

Civilisation Britannique L1S1

Complément de cours

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Topic 1 : Nation and State

Introduction

The British Civilisation class begins with an apparently simple question: which country are we going to be studying? As we begin to answer this, however, we see that such a question is not as self-evident as it may seem.

We can begin by analysing the adjective “British”. Again, which country does it refer to? It does not refer to a country called “England”, although this mistake is frequent and is interesting in that it tells us something about the nature of Britain – points that will be studied later. “British” is also used to designate the “British Isles”, but this is a geographic concept – a group of islands containing notably Ireland, which, we shall see, is divided into two parts one of which is a totally separate country from the one we shall be mainly studying. “British” is used to refer to a country whose name sometimes appears as “Britain”, “Great Britain” or “the UK”. There are differences between these terms however. And when we think of this country we will often break it down into component parts, i.e. England, but also Scotland or Wales as well as the tip of Ireland named Northern Ireland (the larger, southern part is named the Republic of Ireland and is a separate European country with a distinct constitution, currency etc). What is the relationship between all of these? What does these many names tell us about the nature of the country? Can we even still use the term “country” to discuss them all?

Firstly we should not make the mistake of using “England” as a synonym for the UK, for it is only one of the parts of the UK. This usage, despite being very common, is incorrect and misleading, particularly in light of recent political developments. “British” evidently comes from the noun “Britain”, but this term, though commonly used is a little imprecise and

does not clearly indicate the exact nature of the country which is being discussed. For our purposes here it is too vague and should be kept for conversational use only.

The official title of the country we shall be studying is **The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**. This country is composed of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and is commonly abbreviated to “the UK”. We shall avoid using the term “Great Britain”, again despite being very commonly used, because, as we can note, it specifically does not refer to Northern Ireland.

If we now say that we have a *country*, the UK, composed of other *countries* (Scotland, England etc) we realise that we have another problem of terminology. We can try to analyse the problem by thinking about questions such as the following: are all these “countries” equal in status or do some have a superior rank or position? How and why are they linked?

One of the most important distinctions is to decide whether we are dealing with a geographical concept (questions of land mass, terrain, populations etc.), a political concept or a human concept. What will particularly simplify things is to come up with terms to replace “country” based on these last two concepts.

We shall use the term “**state**” to define the political concept and “**nation**” to define the human. The Oxford Dictionary gives this definition of a state as “an organised political community under one government”. In other words, we can say that a state is an autonomous political entity which is centred on a government. A fully-formed state must have certain attributes : a recognised territory defined by borders, political representatives and institutions which are led by a government who makes decisions for the country, and international recognition in terms of embassies, passports and a seat in the United Nations. (NB Confusingly, in a **federal** political system such as the USA, the component parts of the country such as California, Texas etc. are also called states. This is a separate use and should not be confused with the meaning given here. As the UK is not a federal regime this use of the

word “state” can be ignored here.) In this sense, the UK is a state, just like France, Germany or the USA (although not the EU, or not yet in any case as it lacks a European government, its own seat in the UN etc). For most developed countries there is little debate about what is and what is not a state, although such arguments (border disputes, the desire for self-government of one particular region) have led to diplomatic tension or all-out war in places such as the Middle East and Taiwan. By the definition given above, while the UK is a state, England and Scotland etc. are not, being without, for example, separate passports or international representation. In addition, while Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have some distinct political institutions, these remain dependent on the UK Parliament. England, meanwhile, has no separate national parliament and is solely represented within the UK Parliament. Thus the UK is a state made up of entities which are not states : they have no independent political existence.

“**Nation**”, as a human construct, is a much more subjective concept which is harder to analyse. For a nation to exist the people living in a country must believe themselves to share something in common; they must possess a sense of belonging. Thus, a nation is not a place, or a set of institutions, but an idea. To belong to a nation means to have some feeling of common destiny with one’s compatriots, to share something which can take precedence over individual differences, to feel a common bond with the anonymous individuals in towns and cities that they have never visited. It is for this reason that a nation has been described as an “imagined community” (Benedict Anderson), not because it does not exist, but because it relies on an imagined relationship with others. What is the basis of this relationship? What does a nation need to exist? Some important elements can include a common language, a common religion, a common history, or a common culture etc., but already in the 19th century, Ernest Renan, in his conference entitled “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation ?” made it clear that not all nations share *all* of these elements: Switzerland, for example, has a strong national identity

but no common language. What remains important is, in Renan's terms: "the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories" and "the desire to live together". There must be *some* shared elements (linguistic, religious, cultural or historical etc.) which allow people to feel part of a single national group, but these factors may change from one individual to another and are hard to quantify.

