Article

Imagined communities: from subjecthood to nationality in the British Atlantic

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Abstract

Drawing on the concept of uneven and combined development this article critically interrogates Benedict Anderson's theory of the 'imagined community' through an historical investigation into the English-realm-cum-British-empire. Placing its rise in the context of the conflicts of Post-Reformation Europe, it identifies vectors of combined development (money, goods, ideas, people) which shaped the formation of new imagined communities. These post-Reformation struggles were not defined by nationality but subjecthood, which saw 'the realm' displace the monarch as an object of rights and duties. The 18th century rise of British nationalism was a response to the long crisis of subjecthood (1639–1688). However, this emergence was uneven and non-linear, such that it co-existed as a political imagination with continued belief in – and political support for – subjecthood. Ironically, given its latter-day mythology, the American Revolutionary War was fought to protect subjecthood under the Crown from subordination to the British nation and its parliament.

A national reawakening *within IR?*

International Relations (IR) has rarely considered the study of nations and nationalism to form a foundational element of its research programme. Over two decades since Jan Jindy Pettman argued that the use of the hyphenated idiom *nation-state* clouds both theoretical and empirical investigation into the distinctive concepts of nation and state,[1] IR has still tended to prioritise the latter and its relationship to the discipline's 'ontological

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cornerstone'[2] of sovereignty. Indeed, in his recent survey of the state of nationalism studies within the discipline, Jaakko Heiskanen tellingly repeats Pettman's point, noting the scale of work that exists on the 'state side' of this interrelationship and the continued lack of attention to the *nation* as a component of modern world politics.[3]

There are, however, signs that IR scholars are starting to emphasise the national dimension of international processes. William Callahan has challenged the distinction between secular states and mediaeval theology.[4] Fiona Adamson and Madeleine Demetriou bring diaspora to the fore in order to critique IR's identification of collective identities with the state.[5] Burak Kadercan has shown that by transforming territories into 'inviolable homelands' 19th century nationalism altered the logic and nature of war.[6] Nonetheless, much of the contemporary research on nationality remains rooted in Political Science and Sociology.[7] And the effect of this may be that the distinctive contribution IR holds for studying nationality – how the existence of *multiple* interacting societies affects its nature and constitution[8] – is overlooked in the broader scholarship. As Frédérick Guillaume Dufour observes, IR theories have 'often shied away from apprehending the historicity of modern nationalism', while, 'theories of nationalism', in turn, mistakenly ignore 'the *inter*-national' dimension of the social world.[9] Indeed, in the post-war literature[10] on the modern origins of nationality, 'the international' was for the most part present empirically but not conceptually.[11]

This article seeks to overcome this problem by revisiting Benedict Anderson's[12] account of the imagined community in dialogue with the theory of uneven and combined development.[13] Through the examination of identities in the English-realm-cum-British-empire from the 16th to the 18th century, I correct ambiguities in Anderson's analysis, specifically his tendency to emphasise 15th/16th century causes in his explanation of 18th/19th century political nationalism.

I argue that Anderson's narrow emphasis on print-capitalism excludes the broader range of practices and processes which were deepening communication networks in the 16th century. While these interactive vectors did not generate modern nationalism, they did give rise to an international conflict that contested the terms of association between subject, realm, monarch and church. In the Tudor and Stuart era, this dispute fostered subjecthood as a political and constitutional form of rule. The 18th century rise of British nationalism was a response to the long crisis of subjecthood, which began with the dispute between Parliament and Charles I. This emergence of British nationalism was uneven and non-linear, such that it co-existed as an imagination with continued belief in – and support for – Crown subjecthood. In the colonies, the latter entailed a form of equality as *subjects*, rather than a hierarchical subordination to British national imperialism. Ironically, given its latter-day mythology, the patriots took up arms in 1775 to protect subjecthood under the Crown.

Rethinking the imagined community

In this section, I support Anderson's claim that the distinctively modern character of nationalism lay in its tendency to internal homogenisation – a dynamic, which also entailed a new conception of sovereignty, one based on the claim that *the nation* had a fundamental *right to rule* itself. I will establish this through an initial discussion of the

nature of pre-modern forms of imagined community before preceding to make a case for revisions to Anderson's account along three lines of argument: (a) the *longue durée* analysis with which he explains the transformations of the 18th century; (b) the absence of 'the international' in this story, which leads him to cast the process as more or less unilinear; and (c) the de facto invisibility of political agency in his theorisation.

Anderson's work is part of the modernist canon of nationalism theories.[14] According to this school of thought nationality has a relatively recent history beginning with the 18th and 19th centuries. Overtime this framework has come under challenge from scholarship identifying a longer history.[15] The strength of the latter argument lies in the etymology of the term, nation, as well as categories that have been identified as analogous, for example, in the Latin and Greek traditions, *gens, ethnos, populus* and *tribus*.[16] In the *Old Testament*, the Hebrew term *goy* has been translated as nation and taken to mean a people (*am*) with their own land or country.[17] A Norman bishop used a similar definition in the 12th century to discuss the 'language, laws, habits, modes of judgment and customs' of the Welsh.[18] Nation was often used interchangeably with race in early modern Europe, attached to claims that anticipated 'scientific' racism[19] and justified colonial dispossession.[20] It was, for instance, the plantation programme in Ireland and the Tyrone Rebellion (1593–1603) that formed the backdrop to Shakespeare's *Henry V* and its 'part-English, part-Irish, part-Norman' character's suggestion that his mixed ethnicity left him without a national identity.[21] These examples demonstrate the complicated way in which cultural identities, traditions and beliefs systems have interacted with political institutions across history. They raise two interrelated questions for theories of nationalism: were there still distinctive qualities to the nationalism that emerged in the 18th century? And, if so, how do we conceptualise the transformation in notions of belonging, identity and community that took place from the 16th to the 18th centuries in Europe and the Americas?

