Nasser nationalised the canal to get rid of the neocolonial practices of Britain and France, who controlled the operations (and profits) of the canal through a Franco-British consortium.¹¹² When a combined British, French, and Israeli offensive was condemned by the United States and the Soviet Union, Britain reluctantly pulled back its forces. The crisis revealed a deep rift in the 'special relationship' with the United States. Even the most important members of the British Commonwealth – Australia, New Zealand, and Canada – refused to support the British efforts to reclaim the Suez Canal.¹¹³

Furthermore, Britain's place in the world stemmed from its leadership of the British Commonwealth, yet that role was quickly changing. The waves of decolonisation that occurred after 1945, particularly in the second half of the 1950s, meant that British relations with its

¹⁰⁹ Jim Tomlinson, *The Politics of Decline. Understanding Postwar Britain* (New York, 2000), pp.1-5.

¹¹⁰ Barry Supple, 'Fear of failing: economic history and the decline of Britain' in: Peter Clarke and Clive Trebilcock (eds.), *Understanding Decline. Perceptions and Realities of British Economic Performance* (Cambridge, 1997), p.9.

¹¹¹ Jim Tomlinson, 'Thrice Denied: "Declinism" as a Recurrent Theme in British History in the Long Twentieth Century', *Twentieth Century British History* 20:2 (2009), 235.

¹¹² Gowland, *Britain and European Integration since 1945*, pp.48-49.

¹¹³ Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, pp.218-219.

former colonies had to be rearranged on a more equal footing. Newly independent countries had different interests than their former colonial overlord, resulting in disagreements over the Commonwealth's common identity.¹¹⁴ In this environment, Macmillan proclaimed in a speech in South Africa in 1960 that 'a wind of change' was blowing throughout the African continent. His policy towards the former Empire had been marked more by pragmatism rather than sentiment. Macmillan attempted to guide the process of independence to project an image that Britain still had an important role to play in the world.¹¹⁵ Nonetheless, many settler colonies, including Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, interpreted Macmillan's speech as confirmation that Britain's world role had come to an end. They also feared that the independent African and Asian nations would dominate Commonwealth configurations. The British Commonwealth thus gradually lost its significance, prompting British politicians to rethink their position in international politics.¹¹⁶

Relations fared no better with the Americans. Following the Suez Crisis, Macmillan initiated a reconciliation policy to restore the relationship with the United States.¹¹⁷ Although Anglo-American ties under Macmillan are regarded as the 'golden days', historian Ashton argues that this classification should be seriously questioned.¹¹⁸ First of all, within the context of the Cold War, London and Washington continued to disagree over policy in the Middle East. Second of all, the British government realised that the reciprocal cooperation that had been the cornerstone of the relationship had become a form of unilateral dependence on the United States in practice. American Presidents Dwight D. Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy paid lip service to the views of their British colleagues on a variety of international issues. For example, the American intervention in the Lebanese Civil War was carried out without prior consultation of the Conservative government. Alexander Douglas-Home, who acted as Foreign Secretary, describes the subordination of Britain in this relationship strikingly: 'If America after weighing everything decides to go in, I fear we must support them but the prospect is horrible'.¹¹⁹ By 1958, then, it seemed to many British politicians that Britain's international status was in a spiral of decline.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p.209.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p.245.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.248.

¹¹⁷ John Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship. Anglo-American Relations in the Cold War and After* (London, 2006), pp.53-56.

¹¹⁸ Nigel J. Ashton, 'Harold Macmillan and the "Golden Days" of Anglo-American Relations Revisited, 1957-63', *Diplomatic History* 29:4 (2005), 700-710.

¹¹⁹ Cited from *ibid.*

Economic developments in particular led contemporaries (and later historians) to conclude that Britain was in decline.¹²⁰ The vulnerability of the British economy was reflected in the ongoing struggle to get its budget in order. The balance-of-payments issue produced a cycle of stimulating demand, which was then countered by restrictive measures to clamp down on the flood of imports.¹²¹ It did also not help that the wars over decolonisation, the Suez Crisis, and the expenditures of keeping British troops on the European continent caused a heavy burden on the British Treasury.¹²² Equally, the growing emphasis of comparative economic growth performances between Britain and Western European countries reinforced this declinist interpretation. To be sure, Britain's growth performances in the postwar period were meagre, especially compared to West Germany.¹²³ In terms of GDP growth between 1950 and 1973, the West German economy grew 6 percent per year on average. In comparison, the British economy saw a slight 3 percent annual increase in GDP.¹²⁴

In the mindset of Conservative officials, the relatively poor growth figures indicated that Britain was falling behind other countries. For example, the *Economic Survey* for 1956 included comparative economic figures on industrial output and growth rates between Britain and Germany, as well as a chart depicting Britain's diminishing share of world trade.¹²⁵ There also seemed to be a defeatist mood in successive Conservative governments that they had run out of policy ideas to stimulate the economy. A Research Department Memorandum noted in early 1961 that 'we have virtually exhausted the neo-liberal seam in economic policy'.¹²⁶ The notion of economic decline in Britain of the 1950s and early 1960s made the EEC seem as a natural panacea that would reinvigorate the British economy.

At the same time, the sense of decline presented the British government an opportunity to contemplate its identity in the international domain. In January 1957, the Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd proposed his 'Grand Design' to the cabinet and argued that Britain should seek

¹²⁰ David Sanders, *Losing an Empire, Finding a Role. An Introduction to British Foreign Policy since 1945* (London, 1989), pp.1-20.

¹²¹ Crowson, *Britain and Europe*, p.80.

¹²² Sanders, *Losing an Empire*, pp.248-249.

¹²³ Tomlinson, *The Politics of Decline*, pp.65-80.

¹²⁴ See for a detailed assessment on these comparative economic figures, as well as a critique of measuring economic performance on the basis of GDP, Jim Tomlinson, 'Imagining Economic Growth in Post-War Britain', *Twentieth Century British History* 34:4 (2023), 754-758. Put succinctly, Tomlinson contends that these relatively poor growth figures can be explained by the relationship between the starting level of absolute GDP per capita and the subsequent economic growth. The complete destruction of the Western European economies during the Second World War allowed for a process of 'catch-up', reflected by the high growth rates. In contrast, the British economy, which was one of the most advanced economies in terms of GDP per capita and living standards, came out relatively unscathed from the war. Therefore, the shortfall in economic growth between 1950 and 1973 can be mainly explained by the statistical starting point in 1950.

¹²⁵ Tomlinson, *The Politics of Decline*, pp.65-80.

¹²⁶ Cited from *ibid.*

its future in Europe.¹²⁷ In the year prior to the official application, these conclusions were reinforced in several governmental reports. The main conclusion from these reports was that, aside from an Atlantic Free Trade Area, EEC membership was the most favourable option. Even though no hard figures could be provided to determine how much the British economy would benefit from accession, entering the European club was widely regarded as a means of making Britain's struggling industry more competitive.¹²⁸ These factors, when taken together, show that Europe was seen as the only vehicle left for reigniting Britain's status as a world power. After much soul-searching, on 9 August 1961, Macmillan finally submitted a formal application to request British membership to the EEC.

Negotiation process

Three issues in particular dominated the negotiation process from the side of the Conservative government. These were the ties between the EFTA countries and the EEC, the agricultural exports of the Commonwealth to Britain, and the position of domestic British agriculture.¹²⁹ British negotiators faced difficulties with getting satisfactory conditions on all three fronts. Macmillan also stressed that the EEC should be more closely linked to the United States. Given its past record, Britain needed to demonstrate the genuineness of its approach to become a member. More importantly, Macmillan needed to overcome the suspicions of the French President De Gaulle.¹³⁰ Despite these diverging interests, an initial breakthrough came at the end of May 1962, when Britain agreed to gradually implement the Common External Tariff on Commonwealth manufactures by 1970.

Nevertheless, what ultimately derailed Britain's first application was less about the negotiations themselves but rather the issue of power politics. De Gaulle remained sceptical of Britain's motives throughout the negotiations. On 21 December 1962, Britain signed the so-called Nassau agreement with the Kennedy administration to modernise Britain's independent missile deterrent. For De Gaulle, who had met Macmillan a few days earlier in Rambouillet, the deal signalled that Britain prioritised its relationship with the Americans instead of Europe.¹³¹ It led him to conclude that Britain was in fact a 'Trojan Horse', as he thought that British entry would swallow the EEC into an Atlantic community under American hegemony. On 14 January 1963, the general held a press conference, in which he firmly rejected

¹²⁷ Young, *Britain and European Unity*, pp.59-61

¹²⁸ Gowland, *Britain and European Integration since 1945*, pp.54-55.

¹²⁹ Crowson, *Britain and Europe*, pp.81-82.

¹³⁰ Dewey, *British National Identity and Opposition to Membership of Europe 1961-1963*, pp.13-16.

¹³¹ Gilbert, *European Integration*, pp.92-93.