In the sense that the majority of French people or Americans see themselves as being part of a distinct people with their own particular heritage, customs, lifestyle, language etc. we can talk of these groups as nations. And because, as countries, they represent the superposition of a single political entity (state) with a human construct (nation), they can be referred to as **nation-states**. This term has commonly become used for many developed countries.

For the UK though, this co-existence of a single political structure and a single people is less evident meaning that the UK is not a simple, unproblematic nation-state. In terms of political institutions, the UK is based around a centralised UK parliament (often simply called **Westminster**, due to it being located in the City of Westminster in London) and government, but studies show that in addition to a sense of a British national identity, there remains the very strong idea of separate national identities at the level of England, Scotland, Wales and (more problematically) Ireland. Indeed it is at this sub-state level that the feeling of national identity is strongest. Thus we say that the UK is not a simple nation-state, but state composed of a number of different nations, referred to as the four "**Home Nations**". The UK is thus a composite or union state, also described as a **supranational state** (the state is superior in importance to the nations) or a **multinational state** (a state composed of many nations). This question of complex, dual-layered national identity will be developed later.

National Symbols

The UK flag, commonly known as the **Union Jack**, is meant to symbolise this political union, in that it depicts several national symbols superimposed upon each other in the form of the cross of each patron saint : the St George's Cross (England), the St Andrew's Cross (Scotland), the St Patrick's Cross (Ireland). However, the flag, created in 1801, is something of an anomaly in that it does not accurately represent today's UK. It does not display any distinct symbol for Wales (patron saint : Saint David) since Wales was annexed by England in the Middle Ages. The UK flag also continues to represent Ireland, although only part of this island (Northern Ireland) is today British. The southern part of Ireland began to break away from the UK in the early 1920s and has been a separate republic since 1949. The formation of the UK will be developed more fully later.

Today, other UK institutions (e.g. the UK Parliament, the UK Supreme Court) use national symbols in the form of four flowers to more accurately represent the coming together of the four nations : a rose for England, a thistle for Scotland, a daffodil or leek for Wales, flax (*le lin*) for Northern Ireland. Elsewhere the UK is symbolised through the figure of Britannia, a female personification of a warlike naval power holding a trident with a Union Jack shield, or through the figure of John Bull, a robust country gentleman who suggests self-confidence and wealth, often accompanied by a bulldog. Alternatively, the image of the current queen or various royal crests are used to represent the country, reminding us that the UK is a monarchy. It should be remembered that as the head of state of the United Kingdom, Elizabeth II is not (as is commonly stated) the Queen of England, but the Queen of all of the UK : she is no less the Queen of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Indeed the monarchy is an important figure in displaying national unity between all the parts of the UK and the UK national anthem, "God Save the Queen", represents an ode not to the land or people but to its monarch.

To begin to understand the coming together of the UK we will study some of the early history of Britain.

Anglo-Saxons and the “Celtic fringe”

Firstly let us note that Britain was widely settled from the Paleolithic period onwards. Testimony to prehistoric settlement can be found all over Britain in the form of the megalithic stone circles later Neolithic peoples erected such as Stonehenge (2500BC) in the South of England, but also as far north as the Orkney Islands off the north coast of Scotland. Around 800BC new tribes appeared from Europe, Iron Age peoples known as **the Celts** who again settled all around the British Isles and formed various small-scale kingdoms and communities.

Whereas the Celts could be found all over the British Isles, the next wave of settlers, the **Romans** limited their main settlement to what is now England and Wales. (Julius Caesar first invaded in 55BC, but the main colonisation began in 43AD. One of the UK’s most well-known landmarks remains the defensive wall (Hadrian’s Wall 122AD) built by the Romans to defend their main northern border, which almost exactly matches the modern-day border with Scotland (a more northerly defensive wall – the Antonine Wall 148AD – was only in operation for around 50 years). Until the 5th Century, when Roman imperial power and influence sharply declined, England and Wales were shaped by Roman law, customs, language etc, while most of Scotland and Ireland, outwith Roman control, remained largely unaffected, maintaining their older Celtic traditions. This pattern of uneven development is what allows us to understand the premises of what become historically distinct nations.