Although Anderson is clearly situated in the 'modernist' canon, there are grounds for viewing this evidence of nation-like subjectivities across history as consistent with his original argument. For the abstract concept of the imagined community did not assume it had a wholly modern nature. Quite to the contrary, Anderson advanced this idea as an underlying presupposition, which held all communities that go beyond a micro, 'face-to-face' level, to be, in some sense, imagined.[22] The various forms of collective identity found across history and expressed in distinct language, customs, traditions (relating, however, vaguely to some notion of place, location and territory) may therefore simply be viewed as concrete iterations of imagined communities. Nonetheless, Anderson also argued that 18th century nationalisms were different to these pre-modern forms of political association. Firstly, the latter were highly heterogeneous comprising a plethora of layered identities defined through some combination of ethnicity, language, class and status. In contrast, the nationalists of the modern era declared 'we are one people', as they pursued cultural homogenisation. As a result, for the first time in their history, European monarchs 'naturalised' into the imagined community of their subordinates, coming to share a national identity with commoners and subjects.[23] Secondly, nationalism posited a new form of state association as the people, not the monarch, were considered sovereign.[24]

In Anderson's theory, this shift occurred because of several interconnected dynamics: 'a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity'.[25] Often summarised under the rubric 'print-capitalism', this account leans heavily on two historical processes: the use of printing presses in Europe from the mid-15th century onwards and the ecclesiastical conflicts of the Reformation in the 16th. Anderson argues printing broke the monopoly of Latin on learned penmanship, undermining the political role of the Catholic Church. He then inserts language into this picture identifying the rise of administrative vernacular that cohered local identities, laying the basis for the future construction of national identity.[26] As this suggests, Anderson draws a sharp distinction between religious fidelity and nationalism, claiming that 'in Western Europe the 18th century marks not only the dawn of the age of nationalism but the dusk of religious modes of thought'.[27] As William Callaghan has argued, this is a rather problematic dichotomy in light 'of the continual invocation of the nation as the sacred political community. . . throughout the world',[28] notably illustrated by the often close relationship of temperance movements to nationalism.[29]

As a causal explanation this struggles to integrate its *longue durée* sociology with conjunctural analysis, suggesting that 18th century nationalism was largely determined by sociological and techno-cultural shifts which occurred several centuries earlier. As Europe did not invent the printing press, and its use in East Asia did not generate homogenous national identities,[30] Anderson's account is both *too universal* in scope and *too narrow* in its explanation. Notably, despite this heavy focus on the experience of the European Reformation, it curiously neglects the continent's war-prone geopolitics.[31] Warfare was often key to how nations created bonds of solidarity against a threatening outside, and the failure to visualise this aspect in his theorisation may reflect Anderson's normative view of nationality as an ultimately benign process of cultural imagination.[32] Moreover, the simple spatial organisation of linguistic communities with common identities appears unlikely to lead to the 'blood and honour'-style sacrifices historically associated with nationalism.[33] It is also, empirically speaking, not the case that language led to nationality in the direct way that Anderson implies. For example, France in 1789 had two different linguistic communities, French in the north and Occitan (a Romance language with links to Catalan) in the south, each with a plethora of different regional dialects.[34] Yet, this did not lead to two nations.

The variety of these and other histories illustrate that the core of the problem in Anderson's theoretical approach lies in its *linearity* – a failing possibly encapsulated by his view that once nationalism was invented it would inevitably spread by 'modular' repetition.[35] This sits uneasily with his concept of national identity as a form of social imagination which implies a wide latitude for conscious, creative political agency.[36] In addition, as international orders are defined by the co-existence and interaction of different societies, the surprising absence of war and geopolitics from Anderson's account is arguably indicative of his wider exclusion of 'the international' per se.

Given these problems, the suitability of the theory of uneven and combined development as a corrective lies in its account of non-linearity. Within the large literature formed around this idea in IR in the last two decades a number of studies have

specifically applied it to account for the emergence of nations and nationality.[37] By starting from the assumption that the human world is spatially dispersed (uneven) yet still sociologically interconnected (combined), the theory holds development to be inherently non-synchronous. I use this framework in three ways to identify the uneven and combined processes through which the nation emerged as a historical phenomenon. First, the conceptualisation establishes the underlying fact of societal multiplicity, which gives rise to unevenness in geopolitical power relations, shaping the terms of inter-societal competition and cooperation and providing the terrain on which political communities are collectively imagined. Second, the theory highlights the communicative vectors that were reshaping European development in the 16th and 17th centuries.[38] These vectors of ideas, money, goods and people forged the uneven emergence of early modern capitalism. Its 'importance [for the transformations in identity occurring in this period lies]. . .less in the domain of production than that of circulation, for it was in the creation of trade networks that merchant capital began to link up dispersed rural communities',[39] providing a structure which was *ultimately* amenable to the homogenisation of the nation. But, of course, it would have the opposite impetus internationally, where market interactions with other peoples tended to reinforce the sense of difference and particularisation felt by the merchant classes. Nationality's genesis is thus a story of this uneven and combined dialectic between the 'internal' and 'external'.

Lastly, the theorisation also identifies the power imbalances that incentivise weaker states to draw on vectors of knowledge in order to 'catch-up' with hegemonic powers. Together this allows us to show how political nationality emerged in a non-linear manner, as part of a world in which other subjectivities were dominant, but was also, in turn, shaped and 'tested', so to speak, by its conflicting interaction with rival forms. As I will argue, in the British Atlantic this saw two political trajectories go to war in 1775, as the imaginary of *imperial subjecthood* confronted *national imperialism*.