Macmillan's bid for British entry. Macmillan, distraught by the French 'non', wrote in his diary: 'All our policies at home and abroad are in ruins. [...] We have lost everything except our courage and determination'.¹³²

Conclusion

As this chapter has demonstrated, the decision of Great Britain to submit its application for accession to the EEC on 9 August 1961 was not taken lightly. It was only after its international role came under intense pressure over the 1950s that the British government seriously started to consider joining the Six. At the core of this process lay an identitarian dilemma within the British political establishment about its global standing. Over the postwar period, the steady erosion of its imperial power, combined with economic constraints, posed a growing challenge to established notions of British exceptionalism. Seen from this perspective, the application process was not interpreted as a fanfare to Europe, but rather reflected the declinist mood among politicians and policy-makers. The turn towards Europe therefore carried significant implications for the dynamics that sustained particular visions of British national identity. These elements also shaped the language and frames in which the first application was subsequently debated in the House of Commons, a process that will be analysed in detail in the following two chapters.

¹³² Cited from Alistair Horne, *Macmillan. The Official Biography. Vol. II: 1957-1986* (London, 1989), p.447.

3. Rather staying out than going in: the anti-Marketeer case

While the negotiations between the British government and the EEC members were in full swing, the House of Commons extensively debated Britain's application to join the Common Market. This chapter analyses these parliamentary debates from the side of the opponents of entry by examining how they constructed particular visions of British national identity. This chapter argues that the anti-Marketeers consistently constructed a notion of Britishness that was centred on political traditions, economic traditions of free trade, and deep kinship ties with the Commonwealth. Through appeals to British parliamentary sovereignty, history, war memories, and the legacy of Empire, Members of Parliament (MPs) portrayed Britain as historically unique and outward-looking. These appeals were cast in emotionally laden language to substantiate their idea of Britishness. They created a relational understanding of British identity as fundamentally different to the technocratic and inward-looking EEC. Moreover, everyday examples of banal nationalism were mobilised to reinforce this perceived uniqueness of the 'British way of life'. In doing so, the adversaries of EEC entry transformed technical matters into questions of national identity and Britain's international position.

The contours of the parliamentary debates

The historical background, as touched upon in the previous chapter, helps to fathom the characteristics of the parliamentary debates that would otherwise be difficult to understand. Between Macmillan's announcement to apply to the EEC and De Gaulle's resolute rejection in January 1963, three debates were held on the issue of accession and the negotiations. Many parliamentarians were acutely aware of the historic importance of these debates. For instance, Harold Wilson, the later Labour Prime Minister, said: 'Not one speaker in this debate so far, I think, has failed to realise the momentous nature of the issue which we are discussing and deciding (...).' ¹³³

Another distinctive element of the debate was that MPs could take a different position than the party line mandated. In the British political system, party discipline is often strictly enforced by means of party whips, who cajole backbenchers on behalf of their party leader to vote for their party. ¹³⁴ On the EEC-membership issue, many MPs went against their party line. This has to do with the fact that the European cleavage divided the parties internally instead of

¹³³ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 3 August 1961, col. 1651-1652.

¹³⁴ Backbenchers are those party members who do not sit in the front row, where the party's ministerial team always sits. Their influence is primarily felt in matters of leadership succession within British political parties. Their loyalty is also crucial during voting procedures.

being a partisan issue.¹³⁵ As a result, it was possible for left-wing Labour MPs like Michael Foot and Conservative imperialists such as Derek Walker-Smith to be in the same camp.

A third characteristic of the debate was that large minority of politicians made their choice dependent on the negotiations. Much time in parliament was spent on the question of whether the government had managed to gain satisfactory concessions on various policy issues. Predictably, this line of argument was put forward by critics of the Common Market, who demanded all kinds of guarantees regarding trade with the Commonwealth and the EFTA countries. Wilson thus framed accession as a choice for or against Europe on the outcome of the negotiations: 'Frankly, until we know what terms we can get, anyone who can claim to see this issue in simple black and white terms, in or out, is either a charlatan or a simpleton.'¹³⁶ The consequence was that the debate on the matter of principle was often obscured by arguments concerning the precise guarantees that needed to be secured for British interest groups.

British political traditions

Beyond technical matters, the contributions to the debate demonstrate how important the preservation of British national identity was to the anti-Marketeer cause. On a general level, it is possible to view the parliamentary clashes as centred around different constructions of British national identity. At its core, EEC adversaries constructed Britishness as fundamentally incompatible with European political traditions. In other words, Britain was supposedly 'different' from its continental counterpart. The opponents of entry presented a picture of a static and unchanging society and characterised Britain as an 'exceptional' nation. Viewed in these terms, the anti-Marketeers provided three broad arguments that constructed a particular notion of Britishness.

The first common argument they used was that British national identity was based on British political traditions, such as parliamentary sovereignty and parliamentary democracy. These traditions were claimed to be hundreds of years old and would be destroyed by accession to the EEC. Many anti-Marketeers mobilised conceptions of fundamental British freedoms to

¹³⁵ Gowland, *Britain and European Integration since 1945*, pp.1-5.

¹³⁶ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 3 August 1961, col. 1651-1652. The strategy of making the voting decision dependent on the results of the negotiations curiously enough drew criticism from passionate opponents such as Michael Foot. He considered the lengthy digressions regarding the exact terms of negotiations a futile undertaking, because so many demands were put on the table by the British side that the EEC would not accept them. Foot therefore mocked Wilson's line of argument, ridiculing it with the following analogy: 'Yes, we wish to enter the West European football league as long as we can have full consultations with the M.C.C. [Marylebone Cricket Club] so that the rules of the game are so altered that it resembles cricket'. See *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 3 August 1961, col. 1753.

underscore the ‘otherness’ of the European continent. In doing so, they transformed the constitutional nature of sovereignty into an issue of collective identity.

Sir Derek Walker-Smith, a Member of Parliament for the Conservative Party, for instance, found it irreconcilable that a fundamental freedom such as sovereignty was being sacrificed for creating larger economies of scale. In his view, there was a major difference between how the British interpreted sovereignty and how the Europeans did. According to him, this was the result of divergent historical developments:

‘Sovereignty came late to most of the nations of the Six. They were part of the Holy Roman Empire, that physical embodiment of mediaeval law of nature which preceded the formalisation of the modern doctrine of sovereignty. Our national sovereignty did not follow that doctrine; it preceded it. We were practising national sovereignty and evolving our Parliamentary institutions and our common law when others were looking to Europe. (...) We evolved our own common law. They preferred the general acceptance of Roman Law.’¹³⁷

Here, Walker-Smith clearly distinguishes between the Six and Britain on historical grounds. This is evident from the reference to the Holy Roman Empire, Roman Law, and the fact that he speaks of continental ‘collectivism’. This stands in contrast to the historical development of British law, which has led to individualism and ‘imperialism’.¹³⁸ That this distinction does not do justice to the historical reality and complexity – namely, that the traditional definition of sovereignty is the result of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 – is irrelevant. For Walker-Smith, these political-philosophical differences are even older, which explains why the EEC-countries attach less importance to parliamentary sovereignty and accept supranational institutions.

In Walker-Smith’s speeches on sovereignty, three elements recur that highlight Britain’s imagined distinct historical development and political character. First of all, Britishness is being defined by describing what it is not, creating a relational understanding of British national identity that Colley has adequately analysed.¹³⁹ This process of interpretation reveals how narrow the parameters of a reflexive British ‘us’ against a correspondingly exclusive definition of ‘them’ were. As the example demonstrates, the divergent forms of government of Britain and the European countries are supposedly the result of historical developments that have already taken place since the Holy Roman Empire in the Middle Ages. According to Walker-Smith, this makes the EEC customs alien to British ideas about politics and sovereignty.

¹³⁷ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 2 August 1961, col. 1512.

¹³⁸ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 2 August 1961, col. 1512.

¹³⁹ Colley, *Britons*, pp.1-15.

Second of all, Walker-Smith and other critics regard the concept of sovereignty as an absolute principle. Their view of sovereignty was defined as a form of ‘independence’, ‘preserving our way of life’, or the freedom ‘to choose their fate’.¹⁴⁰ It is an interpretation of sovereignty that closely resembles the analysis of legal scholar Venn Dicey.¹⁴¹ He argued that parliamentary sovereignty rested on the fact that the will of Parliament is unfettered, and that it should also be the sole lawmaking agency in the country. According to Walker-Smith, the consequences of going in the EEC are disastrous because the life of the free and individual Briton becomes bound to the collective will of the Community.¹⁴² In a sense, therefore, conceptions of parliamentary sovereignty are linked to the fundamental right to freedom of the British people.

Even more important is that Walker-Smith transformed sovereignty from a constitutional principle into an emotional marker of collective identity. He presents the concept as something banal that was embedded in assumptions of daily life:

‘When I raised the issue of sovereignty last year, I knew that I was talking in an idiom which is not part of everyday language of the British people. But at the same time I knew that I was talking of real things, deeply felt, instinctively understood and traditionally cherished by the British people. They are as natural to us as the air we breathe – little noticed in their presence but valued beyond price in the event of their deprivation.’¹⁴³

Walker-Smith’s formulation closely resembles Billig’s notion of banal nationalism. Sovereignty in Walker-Smith’s interpretation was an instinctive and natural component of British political life. Its very invisibility within everyday political culture reinforced its perceived authenticity. Parliamentary sovereignty was therefore framed as a deeply internalised marker of British national identity and created a divide between Britain and the EEC-member states.