The next wave of invasion, immigration and settlement also concerned primarily the south of the British Isles as various Germanic tribes originating from what is modern-day Denmark and Northern Germany arrived by sea. From the 5th to the 7th Century, the Angles,

Saxons and Jutes took control, with modern-day England being formed by the 10th Century from the various, separate kingdoms which they established. We can note that “England” as well as “English” take their names from the Angles’ dominance and Germanic language. Vikings appeared from Scandinavia and Denmark from the 8th Century and took control of large coastal and inland areas up and down Britain, and in Ireland too. The Vikings too settled in Britain and added elements of their culture to the existing language, beliefs and customs. For example, in English, the days of the week “Wednesday”, “Thursday” and “Friday” refer to the Norse gods “Odin” (or “Woden”), “Thor” and “Friia”.

The final period of important change due to invasion and settlement was that of the Norman Conquest in the 11th Century. William, Duke of Normandy, had a claim to the English crown and defeated the forces of the English King Harold, in the Battle of Hasting (1066). Harold was killed during the battle and William went on to become the first in a line of Norman kings, bringing to England military feudalism, a new aristocracy and introducing Latin and Norman-French as the languages of administration. The Normans went on to defeat the Scots, Irish and Welsh too, but never took full control of all these lands, allowing them, particularly in certain areas, to continue their separate development to some degree.

1066 is an important marker in British history in that it corresponds to the last foreign invasion of British soil. After an initial eclectic influx of Celts, Romans, Angles, Saxons, Vikings and Normans, and after the cultural changes brought by these peoples, the British population remained relatively stable for the next 1000 years, protected by their insular position from attack and large-scale changes in population. What we notice, however, is that the changes we have described in population, society, culture etc. were not uniform across the British Isles. They were the most frequent and the most direct in England, closest to the continent, with the remoter areas – Scotland, Wales, Ireland – being affected to a lesser degree by the Romans, Anglo-Saxons and Normans and their culture. Over time, these

remoter countries evolved into separate kingdoms, distinct from England, with different cultures, institutions and traditions. England was increasingly the centre of power in the British Isles and had the capability to militarily dominate its neighbours on the periphery. Although the English language came to be spoken in some parts of Scotland, Wales and Ireland these were all less fully Anglicised and still had populations who retained a strong Celtic heritage based around a Celtic language (Welsh is related to Breton, Irish Gaelic to Scottish Gaelic). It is for this reason that although English has today become the dominant language in Scotland, Wales and Ireland, these parts of the British Isles are still known as the countries of the “Celtic Fringe”. (In Wales 20% of the population still speaks Welsh and road signs appear in both languages. In Scotland, under 60,000 people speak Gaelic – a tiny fraction of the population.

Geography and climate have also contributed to these national differences. England, a low-lying country (the highest peak is Scafell Pike, just 978m) was also where the best farming land was concentrated, thus supporting a growing population, particularly in the South-East. In the south the influence of the Atlantic Ocean is tempered, allowing a drier, sunnier climate, contrary to the North and West. As the most hospitable land it became home to the largest population and the biggest towns and cities. On the other hand, the most mountainous, inhospitable areas of Britain are in the North and West, in modern-day Wales, Scotland and N. England. In these areas, even if these peaks remain low by Alpine standards (Ben Nevis, the highest peak in the British Isles is 1343m) conditions are harsh, particularly in winter, since the British Isles are quite far north (Edinburgh has the same latitude as Moscow; the Shetlands are closer to Oslo than London). Thus, these areas tended to be less sparsely populated, which contributed to their relative weakness as regards their English neighbour.

Due to the importance of sea routes for conquest and trade, the British Isles became a key military and trading power from the Middle Ages onwards, but it was England in

particular which became a dominant force through its strong naval power and its establishment of colonial settlements and trading posts which became the basis for the British Empire. England remains by far the most populous country of the UK. The UK has a population of around 62 million people of whom 52 million live in England, 5 million in Scotland, 3 million in Wales and almost 2 million in N. Ireland. Thus England remains over 10 times larger than its biggest neighbour.

Conclusion : Multinational and multicultural

We have begun to understand how, from a relatively early age, different parts of the British Isles have developed into the four distinct Home Nations with different characteristics through reasons of climate, culture, language and territory. These, added to a history of different waves of settlement, provide some of the reasons why we do not have one simple British identity, but several nations within a single country, i.e. a multinational state.