This non-linear conception – identifying the 'interactive multiplicity'[40] that characterised the rise and spread of nationality – also creates the basis to 'fill the gap' between the changes of seen in previous centuries and 18th century nationalism. Political actors had to navigate this complex international constellation and the ideological struggles of the Reformation cut-across these societal boundaries. Whereas the Reformation introduced a religious cleavage that often challenged 'domestic' authority, nationalism demanded political loyalty on the basis of identity. Following David Bell, I argue modern nationalism had a *project character* in a way that earlier 'nations' (or 'protonationalism'[41] and 'protonational consciousness'[42]) did not. It outlined a vision of a homogenous imagined community that had to be constructed through political action.[43] In doing so, it sought institutional structures to advance the sovereign claims of the people. Prior to this, 'nations were [imagined as] facts of nature: they signified basic divisions of the human species, not products of human will'.[44] Modern nationalism thus claimed to be traditional, but also saw the nation as a force to be built through political action. This approach allows us to recognise how *the idea* of the political nation *preceded* its establishment, emerging in societies in which other forms of thought were hegemonic. The first dictionary of the French Academy, for example, defined a nation as 'the inhabitants of a common country, who live under the same laws and use the same language'[45] – and, as noted in the foregoing, the Kingdom of France at the time did not meet this definition, or was

at least 'multinational'. While Bell applies the project framework to the French experience, I argue below that this conceptualisation also accords with the 18th century turn to British nationalism.

Missing the politics? The Reformation and Counter Reformation as international political conflicts

IR's focus on the state dimension of the nation-state relation[46] finds it mirror image in accounts of the historical sociology of the state.[47] Emphasising institutional innovation in how resources were raised to prosecute war, 'the literature on state formation is conspicuously silent on the relationship between state and people—or between state and subjects—in the early modern period'.[48] This has impacted the modernist account of nationality by fostering confusion regarding *that which went before*, that is, the relations connecting people, state and territory in the 16th and 17th centuries. Indeed, these accounts have tended to read the early modern period through the prism of later changes. I propose to reverse this methodological procedure, highlighting the intellectual gains that might be garnered from considering why elites sought out a *new* relationship binding the state and people in the 18th century based on nationality.

Anderson's account of the cultural changes seen in early modern Europe highlights the alliance of print-capitalists and Protestants that undermined Catholicism; noting, for example, how Martin Luther's works accounted for a third of German language books sold between 1518 and 1525.[49] While Anderson does describe the Reformation as a set of 'negative' factors in nationality's origins, his 'positive' account also focusses extensively on the fatality of linguistic diversity and print-capitalism.[50] There are hints, however, at the limitations of this catch-all explanation in some of his other arguments. He identifies, for example, the anti-Habsburg political revolution in the Dutch Republic (1581) to illustrate how dynasticism, not merely the celestial authority of the Church, came under pressure in a context in which new and dangerous ideas enjoyed a wider hearing and circulation.[51] He also situates these shifts in the longer history of non-Latin administrative vernaculars, noting how this reflected the fragmentation of mediaeval Christendom with its lack of a single imperial sovereignty.[52]

The range of these historical events sits uneasily with the narrow explanatory scope. For what is missing is a recognition of the *political* character of the contests over identity, religion and sovereignty in the early modern period – a reality encapsulated by the formation of the Dutch Republic, an example of the revolutionary convulsions that would beset numerous polities in the subsequent century. Language was part of these conflagrations but its relationship to imagined communities was dependent on how actors apprehended the ideas in circulation and grounded them in local contexts as the basis for political struggles. The Khmelnytsky Uprising against the Polish Commonwealth (1648–1654) does not appear to be an untypical example of these dynamics. It pitted ethnic Cossacks and Tartars[53] against a Polish-speaking aristocracy.[54] These groups united with a foreign power – the Muscovites[55] – in the name of the Orthodox Church against the Catholic Counter Reformation,[56] and also undertook terrible atrocities against the Jewish people.[57] So, it is hard to identify a 'national project' in this case – and in subsequent

Ukrainian and Russian national imaginings the uprising has been given a variety of historical meanings overtime.[58]

If there was – to use Anderson's phrase – a 'fatality'[59] in these historical shifts it lay in the *geopolitical unevenness* of early modern Europe, not simply its linguistic diversity. This political and cultural multiplicity – the separation of the European order into discrete but interconnected *locales* – mediated how actors formed new imagined communities and altered old ones. These imaginings were active and causal in their own right and not imposed by the medium of their circulation, for example, the print element of print-capitalism. The sociological changes that created new opportunities for the collective imagination (i.e. that enabled but did not determine these ideational shifts) were also broader in character. An intensification of cross-boundary movements of goods, money, people and ideas – that is, vectors of combined development – together formed a new 'toolkit' for the political imagination, extending the terrain of possibility.

Logics of uneven and combined 'catch-up': Elizabethan England in the late 16th century

It has often been argued that the 16th century was a period of expansion in the circulation of goods and capital, – as the deepening of regional economic ties in Europe conjoined with the turn to imperialism in the Americas and greater trade relations with Asia. Ronald Rogowski describes this trade as 'enormous' by pre-industrial standards, noting how it allowed for the creation of regional specialisations with a division of labour integrated through international markets.[60] By 1600, some 6m Europeans (excluding Russia and Turkey) lived in cities of 10,000 or more inhabitants – a rise from 3.5m in 1500.[61] London's expansion was particularly dramatic, rising from around 50,000 in 1500 to 200,000 a century later and 375,000 by 1650.[62] With this urban growth came commercialisation as the population active in markets increased. Urban life depended on networks linking town and country, driving rising demand for goods such as food, building material and fuel, as well as the specie that underpinned this activity.[63] These emergent, capitalistic vectors of combined development required flows of people – and, as they moved, this facilitated the spread of ideas and knowledge.