Next to the issue of parliamentary sovereignty, what also arises from these discussions was that the wartime memories served as proof of superiority and stability of the British political system in contrast to the continental Europeans. For many anti-Marketeters, the EEC was seen as an embodiment of nations that were defeated during the Second World War. Labour MP Maurice Edelman reminded the Commons ‘not [to] forget that the concept of the United Europe was a concept of the defeated and occupied.’¹⁴⁴ One of the reasons why Britain

¹⁴⁰ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 3 August 1961, col. 1698.

¹⁴¹ Venn Dicey, *An Introduction to the Study of the Law and the Constitution*, pp.80-90.

¹⁴² *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 2 August 1961, col. 1512.

¹⁴³ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 661, 7 June 1962, col. 720.

¹⁴⁴ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 661, 6 June 1962, col. 589.

did not participate at the time was because the ‘satisfaction of victory meant that it had the power and authority to go its own way’.¹⁴⁵

Edelman’s formulation reveals how war memories were used to construct a moral distinction between Britain and continental Europe. The EEC was not merely associated with economic cooperation and the booming economic growth, but also with a continent marked by occupation and defeat. Britain’s wartime experience, by contrast, reinforced a sentimental self-image of national resilience and the going alone attitude. In this sense, the memory of victory was a flag that did not require much explanation to wave. It provided a recognisable framework through which EEC critics could differentiate Britain from the continent.¹⁴⁶ The emphasis on the wartime victory also coalesced into suspicion towards European politicians.¹⁴⁷ Many Parliamentarians held deep-seated prejudices against European leaders, who were deliberately framed as ‘others’. Labour MP William Blyton confessed that he was ‘terrified of linking up with President De Gaulle and Dr. [Konrad] Adenauer’.¹⁴⁸

Because European leaders were perceived as hostile to British political traditions, European institutions were subsequently viewed as anti-democratic and authoritarian. This framing was centred on the supranational structure of the European Commission, which was perceived to be culturally and institutionally alien to British political traditions. For instance, Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell called the idea of a European Commission ‘foreign’.¹⁴⁹ According to him, Britons would find it strange that policy was not made by politicians, as they were accustomed to, but by ‘civil servants’. The authoritarian tendency of technocratic policy was diametrically opposed to the tradition of discussion and debate. The British, who stood for freedom and accountability in parliament, could therefore not accept a technocratic system.

Moreover, distrust of the European Commission was reinforced by suspicions regarding the ultimate political goal of the EEC. Although the Treaty of Rome spoke only of an ‘ever closer union among the peoples of Europe’, prominent politicians in the EEC – such as Commission president Walter Hallstein – advocated publicly for a political federation. This did not go unnoticed in the House of Commons and caused resentment among opponents, who accused the EEC of being anti-democratic. For instance, Ronald Russell, based on his experiences as a Conservative delegate in Strasbourg, learned ‘that most of the members of the delegations from the countries of the Six have political federation in mind in the end. We have

¹⁴⁵ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 661, 6 June 1962, col. 590.

¹⁴⁶ Morgan, *Britain Since 1945*, pp.4-6.

¹⁴⁷ Dewey, *British National Identity and Opposition to Membership of Europe 1961-1963*, pp.217-218.

¹⁴⁸ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 661, 6 June 1962, col. 576.

¹⁴⁹ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 2 August 1961, col. 1503.

had the statement about that from the king-pin of all, Professor [Walter] Hallstein.’¹⁵⁰ Although British intellectuals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries held many discussions about federalising with the old dominions – Canada, New Zealand, Australia – that memory was skilfully avoided in the debates on the EEC.¹⁵¹ This selective silence surrounding earlier discussions of imperial federalism illustrates that British identity was carefully crafted and filtered during the debates. The anti-Marketeers reframed federalism as a continental tradition – bolstered by the use of derogatory language to describe European politicians – and was therefore seen as alien with British parliamentary democracy.

The widely held fear that British democracy would be subordinated to an unaccountable bureaucracy was occasionally expressed in more dramatic terms. The EEC was compared by Member of Parliament Frank Bowles to the fascist experiment in Italy, warning that British powers would be transferred to a committee of bureaucrats. ‘It is only about 40 years since Mussolini did the same thing. He set up a corporate State putting Parliament into the background and letting the economics of his society be run by corporations or commission.’¹⁵² Although such comparisons were highly exaggerated, the usage of these examples and the associated rhetoric are revealing because they demonstrate the extent to which the anti-Marketeers associated supranationalism with authoritarianism. The EEC was thus postulated as a profound threat to the continuity of British parliamentary traditions.

Tradition of free trade

The second argument why Great Britain needed to remain independent in the eyes of anti-Marketeers had to do with the preservation of its identity as a trading nation, which was based on the Cobdenite tradition of free trade. This tradition dated back to 1846, when Member of Parliament Richard Cobden and the Anti-Corn Law League successfully had the Corn Laws repealed.¹⁵³ This enabled Great Britain to buy cheap food on the world market.

Several members of Parliament were therefore critical of EEC accession. They feared that the cherished British tradition as a trading nation was being lost to a protectionist EEC

¹⁵⁰ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 2 August 1961, col. 1566.

¹⁵¹ Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain. Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1890* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 1-20.

¹⁵² *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 666, 7 November 1962, col. 1047.

¹⁵³ The Corn Laws were levies and other trade restrictions imposed on imported food between 1815 and 1846. This primarily concerned the import of grains and cereals, such as wheat, oats, and barley. The laws were introduced to protect the British landed gentry from fierce competition from the world market. The consequence of the laws was that food prices were artificially high and the cost of living for ordinary households rose. See for a full overview, Bernard Semmel, *The Rise of Free Trade Imperialism: classical political economy the empire of free trade and imperialism, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, 2004).

bloc. Wilson characterised the EEC as a highly restrictive organisation that had an ‘autarkic motivation’ in its trade policy.¹⁵⁴ For instance, the Common External Tariff, which imposed a uniform external levy on goods outside the EEC, discriminated against the British approach to free trade, which was characterised by bilateral agreements. Yet for Wilson, the real linchpin of the EEC’s protectionist system was the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which he condemned as a ‘monstrosity’:

‘It can fairly be said that the industrial part of the Treaty of Rome is, if we like, free trade over a limited area, and there is nothing to stop it being outward looking. But the agricultural system – this is not free trade. It is mercantilism on a European scale. (...) I must tell its members that the inspiration of the agricultural system of the Common Market is not Adam Smith or [Richard] Cobden, or any of their heroes. It is pure [Hjalmar] Schacht [a Minister of Economic Affairs in Nazi Germany].’¹⁵⁵

Lord Hinchingsbrooke arrived at the same conclusion. His plea for free trade lay in the British trading philosophy that had brought the country so much success. ‘We do better with our “small ship” philosophy – the one that defeated Napoleon and defeated the King of Spain (...).’¹⁵⁶

The formulation of these arguments shows that the perceived incompatibility between Britain’s traditional pattern of food purchases and the EEC went beyond the level of prices. The anti-Marketeers shifted the discussion about levies and prices to a fundamental discussion about Britain’s identity as a trading nation. That identity was based on Enlightenment thinkers such as Smith and nineteenth-century politicians such as Cobden, who were seen as responsible for the success of British trade policy.

The emphasis on British achievements were regularly contrasted with negative continental examples to reinforce a moral distinction between Britain and Europe. Hinchingsbrooke cited the British victory over Napoleon and the King of Spain to demonstrate that the British trading tradition was superior to the European model. In similar vein, Wilson’s quote above compared CAP with the economic policies under the Nazi regime, as Hjalmar Schacht served as Minister of Economic Affairs under Adolf Hitler between 1934 and 1937. This comparison therefore functioned as an attempt to morally delegitimise the continental economic model altogether. Thus, a somewhat technical discussion – the level of food prices and negotiations regarding agrarian measures – transformed into an identity debate in which emotional appeals were regularly made to British historical grandeur, setting itself apart from the dark European past.

¹⁵⁴ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 3 August 1961, col. 1661.

¹⁵⁵ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 666, 8 November 1962, col. 1275.

¹⁵⁶ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 2 August 1961, col. 1544.