It must be also remembered however that there is no serious racial basis to define the different national identities within the UK – we cannot think, say, in terms of a pure Celtic population or a pure Anglo-Saxon population. We have seen that all the nations discussed, even the most remote, have been formed by a mixture of different waves of populations and cultures over time. However, until the middle of the twentieth century the UK remained almost exclusively settled by whites. Consequently, the terms **multiethnic** or **multicultural** are only used in relation to the changes in society following the period of post-war decolonisation (NB “multiethnic” is used to determine a population composed of various ethnic groups while “multicultural” is used to describe a society where the state accepts a wide range of cultural practices among immigrant populations instead of seeking to impose a single, national culture that new populations must adhere to.)

From the 1950s onwards, Pakistanis, Indians and West Indians in particular came to Britain to settle. Today, counting only the two largest groupings of immigrant descent, there are around 2 million British “Asians” (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi) and 500,000 citizens of West Indian (Caribbean) origin. Thus today, the demographic reality of modern Britain is of a cosmopolitan country where large numbers of its citizens (10% of the total population) are non-white, particularly in busy urban areas.

The problem of a defining a modern national identity in racial terms is all the more clear in this context. Indeed, it tends only to be far-right groups who defend ethnic origin and race as important components of national identity within the UK. Politicians of all main UK parties have promoted an inclusive idea of British national identity based not on blood and ancestry, but on cultural and civic ties, where citizens of immigrant origin can fully be considered British if they respect British values. This argument is often based on the historical origins of the UK as a country of mixed identities, where the early waves of settlement, the multinational nature of the UK and the ethnic diversity of today’s UK are all linked :

“The British are not a race, but a gathering of countless different races and communities, the vast majority of which were not indigenous to these islands.” : Labour minister Robin Cook, ‘Chicken Tikka Masala speech’ delivered to the Social Market Foundation, 2001 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/apr/19/race.britishidentity>).

(It has been promoted more strongly in recent years however that those wishing to settle in the UK should speak English and have knowledge of British institutions if they are to be able to integrate.)

What we turn to now is how a composite, political entity gradually formed from the separate nations of the UK. We shall also address more fully the question of “Britishness”: that of national sentiment at a UK level.

Topic 2 : England and Political Union : the formation of the UK

Last week we discussed how the various component parts of the UK can be thought of as separate nations within a single political structure, a situation we can describe as a multinational or supranational state. Although the four home nations have retained a sense of distinctiveness and difference, the state is represented by centralised political institutions that can be found in London. Today we shall look at how this situation came about and we shall also think more in detail about the consequences of having a British identity that is generally considered weak or at best complex and problematic. Our key question today is what unites the various nations of the UK?

1. A United *Kingdom*

The UK is a united “kingdom” (a political entity ruled by a monarch) and the first key institution to become united was that of the monarchy. In the early Middle Ages, the countries we know today as the Home Nations did not yet exist, and it was only later that the various small kingdoms which controlled limited territories began to coalesce into larger unified kingdoms which started to resemble the countries we know today. This process took place in England and Scotland (from the 9th Century) although an insufficient degree of political unity in Ireland and Wales never led to the establishment of unified kingdoms there.

By the 16th Century there existed two distinct kingdoms in the British Isles, each with a separate monarch : a King of Scotland and a King of England. The English Crown had already taken supremacy over Wales : Edward I of England achieved military domination there in the 1280s and since 1301, “**Prince of Wales**” has been the title awarded to the eldest son of the monarch of England (or Britain – hence Princess Diana being known as the

“Princess of Wales” a title she obtained by being married to Prince Charles, the heir to the British throne). In Ireland, English feudal control had been expanding over the various territories there since the 12th Century and this dominance was symbolically achieved when Henry VIII was officially recognised as **King of Ireland** in **1541**. Thus Ireland and Wales were now under control of the kingdom of England.

Both Scotland and England had recognised dynasties and relatively secure rules of succession, but in 1603 the Queen of England, **Elizabeth I** died without having married and without having borne any children. Her successor was the son of her cousin (Mary Queen of Scots) who was already King James VI of Scotland. Thus in 1603 the kingdoms of Scotland and England were joined in a Union of the Crowns, with both kingdoms now under **King James I and VI** (the first of England, the sixth of Scotland). Although the term **Great Britain** can be first found around this date, this rather uneasy situation did not mean that Scotland and England had become one country as they retained separate parliaments, churches, legal systems etc. From now on, however, they would never be entirely separate again and there has been a single British royal family since this date. Today, the Royal Family continues to act as a focus of unity for the British.