The Elizabethan realm was peripheral to this system but benefited from its interlinkages to advance steadily relatively to other powers. Having lost its last foothold on the continent, Calais, in 1558,[64] the English realm engaged in a 'catch-up' strategy,[65] taking advantage of the vectors of combined development[66] that knitted this 'new world' system together. They dispatched courtiers overseas to seek out techniques that could be harnessed to the protection and expansion of the realm. This elite cadre brought back knowledge of dike construction from the Netherlands and may have partly modelled their plans for the colonisation of Ireland on lessons drawn from Spain.[67]

The English engagement with the Ottoman Empire[68] reveals the way in which ideas diffused across the vectors of trade and commerce. Following the excommunication of Elizabeth I in 1570, the polity's merchants were freed from the Catholic prohibition on trade with Muslims and sought to negotiate formal ties in 1578.[69] England's traders developed the skills of organisational competency and pragmatic cultural adaptation – expertise

which were crucial for commerce, due to their military weakness.[70] The Ottoman Empire, for its part, had backed the Calvinists and Lutherans as part of its efforts to maintain its position in relation to the Habsburgs[71] and provided sanctuary to Christian refugees fleeing the Counter-Reformation.[72] Notably, as a result of these movements of ideas and people, a partial doctrinal rapprochement would occur: in correspondence with Elizabeth I, Sultan Murad III emphasised the common rejection of idol worship found in Islam and Protestantism.[73]

This exchange of ideas, money and goods illustrates the dynastic and religious organising assumptions of international relations in this period. Statecraft was framed by, and organised through, religious cleavages. It also points towards an account of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation as a series of international political conflicts. This terminology recognises how calculations of state interest and bargaining existed in a reciprocal bond with a broader societal ferment, as new actors emerged through these social and communicative processes to challenge the traditional order. Geopolitical unevenness, including the pressures of inter-imperial competition, overlaid these deepened vectors of combined development (ideas, people, money and goods). The English realm capitalised on these ties in its 'catch-up' attempt, turning its position as a dissident Reformation power to its advantage as it opened up potential ties with the Ottoman empire. The conception of association and community that formed in the Elizabethan and Stuart realms should therefore been seen as a *political project* in its own right. But – as we shall now see – it did not constitute a modernistic nationalism.

The imaginary of dynastic subjecthood in the political changes of the late Tudor and Stuart eras

Benjamin de Carvalho has analysed statutes of the English Parliament in the Tudor era (1485–1601) to uncover a discursive shift that occurs around the time of the Henrician Reformation in the 1530s and sees the realm displace the monarch as the object of subject's loyalty.[74] Recognising subjecthood introduces a distinction between three different transitions in historical community, each with distinct notions of sovereignty: (a) the personalised conception of feudal kingship in fragmented systems of 'parcelized sovereignty',[75] or what Jürgen Habermas called 'representative publicness'[76]; (b) the transition to subjecthood, in which loyalty to the realm displaced fidelity to the monarch – though this was an uneven and contested process, finding its antithesis in the concomitant rise of a centralising monarchical absolutism; and (c) modern nationalism in which loyalty to the nation assumes a primacy over throne and realm. In phases (a) and (b) nations 'existed' along the lines we earlier defined – that is, as 'pre-political' communities of ethnicity – whereas in (c) they become ideologies of state-building.

This framework allows for a non-teleological conception of this transition in imagined communities, whereby the early modern period is understood in its complexity, rather than simply as a staging post in the rise of the nation-state.[77] Indeed, each 'stage' (a, b, c in the outline above) is a simplifying conceptual description, for the transition between them was non-linear and evolutionary. Late Mediaeval England used a variety of terms to refer to the common people of the town as 'the political whole, not the

lower-class mass', including, for example, 'communitas'.[78] And these subjects could, and did, make claims on authority which were rooted in a conception of the peoples' interests – a dynamic present in the 1381 peasants' revolt, whose rebels believed the young King Richard II to be in sympathy with their demands.[79] The Henrician Reformation built on these earlier cultural and socio-political foundations.

The concept of subjecthood further recognises that, despite their tendency to a degree of institutional centralisation (owing to the need to raise armed forces to prosecute wars[80]), European realms in this era formed hierarchies that were spatially polycentric and subject to considerable heterogeneity. In this respect, the stress on the subject-relations binding the people to the realm is consistent with the concept of *composite monarchy* used to refer to how early modern European states claimed sovereignty over territories comprising diverse peoples and legal forms.[81] Similarly, a number of historians, drawing on the discourse of the period, argue that the English-realm-cum-British-empire was a *commonwealth*.[82] Imperial subjecthood as it developed in the Reformation was a political form that reflected the breakdown in traditional theological hierarchies. Because subjects may refuse loyalty to those not aligned with their faith, the legitimacy of the monarch assumed a conditional character. Subject-realm negotiations in these circumstances were certainly still dangerous for dissident reformers[83] – and those thought to be backed by a foreign power could expect especially steep repression. However, unlike the presumption of loyalty to the state on the basis of identity seen in modern nationalism, the paramount character of the religious cleavage in the wider cultural context rendered the realm's legitimacy fragile.