Such arguments regarding the end of the British free trade tradition flowed seamlessly into the question of the economic consequences of joining the EEC. After all, British households enjoyed low food prices in supermarkets due to free trade. This contrasted with CAP, where farmers were able to produce their products at artificially high prices through subsidies.¹⁵⁷ Although it was difficult to calculate the exact price increase, opponents of accession were convinced that the lives of British residents would become substantially more expensive.¹⁵⁸

Several MPs pointed to the ‘vital question’ of food prices. The impression was created that rising food prices would lead to mass unrest in British cities, where many households were dependent on cheap food imports from overseas.¹⁵⁹ MP Albert Oram pointed out that British housewives would be in ‘shock’ if they saw ‘week by week’ that the prices in the shops increased.¹⁶⁰ Other MPs pointed to the lack of compensation. Hinchingsbrooke projected the most negative scenario and even predicted the end of the British welfare state. This could not remain without consequences for deeply rooted British traditions: ‘Which of the tea breaks is to be given up – the morning or the afternoon?’.¹⁶¹

The debate over food prices reveals how economic discussions over tariffs became intertwined with banal constructions of British national identity. While some of these arguments about economic impacts were legitimate, the impacts were made greater than they actually were. Cheap food was not merely presented as a side effect of British free trade, but as a natural component of British social life. In this sense, the anti-Marketeers wanted to change the issue of agricultural pricing into a broader defence of the British way of life. References to the British housewife, rising grocery bills, and the loss of Commonwealth products made the abstract consequences of European integration concrete and visible in daily life. This aligns to the concept of banal nationalism, in which the national identity is reproduced through familiar

¹⁵⁷ Wall, *Reluctant European*, pp.57-60.

¹⁵⁸ That said, it was easier for the opponents of the EEC to argue that entry would mean higher costs for the British taxpayer. The difficulty for EEC enthusiasts was to convince opponents that Great Britain would benefit economically. In a theoretical sense, it can be argued that it is indeed beneficial to be exposed to competition and to benefit from economies of scale. However, exactly how much the British economy would profit, or which specific sectors would benefit from this competition, was difficult to calculate. As the opponents cleverly mentioned: ‘It has been noticeable that none of the great enthusiasts for the Common Market in this debate so far have taken up the challenge of presenting and proving the economic case in any detailed way. I think that that case cannot be proved, and I do not believe that there is an overwhelming economic case for Britain joining the common market’ (see *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 661, 7 June 1962, col. 750) The costs were easier to calculate in the form of levies on certain import goods or the British contribution to the CAP, and this gave opponents more ammunition to argue against accession.

¹⁵⁹ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 661, 7 June 1962, col. 731.

¹⁶⁰ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 661, 7 June 1962, col. 736.

¹⁶¹ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 2 August 1961, col. 1540.

practices. Food consumption itself was thus mobilised as a marker of British distinctiveness, which fuelled the anti-Marketeer campaign against the EEC.

Britain as a world power

If traditions of the 'British way of life' encapsulated the second argument of a unique domestic national character, its outward-looking character based on British internationalism was the third argument that was put forward. For the majority of the EEC sceptics, the decision to apply for the single market would not broaden Britain's horizons, but their contraction. This sprang from the historic belief that Britain had always played an important role on the world stage. Opposition to the EEC did not reflect the isolationism of the 'little Englander', but a broader vision of internationalism that was rooted in Commonwealth ties and Britain's global vocation. Walker-Smith for instance characterised Britain as 'not merely a European power but the centre and chief banker of the Sterling area'.¹⁶² Anti-Marketeers therefore rejected the EEC because they believed that Britain's identity rested on an international rather than a regional role.

Parliamentarians saw a decisive role for Great Britain as a bridge-builder between East and West.¹⁶³ They deliberately created a dichotomy between the outward-looking Britains and the inward-looking 'little Europeans'. This line of argument was especially made by Labour parliamentarians to create a third way in the Cold War between capitalism and communism.¹⁶⁴ In the context of the Cold War, Blyton stated that Britain's purpose was to form a third bloc together with the Commonwealth and EFTA.¹⁶⁵ Denis Healey, also on behalf of the Labour Party, additionally spoke of 'the pressing need for an end to the arms race, the growing economic gulf between rich white peoples on both sides of the Iron Curtain and the poor, mainly coloured people, living to the south and east of them in Africa, in Asia and in Latin America'.¹⁶⁶ They felt that Great Britain had to cooperate in solving these problems on a global

¹⁶² *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 2 August 1961, col. 1509.

¹⁶³ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 3 August 1961, col. 1669-1670.

¹⁶⁴ Although both Conservative and Labour politicians made these comparisons, this line of argument was made more frequently within the Labour Party. Both Labour fundamentalist and moderate opponents of entry believed that their opposition was valid on socialist grounds. Especially among the left side of the Labour Party, opponents conceptualised the Common Market as a 'capitalist club', an enemy of planning, and a device of Cold War imperialism. In this, they contrasted with their continental counterparts who viewed European unity as a stepping stone to the larger internationalist cause. For a detailed breakdown on Labour's nationalism, see Stephen Howe, 'Labour Patriotism 1939-83' in Raphael Samuel (ed.), *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity. Volume 1: History and Politics* (London, 1989), pp.127-139.

¹⁶⁵ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 2 August 1961, col. 1533.

¹⁶⁶ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 666, 7 November 1962, col. 1094.

scale. Membership in the EEC would undermine this position. Full membership was, in the eyes of the opponents, 'not worth the sacrifice'.¹⁶⁷

Instead of the Common Market, the Commonwealth, which had emerged as a result of the dissolution of the Empire, was seen as an enduring platform on which British national identity was based. By the 1960s, the British Empire was eroding due to several waves of decolonisation. This was accompanied by declining economic ties between these former colonies and the mother country and, moreover, undermined Britain's status as a world power.¹⁶⁸ Against the backdrop of the declining empire, the importance of the Commonwealth was seen as a way to uphold that traditional British international role. Many anti-Marketeers saw the Commonwealth as a model for global interaction. Throughout the entire negotiation process between Britain and the Six, the Commonwealth remained a major subject of debate. This had to do with the sentimental links between Britain and those countries, which for many parliamentarians formed a core element of being British.

Consequently, various projections were transplanted onto the Commonwealth. One of these views was that the Commonwealth was held together because all countries spoke the same language and had the same traditions. Labour Party MP Lynn Ungoed-Thomas projected a vision of the Commonwealth in almost mythical proportions. The Commonwealth was, according to him, 'a voluntary association of free peoples, all brought up in the same traditions, all speaking the same language, all having the same democratic conceptions, all having the same methods of handling their affairs, and all having the same ideals'.¹⁶⁹ In his view, the organisation embodied the same principles and spirit of democracy as it was developed in Britain. Anti-Marketeers discerned a certain bond of solidarity in the relations between the former colonies and Britain.

Others, however, saw the strength of the Commonwealth as lying in its enormous diversity of languages, cultures, and peoples. These Parliamentarians proclaimed that the Commonwealth was a unique organisation because it embraced 'every race in the world and the greatest diversification of geography that one can imagine'.¹⁷⁰ According to these politicians, the Commonwealth would only become more important in the future. Britain thus held a major trump card in the Commonwealth as a connector between different continents and racial groups. By joining the EEC, it would no longer be able to fulfil that role.

¹⁶⁷ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 2 August 1961, col. 1533.

¹⁶⁸ Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, pp.207-222.

¹⁶⁹ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 2 August 1961, col. 1575-1576.

¹⁷⁰ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 3 August 1961, col. 1748.

The role of the Commonwealth here should not be viewed solely in a purely political sense, but there was an emotional and kinship layer beneath it that was important for the construction of British national identity. The following contribution by Harold Wilson illustrates this point. When food shortages threatened Great Britain during the Second World War, Wilson feared that they would have to pay New Zealand a great deal of money to supply goods to Britain. To his surprise, the New Zealand delegation stated: ‘Now tell us what butter, what meat, what grains you need, and – whatever the sacrifice may be for the New Zealand people – we will supply it.’¹⁷¹ Faced then, with the choice of entry, Wilson proclaimed that ‘we are not entitled to sell our friends and kinsmen down the river for a problematical and marginal advantage in selling washing machines in Dusseldorf’.¹⁷² What these contributions imply is that the anti-Marketeers accentuated deep kinship ties with these regions based on shared norms and values. Simultaneously, their hostile references to European politicians implied that this unity was absent on the European continent.

The portrayal of the Commonwealth in these debates reveals that the opponents of the EEC were less interested in describing political realities, but rather imagined a community that reflected Britain’s preferred self-image. Ungood-Thomas’s highly romanticised version of Commonwealth relations was historically inaccurate. In practice, the countries of the Commonwealth did not share the same traditions, language, and democratic norms with Britain.¹⁷³ Moreover, the British government took the step towards the EEC precisely because the former colonies demanded a more equal relationship with the mother country, something Britain only reluctantly accepted.¹⁷⁴ For the anti-Marketeers, the Commonwealth functioned as an imagined extension of Britishness. It allowed them to construct an identity that was based on a broad transnational community that was bound together through historical experiences and emotional attachments. This was more or less acknowledged by Sir Grimston: ‘We should not, however, forget, that its cohesion is based to some extent on mystique, on sentiment, on the memory of two great wars, when the Commonwealth rallied to us (...).’¹⁷⁵

Moreover, the anti-Marketeer discourse suggests that they perceived the Commonwealth as a continuation of an older imperial identity. The arguments signalled an unwillingness to accept the political realities of Britain’s postwar decline. By positioning the

¹⁷¹ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 3 August 1961, col. 1665.