2. Acts of Union

The other key British political institution that has been formed by successive stages of union is that of its parliament. Today the UK Parliament, located in the Palace of Westminster, London, represents the Scots, the Welsh, the Northern Irish and the English – it is thus the key British political institution and the heart of the British state.

To understand its present day importance as the institutional heart of the UK we have to return to Wales, Scotland and Ireland in the Middle Ages.

Wales

Wales had retained a strong Celtic influence with a culture distinct from that of England, but for a long time remained a collection of earldoms and principalities lacking the sense of unity that we would associate with a “country” today.

King Edward I of England secured his domination over Wales by military means and had formally annexed it in **1284 (Statute of Wales)**. Castles were built to secure the English presence and English settlers took land there. Despite periods of rebellion and revolt against English rule, this was the end of Wales’ independence. In the **1536** and **1543** the English Parliament decided to normalise this situation, fully incorporating Wales into England. It proclaimed two successive Acts of Union by which Welshmen were to be given the same legal status as Englishmen, English law was to replace Welsh law, Welsh representation would be secured within the English Parliament and English was to be used as the language of administration. Thus from an early age, Wales was brought under military rule, annexed and then formally treated as if it were another part of England. The situation is quite different, as we shall see, in Scotland.

Scotland

Scotland too was in the sights of **King Edward I of England**, who was the first monarch to have the ambition of creating a United Kingdom with himself in command. When a dispute over the succession to the Scottish throne broke out in the late 13th Century, Edward I profited from the chaos in order to forcefully exert his own rule just as he had in Wales. His army marched North where it conquered the Scots allowing Edward to assert his supremacy over Scotland and the Scottish nobility.

The difference is that the Scots – again, not yet a nation in the modern sense – resisted this imposition of foreign power and successfully fought back in a war of independence. Led by **William Wallace**, the Scottish Army defeated the English at **Stirling Bridge (1297)** but

were then defeated themselves the next year at Falkirk. The decisive battle came in **1314**, when at the **Battle of Bannockburn**, Robert the Bruce defeated the English and enabled Scotland to assert its independence. This was formally laid out in the **Declaration of Arbroath (1320)**, a letter sent to the Pope which claims Scotland's independence from England.

Thus Scotland went on for the next few hundred years to develop as an independent state with its own institutions. Warfare between Scotland and England was commonplace, but Scotland was politically and culturally a separate country with its own language, education system, political institutions, church etc : a situation which the **Union of Crowns** only complicated further by bringing the two countries closer without bringing them into a formal political union : they in effect shared a single executive power (monarch) but had separate legislative bodies (parliaments).

In **1707**, the Scottish Parliament passed an **Act of Union** by which it voted itself out of existence. Scotland, in effect, ceased to be an independent sovereign state – not through military defeat or colonial domination but by the voluntary relinquishment of its statehood. The members of Scotland's now inexistent Parliament would henceforth travel to London to represent Scotland as part of a new joint British (i.e. Scottish *and* English) Parliament (remember that Wales was already represented by this Parliament). This Union of Parliaments truly represented the creation of **Great Britain** as a political entity, in that there was no longer a separate English or Scottish Parliament, but a single, joint parliament and administration.

Why would the Scots choose to act in this way if they had, until this date, been an independent state? Many factors can be cited : firstly, it must be remembered that this decision represented the desire of the Scottish elite and not the democratic will of the Scottish people (Parliaments at this time were composed of the wealthy and influent, not the fairly elected representatives of the common people). Secondly, Scotland was eager to benefit from

the new economic opportunities afforded by trade with English overseas colonies. At the same time, England was putting pressure on Scotland by threatening to cut off trade between the two countries – in effect, threatening a trade war if Scotland refused the union. Lastly, England was eager to have Scotland, a traditional ally of the French and a potential source of problems relating to the royal succession, more closely involved in a common project with the English.

Thus it can be said that the 1707 Act of Union did not represent the popular will of Scotland, but nevertheless represented a relatively peaceful, reasoned, deliberate choice to enter into a new political union with a larger and wealthier country.