Seventeenth century English Puritans like William Bradshaw, for example, encapsulated how loyalty assumed this conditional character with the transition to subjecthood. His nonconformist pamphlets, *A Protestation, Myld and Just Defence* and *English Puritanism*, illustrate how this group saw their commitment to anti-Papacy as inseparable to opposing monarchical absolutism. James I, he argued, lacked the 'grace and power' to make binding ecclesiastical laws that subordinated the nonconformist congregations to the Church. For 'the lawes, statuts, and customes of this kingdome' were *primary* to the monarch's prerogative power, that is, the *realm*, not king, was truly *sovereign*.[84] This gave an explicitly political character to the theological schism. In turn, given that puritans held their establishment critics to be part of a conspiracy of the Antichrist against the true teaching of the Lord, theology invested this politics with extremely high stakes.[85] As the challenge to theological and political orthodoxy was a transversal and polycentric movement, the destabilisation of dynastic states in the Reformation was not a 'domestic' process, but one shaped by the new uneven and combined vectors of Europe. One dimension of this lay in the influence of different political models as ideas spread across the continent. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth offered English reformers a real-world example of a quasi-republican form of realm – though it was based, after 1572, on the aristocratic election of the sovereign, with more representative concepts rejected.[86] Treatise from the polity – albeit sometimes radically manipulated in translation for political ends[87] – would find their way through Europe's enveloping web of cultural ties into the English realm.[88] If this referred to the combined development of the era, the geopolitical contests of the period illustrated its uneven, fractured, indeed,

violent nature. This further incentivised the need to win legitimacy from subjects, usually by way of religious arguments, to ensure their loyalty and raise the resources that were required to prosecute war.[89]

Subjecthood as it came to be understood in the Tudor and Stuart era implied both loyalty to the realm and an accordant notion of rights and duties as subjects. It existed in a complex relationship to absolutism, which supported a personalised monarchical sovereignty and emphasised the obligations of subjects over their rights. Between these poles lay a range of options that could be negotiated between elites, commoners and monarchs – one of which was 'mixed monarchy' (see below). These 'talks' were fraught, subject to mutual suspicion and repeatedly broke down into violence as the depression of the 17th century (and concomitant fiscal crises)[90] brought stress onto the political relations binding subjects and realms, and drove intern-dynastic warfare. In this transboundary political conflict, subject-throne loyalty was not guaranteed. English subjects, for example, had to seek permission for foreign travel, and the activity of Catholics overseas was monitored through networks of spies and ambassadors.[91] The primacy of religion often rendered the distinction between 'internal' civil wars and 'external' defence ambiguous. In France, for example, the besieged Huguenot revolt was unsuccessfully supported by the Stuart dynasty in 1628.

Figures such as Charles I or Ferdinand II saw cohesion around common religious beliefs and ritual upheld by established institutions as a mechanism for maintaining cohesion in their otherwise fragmented societies.[92] For a compliant population aided the defence of the realm in the wars of the 17th century – and vice versa, that is, conflicts served to justify the policing of confessional practices. Many Puritans also drew similar conclusions, for example during the discussions over the Stuart Restoration[93] and in the practices of the settlements in New England,[94] underlining how one must be careful not to equate this amorphous group with 'liberty'. In this context, 'secularisation' does not, therefore, refer exclusively to religious toleration, but to how the theologically motivated sought substantive political change – rather than relying on biblical prophecy.[95] Neither was the outcome of these disputes destined to support the claim of subjects. It was dependent on struggle: 'human beings, thinking and acting (however haphazardly) in concert'[96] shaped the course of events and restructured the political imagination. Indeed, Louis XIV succeeded in creating an absolutist state, defeating aristocratic opponents of centralisation in the Revolt of the Fronde (1648–1652) before forcing the conversion of the Huguenots to Catholicism.[97] Agents' struggles took place in this uneven and combined system and their different outcomes served to deepen this character as diverse ideas and trajectories co-existed.

The conflictual imagined communities forming in this period can be summarised as follows. These conflicts over the political relations binding subject, monarch and realm drew on religion as their principal mode of legitimation. They took place on, and across, Europe's uneven and combined vectors, giving these disputes the character of an international political conflict. Ethnonational identities were a subordinated part of these diverse realms yet had a strong cultural presence – and, in the case of the Stuart dynasty, mapped on to the territories claimed by the Scottish, English and Irish Crowns. The composite character of the realm was illustrated by the fact that the Scottish and Irish Privy Councils continued to meet in Edinburgh and Dublin – and, despite their reputation for

centralisation, neither James I nor Charles I attempted to unify them.[98] Bonds of cultural ethnicity also shaped how individuals travelled across Europe. Scottish travellers relied upon their own diasporic networks for support, not those of the English, despite their shared status as Stuart subjects.[99] Furthermore, within these imagined communities of cultural heritage there were also often internal differences; for example, among the Gaelic-speaking Highlands that are said to have identified more with their Irish brethren than Scottish lowlanders[100]; or, in the formally 'English' realm, the distinctive identities of the Welsh and Cornish.[101]

These particularist sensibilities would play a role in the crisis of subjecthood that occurred in the War of the Three Kingdoms (1639–1651)[102]: a conflict that was 'primarily. . . about religion, but in some parts of the country. . . [concerned] race as well'.[103] There are two important consequences of this history for our argument. First, this contextualises why a turn to *British nationalism* became attractive to 18th century elites and their intellectual outriders, as it offered a means to cohere the internally fragmented polity, binding a diverse people to the interests of the state. Second, it illustrates how the *ties of subjecthood* that connected the Atlantic colonies to the Stuart realm, at one level, simply represented a novel extension of its domestic form.