¹⁷² *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 3 August 1961, col. 1665.

¹⁷³ Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, pp.240-245. For instance, the emergence of several dictatorships in former British colonies, such as Egypt, suggests that there was a notable lack of democratic traditions owing to the legacy of colonisation.

¹⁷⁴ See for this relationship, *ibid.*, pp.245-248.

¹⁷⁵ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 3 August 1961, col. 1748.

Commonwealth as an outlet for Britain's international role, the EEC was portrayed as an inward-looking and provincial organisation. Similarly, the British Commonwealth was represented on voluntarism, democracy, and the result of an organic development. The continued emphasis on Britain's global mission – as a bridge between the East and the West, or as the leader of a multi-racial organisation – reflects the efforts to reconcile its declining power with continued claims to global significance. The construction of this particular Commonwealth identity reinforced a relational understanding of Britishness. EEC membership would not only threaten to cut off the links with the former colonies, but would more importantly symbolise the erosion of Britain's imperial identity.

It follows from the analysis that the Commonwealth remained of fundamental importance for British national identity. However, this introspection also touches upon the various roles and ideas that had been ascribed with assessments of Britain's imperial past and the future of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth as a whole was a fixed idea in British identity, but the way in which that Commonwealth was interpreted differed from parliamentarian to parliamentarian. It was regarded, among other things, as a democratic ideal, a form of imperial nostalgia, a global mission, and a moral community. This was possible because the identity of the Commonwealth was changing, as Macmillan acknowledged during his 'Wind of Change' speech in South Africa in 1960.¹⁷⁶ Compared with the issue of sovereignty, Commonwealth allegiances were therefore less prone to be absolutely defined because it was still fluid. It is precisely this vagueness that made the Commonwealth an excellent political vehicle for the anti-Marketeters during the parliamentary debates on the EEC, because they did not have to clearly define what such a post-imperial future should look like.

Conclusion

From the debates, it becomes evident that the issue of national identity was an important element in the anti-Marketeer battle against entry. Its centrality was articulated in historical-cultural archetypes of Britishness. On the one hand, British national identity was formed by core domestic traditions such as parliamentary sovereignty and the liberal tradition of free trade. A striking feature of this discourse appealed to emotional identity markers, such as the war time experiences, in which the anti-EEC bloc went on the offensive against the government. The European question provoked these nationalist reactions not only because it threatened British identity in a political void, but because it resonated with mechanisms that

¹⁷⁶ Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift*, pp.240-250.

contributed to an ongoing imagination of Britishness. In particular, parliamentary contributions were powered by distinctions between 'us' and 'them' that cast Europeans and their customs as 'others'. In addition, the bread and butter arguments about the 'British way of life' were ideal banal flags that could be waved against the Common Market. On the other hand, Britain's national identity was tied to its international vocation. By constructing idealised images of the relationship with the Commonwealth, these sentiments were used to cloud the discomforting reality of Britain's diminished international standing. Overall, the significance of banal nationalist arguments lay in its capacity to translate the consequences of remote diplomacy into daily experiences, a strategy that the proponents of the EEC had difficulty to counter.

4. Safeguarding Britain's greatness: the EEC advocates

The final chapter examines the role that British national identity played in the speeches of the EEC-supporters during the parliamentary debates. The main argument is that they did not view Britishness as an obstacle to their plea for European integration, but appealed to various elements of national identity. In doing so, they reconstructed their national identity in ways that neutralised the exclusionary anti-Marketeers claims. Much effort was made to reinterpret national identity in a less emotional manner so that British traditions would align with EEC accession and the changed international context. First, the proponents broadened British identity by viewing it as part of European identity by denoting a shared past and geography. Second, selective appeals were made to the tradition of British leadership, citing war memories and different episodes from history. Finally, a core element British culture was equated with the idea of national renewal and adaptability, whereby accession could be presented as a natural continuation of a long history of the British international vocation. As in the case of the anti-Marketeers, the proponents used familiar points of reference about everyday nationhood to translate abstract questions of European integration into debates about Britain's identity.

Britain is European

The proponents of the Common Market found themselves in a difficult position during the parliamentary debates on EEC accession. As noted in the previous chapter, the negotiations were ongoing at the time of the debates, and a lot of the British demands concerning the Commonwealth or agriculture were either denied or unresolved by the Six.¹⁷⁷ This made it difficult for the Macmillan government to present concrete results during the debate. The government also came under pressure because the opponents submitted a large stream of amendments that the government could not carry out given the strenuous negotiations.¹⁷⁸ Consequently, some of the contributions from proponents during the debates remained technical and abstract in nature.

¹⁷⁷ Wall, *Reluctant European*, pp.59-60.

¹⁷⁸ For instance, the anti-Marketeers were adamant that the government should make no concessions regarding British Commonwealth imports. Although this was impossible in light of how the EEC operated with the Common External Tariff, it remained a point of principle for many opponents. Labour Party MP John Mendelson denounced the evasive answers of many government members to these questions, because the debate ultimately concerned the fate of the nation. Or as Mendelson himself articulated it: 'We are not entering a football league or an association for cultural relations. We are entering a community which is going to determine the economic and political future of this country for many years to come ...'. See *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 666, 7 November 1962, col. 1082.

More fundamentally, the government could not mobilise British national identity in the same straightforward manner as their opponents had done. The anti-Marketeers constructed a particular version of Britishness around an exclusionary strategy that evoked strong emotions but was less suited to supporters of entry. Instead, they had to reconstruct and reinvent British national identity to suit its purposes. What stands out in this regard is that the various traditions that were used were grounded in rational identity claims that took the changed international context into account. They did so through overlapping themes by arguing that Britain was inherently European, internationally responsible, and historically adaptable. Their objective was to underline the direct linkages between the continent and Britain as opposed to its boundaries. It was the government's task to construct a specific national identity that was, on the one hand, inclusive and wide enough to forge connections between Britain and the continent. On the other hand, such an appeal could not detract from already established pillars of Britishness. Based on these considerations, the proponents used three strategies to construct a broader framework of Britishness.

The first argument that was regularly employed was that Great Britain had essentially always been part of a broader European identity. The opponents' alarmist claims about the end of a thousand years of history were countered by factual statements that Britain had been connected to the continent for centuries. In a number of cases, proponents framed membership as a natural recognition of Britain's European identity and historical 'destiny'. Edward Heath, who as Lord Privy Seal was responsible for the negotiations with the EEC, constructed such a narrative:

'From my point of view, the history is that the Lord Privy Seal took office in 1275 and, at that time, the land of Gascony and a considerable part of the Continent came under the British Crown, so that the then Lord Privy Seal was not faced with the problem of how to get a foot in Europe because he had a very substantial foot there already. But we are now faced with the problem of how to reach an arrangement.'¹⁷⁹

By emphasising the link between the continent and the British Isles, Heath attempted to bridge the physical and mental distance between Britain and Europe. Heath's argument reflected banal nationalist elements. This becomes clear when he invokes familiar episodes from British history that required little explanation to his audience – indeed, they were not elaborated upon in the debate. The central claim was that accession reflected Britain's proper place within Europe. References to Gascony and the medieval possessions of the English monarchs were

¹⁷⁹ *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, 5th Series, vol. 645, 3 August 1961, col. 1671.

reminders of Britain's long-standing entanglement with continental affairs. These descriptions were taken for granted and normalised the idea that European engagement would not constitute a departure from its national identity. Geography and history were thus used to minimise the alleged differences in norms and values, thereby refuting the persistent claims made by Walker-Smith and other anti-Marketeers.

A further spin on this theme came from politicians that argued that there were no perceived differences between Britain and the European mainland. This was articulated most vigorously by Liberal Party leader Jo Grimond. He believed that Britain would 'be contributing to a great advance in European civilisation. European civilisation is the greatest civilisation the world has ever seen. I think that we can ill afford to allow this country, which is a European country, to be outside this great movement'.¹⁸⁰ Grimond directly countered the anti-Marketeers' assumption that British national identity and European identities were mutually exclusive. In his view, Britain's identity was part of a deeper European cultural foundation.

By pointing out that Britain and Europe were founded on the same cultural traditions, it logically followed that the ideas of the EEC were not alien to Britain either. The anti-Marketeers had been fervent in their claim that supranationalism and federalism were 'foreign' concepts that did not fit into the British tradition of parliamentary democracy. The proponents, however, pointed precisely to the British tradition of federalism in the past, which meant that the EEC could be considered as a familiar political constellation. For instance, Arthur Woodburn, a pro-EEC MP for the Labour Party, argued that the Acts of Union between England and Scotland in 1707 were a precursor to European federalism.¹⁸¹ Not only was this historical fact important, but also the fact that the first steps towards European integration were taken by prominent British politicians such as Winston Churchill and Harold Macmillan.¹⁸² Although Britain did not join at the time, Woodburn contended that there was 'not the slightest doubt that they inspired the people of Europe to want unity and to become Europeans, instead of Germans, Frenchmen, Belgians, Dutchmen and others'.¹⁸³ By linking Britain's positive contributions to the European peace project, such as the establishment of the Council of Europe, Woodburn constructed a historical genealogy for European integration within which the British national experience itself rationally fitted.