Ireland

The situation as regards Ireland shall be treated in more detail in topic no. 4 “Northern Ireland”, but suffice to say that the situation resembled neither that of Wales or Scotland.

The history of Ireland is one of early colonisation by England, beginning with Anglo-Norman settlement in the 12th Century. Little by little the English took control of the various earldoms and kingdoms across the country. A policy of deliberate, systematic colonisation accelerated in the 16th and 17th Centuries and became compounded by a problem of religious difference which set a predominantly Protestant England (and Scotland) against a Catholic Ireland. The scene was set for bloody confrontation between the native Catholic Irish and the Protestant British settlers, which resulted in the **1801 Act of Union** between Great Britain and Ireland in attempt to normalise the situation. The Parliament in Dublin ceased to exist and Ireland’s Protestants were allowed to vote for MPs in the British Parliament (Catholic emancipation would not be allowed for another thirty years). This date saw the creation of a new political entity, the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland**.

Nevertheless, the tensions between Catholics and Protestants, marking the division between native Irish and British settlers remained. Widespread rejection of British rule culminated in violence and repression. The British finally proposed to separate Ireland into two parts, the mainly Protestant north remaining British, while the southern part of the island (where there was a Catholic majority) would leave the UK. This decision was the basis of the **1920 Government of Ireland Act** and partition followed in 1921, a situation that has never been accepted by Irish Republicans in Northern Ireland.

Thus the youngest addition to the UK, Northern Ireland, is also the most unstable, still affected by the sectarian divisions which accompanied its creation in the early 20th Century.

Britishness

Although the various parts of the UK were joined together in monarchic and political union by the early 18th Century there remains today in the UK a strong sense of separate national identities rather than a single British national identity, particularly in the Celtic fringe. A feeling of “Britishness” was once bolstered by the Empire or two World Wars, but these have become less relevant for younger generations. Regular studies show that inhabitants of the UK often feel a stronger national identity at the level of their “Home Nation” than at the level of being British (This is particularly true for Scotland and Wales : NI remains a separate case as we shall see later) :

Table 1 Trends in National Identity in Great Britain

	1974	1978-9	1991-2	1996-7	1999	2001	2003
England							
English			31	34	44	43	38
British			63	59	44	44	48
Scotland							
Scottish	65	56	72	72	77	77	72
British	31	38	25	20	17	16	20
Wales							
Welsh		59		63	57	57	60
British		34		26	31	31	27

Sources: Election and Referendum Studies, British Social Attitudes, Scottish Social Attitudes, ESRC surveys

source : <http://www.devolution.ac.uk/Final%20Conf/Devolution%20public%20attitudes.pdf>

More recent figures show that only in England do most people think of themselves as “British” (52% respondents) not English. In Scotland the number of inhabitants who said they were British not Scottish was 19%, while in Wales it was 30% (British not Welsh). source : <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/blog/2011/oct/06/national-identity-disunited-kingdom-debate>

Studies like this suggest that the sense of ‘Britishness’, while present all over the UK, is often weak, explaining, perhaps, anomalies such as the absence of a UK national football team. However, such figures come from polls involving a “forced choice” (i.e. ‘Do you feel Welsh or British?’ etc.) and the reality is no doubt more complex, with many inhabitants of the UK feeling a complex **dual identity**. The sense of being both British and Scottish (for example) to varying degrees may depend on different circumstances and contexts and may fluctuate over time. Thus more complex opinion polls may allow more responses which more accurately describe a complex phenomenon. Respondents will be asked whether they feel *equally* Scottish *and* British, *more* Scottish than British, or *more* British than Scottish etc. Such polls show only a smaller percentage rejecting absolutely any sense of Britishness. But no matter how the question is asked, it is clear today that the feeling of Britishness is at best complex and problematic, while the sense of distinct national identities at a sub-state level has remained very strong despite a three hundred years of political union.

This has been due in part to the circumstance surrounding the different phases of union. In Scotland, despite the Act of Union, the country (which had enjoyed hundreds of years as a separate kingdom) retained certain distinct institutions : the Church of Scotland, a separate education system, its own legal system and courts. In Wales, despite early military domination and annexation the Welsh language remained the basis for cultural differentiation. In Ireland, the Catholic religion and a strong sense of persecution at the hands of a colonial power helped reinforce Irish identity.