Subjecthood in the Atlantic colonies

Subjecthood as a phenomenon contained a basic contradiction and ambiguity. Given the realm was an inherited entity, historically inseparable from the existence of royal authority, how could subjects profess loyalty and duty to the *political community* without simultaneously recognising the *absolute jurisdiction* of the monarch? While this logic provided the opening for the centralising instincts of sovereigns, it did not go unanswered by reformers. They developed the argument that the monarch had *two bodies.* Their mortal, individual body, on the one hand, and, in the words of Bradshaw, their 'body Politicke, which is the Commonwealth',[104] on the other. The metaphorical and spiritual nature of this claim had two important 'Earthly' implications. First, this reimagination of the community served to carve out a safer space for moderate dissent by recognising royal sovereignty. But monarchical rulership now involved the *presumption* that they would – and must – govern in symmetry with the interests of their subjects. Second, the *body politic* and *commonwealth* did not have specific territorial or ethnic features, rendering it open to adaptation in new imperial frontiers.

Atlantic colonisation was therefore able to grow organically out of these assumptions. Reflecting the composite character of the realm, the language that framed colonising efforts sought to establish 'new kingdoms and commonwealths'.[105] The metaphor of the *sovereign body* of James I was evidently suitable to the un-bordered, geographically open character of this new imperial expansion. This formula gave the colonists a wide interpretive latitude to prosecute their interests in the new settlements and would therefore establish a tension-ridden coalescence with the Stuart dynasty. James I continued to endorse the Virginia Company's enterprise due to the structural logics of the international political conflict unfolding in the war-ravaged 17th century: sending 'hyper-Protestants' to the Americas suited his domestic interests, while the desirability of an empire to counter-balance the Catholic Spanish imperium was clear – arguments put to the King

by his secretary of state, Sir Robert Naughton, to persuade him to persist with Atlantic colonisation despite its initial failure.[106]

These dual logics of domestic and geopolitical power – together reflecting the international political conflict of post-Reformation Europe – imparted a specific politics to Jacobean settlement, taking puritanism as its religion and a notion of property, the 'rights of subjects', drawn from civic humanism. The Virginia Company undertook a propaganda effort along these lines to win recruits. Their consistent use of the term 'commonwealth' reflected this orientation. As Andrew Fitzmaurice puts it, 'their intention was not merely to establish a trading post or a military post, nor merely to conquer foreign lands, nor to expand the existing commonwealth of Britain. The aim was to establish a new civil society'.[107] These ideological justifications, in turn, sat easily with winning commercial support. Colonisers required the sovereign's consent, but they raised capital independently and the realm simply gave them sweeping freedoms to exploit these 'new' lands. *The First Charter of Virginia* (1606) granted sovereign permission to extract resources from a vast region with the only exception those areas already 'possessed by any Christian Prince or People'.[108] Religion therefore shaped the terms of recognition and exclusion of sovereign claims, preparing the way for the dispossession of First Nation peoples.[109] In addition, the role of private financing and their degree of freedom from the sovereign rendered this a capitalistic form of colonial expansion, dependent on the initiative of the aspiring commercial classes. In this 'new world' capital was, thus, the bearer of a now imperialised royal subjecthood.

While nationality was not *the project* – that is, the form of political association settlement aimed to achieve – it could still appear in the Shakespearian pre-18th century form. Robert Johnson, a leading figure in the Virginia Company, published a promotional treatise in 1612, which declared empire to be a cause worth fighting and dying for: 'let us fight like English men, all England prayeth for us: if here we dye, let this be our comfort, ur cause is good, and. . . [our] countrimen that wil revenge our deaths'.[110] In the colonies' evolution, this concept of *Englishness* was shaped by the relations of subjecthood, referring interchangeably to a people of common origin in the country of England and a political relationship to the Crown. Imperial subjecthood as a political identity, affiliation and accordant notions of rights and duty, also entailed two critical points of exclusion[111]: on the one hand, while it did not have a formalised ethnic demarcation, it still involved a racialised separation from, and active subordination of, Black slaves and First Nation peoples[112]; on the other, the realm was embedded in a hemispheric community and system[113] still dominated by the Spanish Empire, with the colonisation of settlers seeking an alternative imperium, revising the balance of power in their realm's favour.

By the close of the 17th century the success of this empire-building had created a series of interlocking ties between the colonies and metropole. The growth of these trans-Oceanic networks followed the earlier pattern seen in Europe, facilitating the movement of money, goods, people and ideas. As these cultural ties and networks became institutionalised, 'correspondents on both sides of the Atlantic could write their letters with a growing confidence that they would reach their destination with a reasonable degree of predictability'.[114] A colonial literature emerged gradually following the establishment of the first printing press in 1639 but remained for the next 80 years dominated by London

imports.[115] The prominent puritan intellectuals and prolific writers, Increase Mather and his son Cotton, often published their books in London first, indicating its centrality to the British Atlantic's network of ideas.[116] Similarly, after censorship legislation lapsed in England in 1695 newspapers began to emerge, but this would only be paralleled in the colonies in the 1720s and 1730s.[117]

The crisis of subjecthood in the British Atlantic

Bringing the argument to its conclusion, this section outlines the uneven way British nationalism emerged in the 18th century. I argue that the political and constitutional system which underpinned the new imaginary of British nationalism – the supremacy of Parliament – ultimately led to the American war as the patriots sought to protect their *subjecthood* to the Crown.[118] In doing so, they ironically reappraised the royalist position in the Civil War, identifying with its rejection of unchecked parliamentary power.[119] Thus, these trajectories – subjecthood in the colonies and British nationalism at 'home' – gave a non-linear, uneven and combined character to the Atlantic empire and shows how nationalism arose in conflict with other imaginaries.