¹⁸⁰ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 661, 6 June 1962, col. 556.

¹⁸¹ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 2 August 1961, col. 1524.

¹⁸² See also, Crowson, *Britain and Europe*, pp.63-65. As Crowson points out, many of the British MPs that were contemporary delegates at the Council of Europe were a reliable source of support for the government during the parliamentary debates on European accession due to their pro-European attitudes.

¹⁸³ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 2 August 1961, col. 1517.

These arguments about the geographical and historical links between Britain and Europe made it clear that British national identity was presented as compatible with the EEC – though it was never specified how exactly these two connected in relation to the political culture of the Common Market. Grimond, Heath, and Woodburn attempted to widen the boundaries through which British identity should be understood. This was done by relying on more factual and rational arguments instead of the emotionally charged discourse of the anti-Marketeers. Following Colley’s insight that national identities are relationally constructed, opponents had relied upon a sharp differentiation between Britain and continental Europe. In contrast, the proponents contested this assumption of European ‘otherness’. There was not a dichotomy between static British and European identity that was immutable, but rather one of mutually influencing identities. By accentuating centuries of shared history and political interaction, they sought to incorporate Britain within the broader European heritage where it belonged. In doing so, the pro-Europeans tended to exhibit a strong sense that Europe was an extension of the British national story.¹⁸⁴

There was also a clear political underpinning by explicitly linking British kinship to the European continent. Proponents made it clear that the Britian’s future lay not with the Commonwealth. For instance, Labour MP Dingle Foot criticised the wishful thinking of the anti-Marketeers regarding Commonwealth ties. Foot felt that they were attaching all sorts of idealistic projections to that organisation that did not mirror daily practice: ‘A rather favourite phrase nowadays, particularly among the opponents of Common Market entry, is that we are the centre of the Commonwealth. That is the sort of question-begging phrase which covers up realities.’¹⁸⁵ For despite all similarities in language, legal systems, administration, and good will, ‘none of these things can possibly make the Commonwealth into an alternative to the European Economic Community’.¹⁸⁶ In Foot’s interpretation, Britain had transformed from a world power to a European power, which could no longer rely on the unconditional support of its former colonies. In effect, Foot deconstructed the legacy of Empire and the Commonwealth as a core element of Britishness and relocated that identity back to its European roots.

¹⁸⁴ Despite attempts to eliminate the differences between the continent and Britain, some proponents continued to implicitly make the distinction in their speeches. Harry Diamond, an independent, felt that despite the fact that Europeans were ‘intelligent, honourable, and decent people’, they were different from the British because ‘they speak funny languages, and speak them far too quickly for us to understand them’. (See *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 666, 8 November 1962, col. 1234-1235.) Whether consciously or unconsciously, a number of pro-EEC politicians continued to differentiate between the ‘us’ and ‘them’, thereby partly undermining their objective of bridging this contrast.

¹⁸⁵ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 666, 7 November 1962, col. 1063.

¹⁸⁶ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 666, 7 November 1962, col. 1064.

Furthermore, the concept of sovereignty, which was hailed as absolute by the opponents, was relativised by Common Market enthusiasts. It consistently emerges from their contributions that sovereignty was watered down as ‘a matter of degree’, as Macmillan formulated it.¹⁸⁷ Moreover, a number of parliamentarians pointed out that Britain had already ceded parts of its sovereignty after the Second World War. According to Woodburn, this was logical in the new world of interdependence. By joining alliances such as NATO and the OEEC, the room for manoeuvre for the British government was already curtailed according to the principle of parliamentary sovereignty. In the words of Woodburn, it did not matter that Britain was longer fully sovereign if it gained more influence by pooling its sovereignty with other countries.¹⁸⁸

Memories of both world wars served proponents with a particularly powerful means of contesting the absolute interpretation of sovereignty. Pro-European politicians argued that Britain’s traditional isolationist stance had failed to prevent the country from becoming embroiled in major conflicts. As Roy Jenkins, MP for the Labour Party and the later president of the European Commission, reminded the House:

‘Europe is there, 21 miles away from us, and we do not insulate ourselves from it by not going into the Common Market. Anyone who looks back on the history of the past 50 years cannot possibly believe that, in or out of the Common Market, we can be indifferent to what happens (...) between France and Germany. The extent to which one has doubts therefore seems an overwhelming argument for getting into Europe and seeking to influence the course of events in Europe, instead of standing outside rather self-righteously clinging to our little corner of sovereignty and hoping that the Channel, which has been so ineffective in insulating us from these difficulties in the past, will somehow be miraculously effective in doing so in the future.’¹⁸⁹

This contribution drew heavily upon the collective memory of the two world wars to construct a distinctively pro-European version of ‘never again’. But this feeling was constructed by actively participating in Europe to prevent another world war. The speech therefore illustrates how the historical memories were being invoked to renegotiate the meaning of core national traditions such as sovereignty.

Moreover, Jenkins’ intervention also challenged the spatial boundaries through which British nationhood was traditionally imagined. The anti-Marketters posed a consistent view of Britain as a political community that developed separately from the continent. Jenkins,

¹⁸⁷ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 2 August 1961, col. 1491.

¹⁸⁸ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 2 August 1961, col. 1518-1519; *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 3 August 1961, col. 1674-1675.

¹⁸⁹ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 661, 7 June 1962, col. 726.

however, stressed the geographical proximity between these two areas, seeing the Channel as a connection rather than a separation. With Europe being only '21 miles away from us', Jenkins drew attention to the well-known fact that the Channel is narrow. This mundane fact nevertheless carried significant implications towards the mental image of framing the Channel as a natural barrier, as the anti-EEC politicians exhaustively repeated. Jenkins used this geographical reality to contest the meaning of Britain's imagined geographical distinctiveness from the continent.

These criticisms on the concept of absolute sovereignty were echoed more punitively by other figures. For instance, Dingle Foot illustrated the hollowness of the sovereignty concept, arguing that its absolute interpretation caused more harm than stability to the security of Europe. Remembering a speech made in the House of Commons in early 1939, as the storm of war approached, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer John Simon insisted that the government clung to its policy of appeasement. Just 'after the German troops had marched into Prague', Foot recalled, 'Sir John Simon was still resisting any movement towards collective security on the Continent of Europe'.¹⁹⁰

What Foot and Jenkins' interventions highlight is that they went beyond criticising sovereignty as a constitutional principle, as Macmillan and Heath had done. Foot directly challenged one of the central narratives employed by the anti-Marketeters that Britain was safest behind the shores of the Channel. He argued that detachment from the continent had contributed to a catastrophe. The lesson from the Second World War, that had scarred many individual MPs that participated in it, was that Britain could not afford to sit on the sidelines.¹⁹¹ Historical memory was in this sense mobilised to reverse the absolute meaning that was attached to British independence.

International responsibilities

The second argument concerned the Britain's role in a changing world. Proponents of entry argued that British identity was rooted in a tradition of international leadership and responsibility. British exceptionalism was not abandoned in this interpretation, but redefined. Britain, in their view, remained unique, not because of its separateness, but because of its capacity to lead and shape developments on the European continent. From this perspective, accession to the EEC was seen as a responsibility to make that organisation stronger and more

¹⁹⁰ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 666, 7 November 1962, col. 1065.

¹⁹¹ For an elaborate discussion on the legacy of the war experiences on the Europeanist attitude of British politicians, see Crowson, *The Conservative Party and European Integration since 1945*, p.111.

outward-looking. For instance, Prime Minister Macmillan believed that ‘the United Kingdom has a positive part to play’ in the development of the EEC, partly because it could thereby strengthen the free world.¹⁹² Heath stressed that Great Britain, through its ‘political traditions’, ‘experience’, ‘stability’, and ‘industrial strength’ of ‘our people’, could make an important contribution to the European movement.¹⁹³

These examples show that the proponents tried to redefine the British international role in the context of the EEC. Significantly, these references about Britain’s leadership capabilities and role remained deliberately broad and somewhat undefined. In contrast to the anti-Marketeers, who used familiar symbols such as food prices, parliament, or Commonwealth sentiments, the proponents of entry relied on moral characteristics of Britain. Britain’s greatness was therefore not framed on the basis of an imperial past, but was approached from the historical responsibility Great Britain had to help determine the future of the international order. In this way, the legacy of Empire was reconciled as a new means of exercising that role, but now for advancing the European project.