England, however, as the dominant force in the British Isles has had a tendency to be equated with the whole of the UK. Indeed, it remains by far the largest in terms of population and, as we have seen, it was English military and economic power which was responsible for the creation of political union while it was in England that political power was centralised over time. While the circumstance of union were very different in Wales (early annexation), Scotland (voluntary renunciation of statehood) and Ireland (colonisation complicated further by religious divide), what these three elements all have in common is the dominance of England. In effect, while England should not be assimilated with the UK and while “English” is not an adequate synonym for “British” this historical dominance of England at least allows us to understand the origin of this imprecision. It was once not uncommon for England football fans to display UK flags for example. However, due no doubt to recent political changes that we will discuss shortly, there is now more concern at all levels to specify the distinction between England and the UK.

Next week we shall see what happens when a sense of difference, domination and disenfranchisement combine to challenge the permanence of the centralised British state.

Topic 3 : Devolution in Scotland and Wales

So far we have explained how the individual home nations have come together while retaining a sense of distinctiveness and how the UK is a political entity where power has, over time, come to be centralised in the UK Parliament. In this class we shall see how the feeling of national difference within the UK remains to this day closely linked to the question of political representation. This resulted in a challenge to the centralised political structure of the UK, particularly in Wales and Scotland, in the last years of the 20th Century. We shall look at Scotland in particular as a case study.

The growth of political nationalism

Since the 19th Century there had been some campaigners promoting “Home Rule”, or some form of self-government, for Scotland and Wales. This was essentially a nationalist argument based on the premise that a distinct people should be represented by their own distinct political institutions. However, despite a renewed sense of cultural distinctiveness in Wales and despite Scotland’s long previous history as an independent state, there were few voices calling for Scotland or Wales to be given separate parliaments until the 1960s.

Nationalist parties had been created in both Scotland and Wales in the early 20th Century, but they only enjoyed limited support among voters. They had different aims at first: the **Scottish National Party** (1934) promoted independence for Scotland while the objective of **Plaid Cymru** (1925) was to promote Welsh language and culture. Plaid Cymru has since strengthened its position to support an independent Welsh state, however. From the late 1960s onwards, perhaps explained by the growing sense of economic decline which affected the UK, the nationalist parties in both Scotland and Wales started to gain more support.

In 1966, the first **Plaid Cymru** MP was elected to Westminster (Gwynfor Evans) and in 1967 Winifred Ewing was elected to Westminster as the SNP’s first MP. Popular support

continued to increase and by the mid 1970s the two nationalist parties had become significant for a Royal Commission was set up by the Labour government in 1969 to study the UK constitution and make recommendations about how political representation for the various home nations could best be organised. The rise of the “Nats” continued to put pressure on the main UK parties to take action, particularly following their strong electoral success in the 1974 general elections.

The SNP backed up their claims for independence by arguing that an independent Scotland could be rich thanks to the new discovery of oil in its territorial waters. If Scotland were independent, the revenues from North Sea Oil, could benefit Scottish, rather than British citizens. Thus the SNP asserted “**It’s Scotland’s Oil!**” in a high profile campaign to convince voters of the economic viability of Scottish independence. The nationalists’ growing success subsequently forced the Labour government (1974-1979) to show a conciliatory attitude to “Home Rule” for Wales and Scotland in an attempt to ensure that they did not lose more votes to the nationalists in these countries.

3. Devolution: an antidote to nationalism

“Home Rule”, nowadays called “Devolution”, is not political independence resulting in the creation of a separate, sovereign state. It is a form of political decentralisation in which the UK Parliament remains sovereign but “devolves” or *delegates* some of its power to other subordinate assemblies or parliaments. Thus, Scotland and Wales could have more autonomy to take decisions in their own nationally elected institutions while still remaining part of the UK. Remember, the goal of a nationalist party such as the SNP was to have Scotland regain its independence and withdraw from the UK. The fear of the possible “**break-up of Britain**” is certainly what prompted a party like Labour, whose UK election victories were largely

helped by faithful leftwing voters in Scotland and Wales, to promote “Home Rule” or “Devolution” as an acceptable compromise.