The violent breakdowns of 1639 to 1651, and the Commonwealth (1649–1660) and Stuart Restoration (1660–1688) eras, can be read as a long crisis of subjecthood. Although it involved a complex combination of religious and ethnic cleavages, at its core this was a constitutional dispute that concerned the balance of power in the 'mixed monarchy' established in the polity following the Henrician Reformation.[120] For underpinning the aforementioned discourse of *two bodies* was the constitutional settlement established with the 1530 reforms. The King-in-Parliament created a 'mixed sovereign'[121] in which the passage of legislation required the approval of both parliament and monarch, and the executive functions of government were also, to a degree, shared.[122] For example, the right to organise a lawful militia for the realm's defence, that is, an 'executive' function, lay in the system of Lords Lieutenants and provided the basis for Parliament's military organisation in the first stage of the civil wars.[123] Royalists and moderate/constitutional royalists would, in turn, disagree over whether the monarch had a fundamental legal and God-given right to raise an army.[124]

Charles I wished to maintain this shared sovereignty, including his veto power on parliamentary legislation. In his *Wellington Declaration of 1642*, he committed 'to maintain The just Priviledges and Freedom of Parliament, and to govern by The known Laws of the Land to my utmost power, and particularly to observe inviolably The Laws consented to by *me this Parliament*',[125] that is, explicitly invoked the classical Henrician position. What we described earlier as the basic contradiction of subjecthood was evident in these civil war era constitutional disputes. For the concept of power sharing between the monarch and the realm's broader elite, represented in parliament, broke down the moment it was confronted with an issue on which the two sides profoundly disagreed, owing to the lack of clarity over where *ultimate authority* resided. This inescapably reposed the question of loyalty for the realm's people: did their attachments lie with the monarch or Parliament? In the context of the international political conflicts of post-Reformation Europe for most Stuart subjects religion determined their answer.

The resolution of the crisis of subjecthood occurred through the establishment of a Protestant supremacy, confessional freedoms for most non-Anglicans and the relegation of the monarch to an advisory and constitutional role, establishing the basis for parliamentary sovereignty. The Glorious Revolution of 1688, which rippled through to the colonies a year later,[126] the *1689 Toleration Act* and the *1701 Act of Settlement* were the key marker points in this shift. By positing a conception of sovereign representative government this legislation, in tandem with the *1706 and 1707 Act(s) of Union*, began a process of institutionalisation in which the idea of Britain became an attractive proposition for elites that displaced the imaginary of realm with that of nation. The combination of the internal pluralism of the polity – with its formally multinational and multi-ethnic composition – and the role of imperialism overseas in giving meaning and identity to this otherwise fragmented community at 'home', gave Britishness a peculiar character vis-à-vis the global rise of nationalisms that would follow its creation.[127] Nonetheless, the somewhat 'forced', state-centric construct of 'Great Britain' would also be found in other nations with similarly unclear ethnic definitions. External threats and war-making – that is, the concrete condition of geopolitical combined development – consolidated domestic state-building, as 'a series of massive wars. . . allowed. . . [Britain's] diverse inhabitants to focus on what they had in common'.[128]

Nationality implied the imagination and institutionalisation of a coherent set of relations between people, state and territory.[129] This process of homogenisation arose in dialogue and conflict with other imaginings. These were alternative outlooks that posited different political trajectories, generating cultural and ideological differentiation in the British Empire. In the colonies, Westminster's pursuit of national parliamentary sovereignty had implications for their status as equal subjects. An early indicator of the potential for conflict lay in the positions taken by the Long Parliament during the Civil War, which had placed all Crown territories under 'the Supreme Authority of this Nation, The Representatives of the People in Parliament', and passed the *1651 Navigation Act*, the first piece of statute that specifically legislated for the colonies.[130] However, the perceived external threats that drove nationality formation 'at home' also served to consolidate the settlers' own conception of their 'Englishness'. Local conflicts with the French and the recognition that they required the protection of the Royal Navy, provided a security basis for their ideational attachment to the 'mother country'.[131] Nonetheless, the material growth of the size of the colonies, which numbered 2 million by the Seven Years War (1756–1763),[132] also meant that they constituted large societies in their own right. Accordingly, the sentiment emerged that they had distinct interests, which were not always aligned with the London elite, on whom their security depended – with each colony sending agents to Britain to lobby Parliament, seeking to protect and advance their economic and political interests.[133]

For most of the century following 1688 mutual interest allowed distinct ideational conceptions to co-habit, though their differences were perhaps also not necessarily obvious. Two intellectuals writing in this period, the aforementioned Cotton Mather and the London-based Daniel Defoe, illustrate how ideas of subjecthood and nationality could both be found in this 'Anglo-American' public sphere. Defoe's *A Trueborn Englishman* was written as a response to xenophobic critics of 1688. Its famous opening lines, 'Thus from a mixture of all kinds began, That het'rogeneous thing, an Englishman'[134] referred to the multiple lineages that had shaped the polity and its people overtime. Rather than

seeing nations as 'facts' of ethnicity, Defoe saw an identity that absorbed cultures into one state-building mission, explicitly recognising the dominance of England ('Wales strove to separate, but strove in vain'[135]). Discussing the same subject, Mather argued 'that we are a part of the English Nation'[136] but his attachment to the realm and its king were defined by Protestantism and subjecthood:

> [T]here is no Nation, that can boast of such a KING, as ours! A KING Raised by Heaven, to save Three Kingdoms from the Chains of Popery and Slavery that were Treacherously prepared for them.[137]