Importantly, this positive discourse regarding Britain’s alleged role was also a direct response to opponents who portrayed the EEC as an inward-looking bloc. Macmillan dismissed this framing as ‘medieval dreams’. Even though some European leaders – he did not mention whom – did have those narrow continental ambitions, British accession could still ensure that the EEC would acquire more global ambitions:

‘(...) But if there are little Europeans, and perhaps there are, is it not the duty of this country, with its world-wide ties, to lend its weight to the majority of Europeans who see the true prospective of events? I believe that our right place is in the vanguard of the movement towards the greater unity of the free world, and that we can lead better from within than outside.’¹⁹⁴

Macmillan used the British tradition as an outward-looking nation as a rationale for joining the EEC, hoping that the organisation in due course would also acquire a more global vocation.¹⁹⁵ In this way, a British tradition was mobilised to help the Europeans. Others also underscored the importance of participation to prevent the Community from becoming a ‘nationalist’ or ‘neutralist bloc’.¹⁹⁶ According to Aubrey Jones, Britain could allow the community to be

¹⁹² *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 2 August 1961, col. 1480; See also *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 661, 6 June 1962, col. 530.

¹⁹³ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 661, 6 June 1962, col. 489.

¹⁹⁴ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 2 August 1961, col. 1483.

¹⁹⁵ This argument was widespread among the pro-European wing of the Conservative Party, see Crowson, *The Conservative Party and European Integration since 1945*, p.114.

¹⁹⁶ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 661, 7 June 1962, col. 779.

extended and let it solve Commonwealth and world problems.¹⁹⁷ In this way a connection with the continent was sought without it coming at the expense of Commonwealth relations, something that other proponents also constantly reiterated.¹⁹⁸

In a number of speeches, Great Britain's contribution to world developments was cast in a very idealistic light. Member of Parliament Thomas Moore, a member of the Scottish Unionist Party, argued that Great Britain's accession could send an important signal to those countries that had been 'held prisoner behind the Iron Curtain'.¹⁹⁹ In Moore's view, strengthening Europe would put pressure on the Soviet Union to hold free elections in Eastern Europe and 'allow a genuinely free Europe to cooperate in developing a freer and happier world.' He did not rule out the possibility that Germany might be reunified in the long run.²⁰⁰

Moore's contribution highlights how supporters connected EEC membership with positive international effects. They created great expectations, not only regarding the economic benefits of accession, but especially the political and moral influence that Great Britain would have for freedom and stability in the world.²⁰¹ A notion of British exceptionalism was attributed to indicate that Great Britain possessed the qualities to guide these processes. How this was exactly done or should be executed was glossed over. What mattered more was that British exceptionalism could be constructed in a more inclusive way. In this sense, supporters projected onto European integration many of the same grand narratives of national purpose that anti-Marketeers projected onto the Commonwealth.

In addition, Macmillan attempted to place this leadership role within a historical tradition so that it could be framed as part of British national identity. Although Great Britain also had a tradition of isolation, he argued that the country always emerged from that isolation when the world was 'in danger of tyrants or aggression'.²⁰² The war time experience was not only used to discard absolute notions of sovereignty, but could also be utilised to highlight Britain's traditional role as a guarantor of peace and security. Macmillan did not make such a reference explicit, but it was clear to everyone in the Commons what that statement referred to. His appeal resembled Billig's concept of banal nationalism. Instead of invoking explicitly patriotic language, Macmillan appealed to historical assumptions that required little

¹⁹⁷ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 661, 6 June 1962, col. 533-534.

¹⁹⁸ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 3 August 1961, col. 1723-1724.

¹⁹⁹ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 666, 7 November 1962, col. 1071.

²⁰⁰ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 666, 7 November 1962, col. 1071.

²⁰¹ This highly idealised version of the role of Britain in contributing to the unity of Europe was also apparent in wider Conservative Party circles. See Crowson, *The Conservative Party and European Integration since 1945*, p.108.

²⁰² *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 2 August 1961, col. 1482.

explanation within the Commons. References to Britain emerging from isolation when confronted with tyranny indirectly activated collective memories of both world wars. These memories functioned as recognisable national reference points that reinforced an image of Britain as a nation that historically accepted international responsibilities. It also implied an active participation in world politics to avoid repetition, as Macmillan outlined the dangers of communism for the stability of the continent.²⁰³ Britain was thus represented as a nation whose historical mission lay not in standing apart from Europe, but in guiding and shaping it.

The necessity to adapt

It can be inferred from the examples above that the proponents appealed to more factual and rational traditions to transform Britishness and make it compatible with EEC accession. Nevertheless, no matter how the application to the EEC was expressed, joining a supranational organisation still constituted a break in British foreign policy. Therefore, the government and its supporters did not emphasise the static and robustness of British identity. Instead, British national identity was characterised primarily by Britain's ability to adapt to the historical circumstances of the time – the third argument put forward. At the end of his speech, Macmillan made a remark regarding this alleged nature of Britishness: 'I think, however, that most of us recognise that in a changing world, if we are not to be left behind and to drop out of the mainstream of the world's life, we must be prepared to change and adapt our methods. All through history this has been one of the main sources of our strength.'²⁰⁴

To which specific historical period Macmillan referred to remains unclear in the rest of his speech. However, Macmillan was not concerned with pointing out what exactly demonstrated this British virtue of adaptability. Because he did not specify particular episodes of British history, the members present could project their own examples onto the narrative. What was particularly important to Macmillan was not to frame the choice for the EEC as a break with the past, but as a continuation of it. In discourse terms, British identity was reconstructed around the abstract capacity of national renewal, allowing a continuity of longstanding traditions.

Extending this line of argument, there were MPs who viewed accession as an exciting future experiment. These politicians attempted to bridge the gap with the past by referring to deep-rooted British characteristics. In their view, Britain could take this step because of its

²⁰³ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 2 August 1961, col. 1482-1483.

²⁰⁴ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 2 August 1961, col. 1494.

tradition of boldness and adaptation, which had been proven time and again. In his maiden speech, William Thomas Rodgers argued that Britain had only been dominant for so long ‘by being adventurous and bold and more concerned with the future than the past’.²⁰⁵ According to Maurice Macmillan, MP for the Conservatives, the ‘real division’ in the debate lay between MPs whose ideas were ‘firmly rooted in the past’ and those looking to the future.²⁰⁶ By hammering home on Britain’s future grandeur in terms of economic and political power, the proponents hoped to label the anti-Marketeters as ‘unpatriotic’ instead of the other way around.

But behind this feature of an exciting future, a powerful discourse of decline prevailed within the echelons of EEC supporters, both implicitly and explicitly. In a political sense, this had to do with the changing world role of the British after 1945.²⁰⁷ The Suez Crisis in particular had shown that the British could no longer sustain this role militarily, diplomatically, and economically. Importantly, the narrative of decline disputed existing understandings of British national identity. According to Charles Pannell, a Labour Party MP, no one could deny that ‘in 1961, we see the slow decline of the United Kingdom as an economic and political power’.²⁰⁸

Subsequently, the language of decline offered opportunities for fresh chances for a redefinition of Britishness itself. By framing Britain’s development since 1945 as one of persistent decline, supporters of entry could argue that Britain needed to adapt if it wanted to keep playing a role in world affairs. This interpretation was explicitly made in the speech of Sir Richard Nugent. He looked with ‘anxiety’ at the next ten to twenty years.²⁰⁹ According to him, it was necessary to reverse the decline by joining a larger bloc such as the EEC. ‘If we cannot, we shall follow the same course as the classic fate of the great imperial Powers of the past who had their day of greatness and gradually sank to becoming nonentities or museum pieces. We think of Athens, Rome, Egypt, Spain and so on.’²¹⁰

Nugent’s reference to these once great powers is particularly important in relation to Britain’s national identity. Such historical analogies did not merely describe Britain’s situation, but positioned the nation within a broader narrative of the rise and fall of empires. The

²⁰⁵ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 661, 7 June 1962, col. 711-712.

²⁰⁶ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 661, 6 June 1962, col. 563.

²⁰⁷ Tomlinson, ‘Thrice Denied’, 248; See also Gowland, *Britain and European Integration since 1945*, p.58.

²⁰⁸ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 3 August 1961, col. 1706. These declinist attitudes drew much criticism from the other side of the debate. Harold Wilson was not impressed by this exalted strategy of decline. ‘I cannot avoid the feeling that the government have negotiated throughout from weakness. First, they were panicked into their decision last July by the economic crisis. Secondly, they have talked all along as though there were no viable alternative.’ (*Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 661, 7 June 1962, col. 676.) It can be deduced, then, that contemporaries had already noticed that a pessimistic mood prevailed in government circles regarding their inability of solving economic problems themselves.

²⁰⁹ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 666, 7 November 1962, col. 1026.