Thus, the King's legitimacy was *conditional* on his position as the defender of the faith against the 'popist anti-Christ' – a clear continuity with early Puritan settlement. By contrast, Defoe's secular nationalism found its justification in a competitive view of political economy, a subject he devoted multiple issues of *The Review* to in 1706.[138] Defoe advanced classically liberal arguments against protectionist objections to a British single market; in one issue, for example, he dismissed concerns over cheaper imports of English salt, emphasising the benefits to the Scottish consumer of lower prices.[139] However, this was not extended to Britain's competitors, as Defoe merely emphasised the *British* nature of the collective interest. 'We are now one Nation, and the profits of one part are the profits of the whole', as he put it.[140] He also opposed the Jacobites on the entirely secular grounds of national interest – as they threatened strife at home, rather than supporting the prosecution of the war with France overseas.[141] To further complicate this story, however, other royalists in the colonies used secular arguments to make the case for monarchy. Virginia backed the Stuarts in the civil war and objected to the political and economic policies imposed by the Protectorate – a position approvingly recounted by Robert Beverley in his 1722 history of the colony.[142]

The Hanoverian dynasty derived their legitimacy from the claim that they ruled as the choice of *Britons*[143] – and across the century underwent a naturalisation into a British identity. This was a conscious effort indicative of the *project character* of modern nationalism. It was expressed in the invention of patriotic songs such as *God Save The King*, which was actively promoted from the 1740s[144] – the same decade which saw the presentation of *Rule, Britannia!* to the Court.[145] If this nation-building was initiated around the time of the Acts of Union, it was to a large degree concluded during the Seven Years War – a conflict that was a turning point for identity in the British Atlantic. Unlike his father or grandfather, George III, who assumed the throne in 1760 amid the war, had been brought up as British.[146] An analogous process also occurred with the aristocracy that were pressured to commit fully to the patriotic project of state-building, with Edmund Burke recasting them as what he called the 'natural aristocracy', the preeminent formers of the values and ideas of society.[147] In other words, they were framed as the rightful leaders of the *Great Britons*, a coherent people.

Nationalism as a project was therefore inseparable from the interests and designs of the unitary and increasingly centralised state represented in Parliament. This had clear implications for the American colonies. Under the George III reforms a series of pieces of legislation (notably the *1764 Currency Act*, the *1765 Stamp Act*, the *1764 American Duties (Sugar) Act*) empowered the state to take tighter control over economic life in the

colonies and funded a permanent military presence through taxes and tariffs. For the colonists, this threatened their fundamental rights as Crown subjects.

So, while it is often argued that 'when they rebelled against England, the Patriots claimed to be doing so in the name of the "rights of Englishmen"',[148] it is important to recognise the meaning attached to this conception was still defined by subjecthood. The Atlantic settlers saw their relation to the Crown as *subject ties* – and, given that a state's royal governor negotiated with its legislatures in a manner that mirrored the pre-Civil War/1689 constitutional structure of a 'mixed monarchy' this was perfectly logical. All Englishmen, that is, subjects of the British Atlantic, were equal before and under the Crown. In contrast, the British elite saw the framework of their relations as hierarchical: the colonies must accept the supremacy of the British state in exchange for the protection of the Royal Navy and should also contribute financially to their security.

A number of famous names from the American revolution are strongly associated with the royalist argument for the patriotic cause, including John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, James Wilson and Alexander Hamilton.[149] James Wilson, for example, rejected the sovereignty of the British Parliament but acknowledged the political authority of the King who 'is entrusted the direction and management of the great machine of government', further arguing that 'connection and harmony between Great-Britain and us. . . will be better preserved by the operation of the legal prerogatives of the Crown'.[150] In advocating a form of mixed monarchy, the royalist patriots even accepted the Jacobite mantle and drew an unfavourable contrast between liberty in the England of Charles I and that of Cromwell.[151] While seemingly quixotic in light of the mythology of 1775, this was nonetheless consistent with the concept of commonwealth used in early settlement. They argued that though the acts of union had established the jurisdiction of Westminster over Scotland, no equivalent legislation determined its power over the colonies.[152] Hence, they delicately constructed a dominion theory, arguing correctly that the Jacobean charters were negotiated between Crown, company proprietors and settlers – and, as a result, the colonies were neither the legal property of the monarch nor Westminster but based on these subject ties.[153]

The formation of an American nationalism would only occur during the war, which naturally rendered subjecthood to the Crown materially and logically impossible.

Conclusion

Like the struggles of the Reformation and after, the dispute that erupted between the subject claims of colonists and British national imperialism should be read as an international political conflict in which actors contested the terms of their uneven and combined development. These dynamics were non-linear in their nature, as different trajectories co-existed and interacted within a combined geopolitical and economic space. In the American Revolutionary War this led to a paradoxical scenario in which two distinct 'stages' of political development engaged in a violent confrontation: an 'archaic' vision of Crown subjecthood and mixed monarchy contested the new project of British nationalism. By conceptually excluding 'the international' Anderson's theory closed off investigation into such examples of non-linearity. Foregrounding the 'battle of ideas', and identifying the non-nationalist assumptions of early modern international relations,

nonetheless underlines the appeal of nationalism. For despite its non-linear origins and subsequent spread, it became a dominant mode of geo/political thought.

For IR, the character of the conflicts through which agents wrestled with the circumstances of their uneven and combined development simultaneously blurs the accepted distinctions between 'internal' and 'external' relations, and challenges state-centric thinking, highlighting the cultural contestation of legitimacy and sovereignty 'from below' by individuals and groups pursuing change. This demonstrates the importance of ideology – the international political conflict taking place on and through these combined socio-cultural vectors – to the making of historical worlds.

Funding

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Notes

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