²¹⁰ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 666, 7 November 1962, col. 1027.

implication of his speech was that greatness depended on Britain's ability to adjust its priorities. In this adjustment process, the future within the EEC was depicted as a natural outcome. That also meant that the British identity of 'little Englanders', frequently mobilised by anti-Marketeers, was equated by the pro-Europeanists as a view that was detached from reality. Parliamentary Hynd continues: 'Undoubtedly, our political influence will decline if these European political institutions become more influential. This will happen if we are not there. I suggest that we ought to have our proper place in the new European political institutions.'²¹¹

Not only did political decline become a fixed element for many proponents, but economic downturn was equally cited as a reason for joining the EEC. This was particularly notable for the fact that proponents had little confidence in the nation's own capacity to tackle economic problems. The picture painted here was that British industries had lost their competitiveness and that the British economy as a whole was stagnating.²¹²

Subsequently, banal nationalist arguments were used in the debate to reinforce this frame. Pannell rhetorically asked what the 'greatest misery' was for the British people. He foreshadowed rising unemployment if the government did nothing to address the situation. In his view, 'full employment' meant not only to give 'the wife enough at the end of the week, bringing up the children and putting them to bed at night in comfort'. More than anything else, full employment 'means a man on his feet instead of a suppliant on his knees'.²¹³ According to Pannell, that affluence could found inside the EEC. After comparing the purchasing power ratios, wages, and annual vacation days between the Six and Britain, he concluded that 'the people in these other countries are bringing themselves up'.²¹⁴

In similar vein to the anti-Marketeers, the economic arguments advanced by the proponents of entry went beyond technical economic questions about productivity and growth rates. Discussions of economic decline were also targeted and translated into the language of everyday experiences, as the example of Pannell illustrates. His image of a working man 'on his feet' rather than 'on his knees' linked the abstract economic performance to moral notions of dignity, self-respect, and British citizenship. Viewed through the lens of banal nationalism, these references served the same function as the anti-Marketeers' appeals to food prices and British consumer habits by flagging routinely familiar habits or symbols of the nation.²¹⁵ It

²¹¹ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 2 August 1961, col. 1563.

²¹² *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 666, 7 November 1962, col. 1027.

²¹³ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 3 August 1961, col. 1707.

²¹⁴ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 645, 3 August 1961, col. 1712.

²¹⁵ See especially Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, pp.93-97.

transformed the debate of Britain's balance-of-payments deficits to a discussion where the national prosperity of British families was associated with EEC entry.

Conclusion

Far from being post-national in their political orientation, the speeches made by EEC advocates highlight that they also engaged in national identity construction. Throughout the debates, the proponents justified accession through three overlapping arguments: Britain was inherently a European nation, Britain traditionally had international responsibilities, and Britain's historical strength lay in its capacity to adapt to changing circumstances. In contrast to the anti-Marketeers, the reinterpretation process of the proponents relied less on emotionally charged narratives, but more on pragmatic and inclusive forms of Britishness. This was done to make participation in the EEC appear as both natural and legitimate, thereby attempting to reconcile the tension between nationalism and European integration. In this way, the proponents tried to debunk the anti-Marketeer portrayal of a static and unchanging national identity. While the anti-Marketeers saw EEC membership as an abandonment of what it meant to be British, supporters framed it as a move to the future. European integration was constructed as a mechanism where Britain preserved its status in a changing world. This alternative understanding of Britishness was reflected by the way the proponents used historical memories, geographical assumptions, and national traditions, but attached different meanings to them. National identity construction thus was a central battleground of political contestation during the debates on EEC accession.

Final conclusion

In his memoirs, when he reflected back on the first application debates, Prime Minister Harold Macmillan called the anti-Marketeer campaign a ‘complete and ludicrous failure’.²¹⁶ This assessment did not correspond, however, with how he felt about the issue in July 1961. At the time, Macmillan confessed to Edward Heath that ‘the chief difficulty at the moment is to carry the House with us’.²¹⁷ Alongside the opposition benches, he feared a revolt in his own ranks against the government of those who wanted to safeguard the British national identity. Macmillan’s concern illustrates how divisive the EEC had already become in British politics. This thesis has therefore sought to understand how the construction of different notions of national identity influenced parliamentary debates on Great Britain’s first application to the European Economic Community (1961–1963).

Based on a discourse analysis of the relevant parliamentary debates, it is argued that national identity played a more important role in the debate over Britain’s entry into the EEC than previously assumed. Both sides of the political debate appealed to British national identity. The debate should not be interpreted as a clash between nationalism and European integration, but between competing visions of what Britishness actually entailed. This was possible because Britishness was not a fixed identity. It allowed for different projections of its national identity. The fluid nature of British national identity was reinforced by Britain’s changing status in the postwar era, with decolonisation and economic stagnation as prime examples having repercussions on Britain’s self-image. As a result, both sides of the debate differed primarily in the way Britishness was defined and the corresponding traditions that were invoked. In that sense, British national identity itself was politicised in the debates over EEC accession.

The anti-Marketeers were of the opinion that an irreconcilable difference existed between Britain and the European continent, constructing a relational distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’. They appealed to British political and economic traditions, such as parliamentary sovereignty and free trade. They also claimed that the British mission lay on a global level with the Commonwealth, rather than at a regional level in Europe. These claims were substantiated by a host of well-known national symbols of Britain’s past and wartime experiences, which were often cast in emotional and banal nationalist rhetoric to connect with the imagination of the common man on the street. In this way, a sentimental image of Britishness was presented

²¹⁶ Harold Macmillan, *At the End of the Day, 1961-63* (London, 1973), p.333.

²¹⁷ Cited from Dewey, *British National Identity and Opposition to Membership of Europe 1961-1963*, p.177.

that had been exceptional and unchanging over the centuries, making it incompatible with accession to the EEC.

The EEC supporters, in contrast, could not rely on the notion of the immutability of British identity. They did not challenge the image of British exceptionalism, but redefined it. Partly due to this redefinition, the proponents could argue that Britain had always been part of European identity. Unlike the anti-Marketeers, who focused primarily on domestic traditions such as sovereignty, the proponents emphasised Britain's international role. The distinctive national identity actually enabled Britain to take the lead in the EEC to make its political course more outward-looking. British national identity was redefined by appealing to more rational historical examples, such as its connections and proximity to the continent. Though factually correct, these constructions of Britishness lacked the sentimental appeal that the opponents evoked in their discourse. Moreover, Britain's defining characteristic was that it always adapted to changing circumstances in the world, presenting European integration as a logical next step in its historical development. In this sense, the advocates of entry made it seem natural to enter the European club through a redefinition of Britishness that broke down the exclusionary barriers of the anti-Marketeers. These findings illustrate that national identity played a significant role for both sides in the parliamentary debates on EEC accession between 1961 and 1963.

This thesis has contributed to the historiography on Britain and Europe in several ways. It reinforces the findings made by scholars, such as Dewey and George, who argued that Britain had deeply held beliefs about it meant to be British, which were not abandoned during the application process to join the EEC. In particular, the opponents of entry stressed the unchanging nature of Britishness, using sovereignty and Britain's world role as identity markers that were believed to be centuries old. That said, this thesis complements existing studies by showing that pro-European politicians also mobilised national identity, albeit in a less sentimental manner. While the proponents of entry could not construct a static view of Britain's identity, they tried to create an overall idea of Britishness that aligned with Britain's 'imagined community' and was congruent with the process of European integration. This national identity, they assured, would not be lost once the step into Europe had been made.

Moreover, studying the parliamentary debates on EEC accession enriches our understanding of the first application process as a whole. In particular, it becomes necessary to reconsider the merits and pitfalls of the three schools of thought that seek to explain Britain's move towards the EEC. From the speeches in the House of Commons, accession was publicly justified through narratives of national decline and renewal. Many contributions from the

proponents of entry highlighted the leadership role Great Britain could play within an enlarged EEC, enabling it to resume its traditional leadership role in the world. What also emerges from the speeches is that both sides adhered to a form of British exceptionalism. Strategic considerations appear to be kept primarily behind claims regarding Britain's international vocation and adaptability. This does not imply, however, that strategic considerations, as argued by Kaiser and Camps, were entirely absent, but rather that they did not primarily emerged in the debates. In this sense, this thesis aligns with the findings of Grob-Fitzgibbon and Steinnes, as well as with the 'awkward partner' thesis of George and Wall.

Looking back at these parliamentary exchanges, they do not only explain the role of national identity formation in relation to the EEC. It also helps to understand why this seemingly clear-cut issue 'to join or not to join' has been called in question multiple times. A close reading of the debates highlights how passionately the opponents argued their case against the EEC – as the emotional references to Commonwealth kinship ties and the villainisation of European politicians indicate. In this, they could appeal more easily to historical-cultural notions of British national identity than the proponents could. The principled hostility to the EEC would not fade away in subsequent years, even after Britain hopped on the European boat in 1973. As the Brexit campaign and its tumultuous aftermath have shown, the 'European question' remains a controversial issue up to this day.

The findings of this thesis open up several areas for further research. The first area could examine how Britishness was in later periods, such as during the second application (1967) or the Brexit campaign of 2016. Such studies would give a better understanding what elements in identity construction remained important over time, and which themes of Britishness were cast aside. The second area could explore how national identity discourse was utilised in the public opinion and in media outlets to fully grasp the significance of banal nationalist mechanisms. Taken together, these questions contribute to an even better understanding of the role that national identity played in the British relationship with the EEC.

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