By 1979 the Labour government had passed laws to lead to the creation of new Scottish and Welsh assemblies, but the institutions were only to come into force if approved by referendums in Scotland and Wales which were to be held in 1979. The Welsh decidedly voted against devolution (80% of “No” votes) suggesting that a large majority of Welsh were in fact happy with the constitutional status quo. In Scotland, the referendum on March 1st 1979 gave the following results:

YES 51.6%

NO 48.4%

Thanks to an amendment introduced by a Labour MP hostile to devolution, a condition had been attached to the organisation of the referendum which stipulated that 40% of the total electorate had to support the devolution proposal. Since, turnout was relatively low (un taux d’abstention assez élevé) the result was deemed to be a NO since only 32.85% of the electorate had voted yes. In years to come this decision would cause additional dissatisfaction with the Westminster system.

4. Conservative Rule and Devolution

The Conservatives had argued for a “No” vote saying that they would introduce a better form of devolution if elected in the upcoming UK elections. In fact, once in power, they rejected any notion of constitutional change. The Conservatives were then to remain in power for the next 18 years.

The period of Conservative rule (1979-1997) is the key period to understand why constitutional change was finally effected in 1997-1999. The neo-liberal Conservatives were unpopular in Scotland and Wales where many voters remained leftwing. The rapid decline in heavy industry, the result of Conservative policy, was particularly concentrated in Scotland and Wales where there were numerous coalmines, for example. The Conservatives advocated a strong British state, but were perceived in Scotland and Wales as a very English party seeking to dominate in an imperialistic manner. As such the Conservatives, who won four successive UK elections, were only supported by small numbers of Scottish and Welsh voters.

For example, out of a total of 72 MPs (71 in 1979) which Scotland sent back to the UK Parliament, only a tiny minority were Conservative:

1979	1983	1987	1992
22	21	10	11

The trend was almost identical in Wales. We see that *if* Scotland had been choosing its own government as an independent state, the Conservatives would never have been in power. But the Scots had not been voting for their own parliament. They were electing their MPs to the UK Parliament alongside the Welsh, the English and the Northern Irish. However, because of the demographic importance of England (50m inhabitants to Scotland's 5m inhabitants), it simply did not matter a great deal how the Scots voted. They could systematically vote against the Conservatives (as they did); they would nevertheless get a Conservative government if English voters supported that party.

In 1988 a multi-party coalition (without the SNP or the Conservatives), named the **Scottish Constitutional Convention**, which also included unions, church groups, and other civic groups, issued a claim that Scotland had a right to sovereignty. They began to campaign

for a new Scottish Parliament and draw up detailed plans. In Wales the Labour Party began in the early 1990s to present plans for a Welsh Assembly.

5. The Creation of Devolved Institutions

When **Tony Blair** was elected in 1997 he had promised to introduce devolution along the lines the Constitutional Convention had proposed in Scotland. Similar plans were ready for Wales. Referendums were again held in Scotland and Wales in September 1997:

Scotland	74.3% YES
Wales	50.3% YES

A low turnout and a very narrow margin in Wales showed that the Welsh were still very hesitant about the need for more direct representation. A new **Welsh Assembly** (Senedd) was created, but it was a rather weak institution without the power to make new laws for Wales. Its elected members decided how to spend the budget allocated to Wales, they decided how to implement the laws affecting Wales, and the Assembly had to be consulted when the UK Parliament was legislating on Welsh matters. Following a change in the law in 2006 and a referendum in 2011, these powers have since increased. The Welsh Assembly now has the power to pass laws in certain domains for Wales.

In Scotland, the strong public opinion in favour of devolution prompted the creation of a more powerful institution, a **Scottish Parliament (Holyrood)**. As such, it has had the power to legislate (pass laws) for Scotland and to make decisions relating to taxation (+/- 3%) since its creation in 1999.

The Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly may pass laws relating to certain areas only, known as **devolved matters**. A large number of key areas of everyday life are thus regulated by specific national institutions rather than the UK Parliament such as health, education, transport, tourism the environment, agriculture, law and order (Scotland only).

The UK Parliament, which remains sovereign, is the sole institution with the power to legislate or make decisions on some “**reserved matters**” such as economic policy, defence or international relations. The Scottish and Welsh populations are now represented in two separate forms of assembly: they elect members to the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) or to the Welsh Assembly (Assembly Members), and they also elect members to represent their local constituency within the UK Parliament (MPs).

Scotland in particular, thanks to its important legislative powers, quickly began to pass laws which made it increasingly difficult to talk about the situation in the UK as a whole. On questions such as fox hunting, university tuition fees, smoking bans or care for the elderly Scotland has enacted its own legislation quite separately from England. For example, tuition fees in England have increased to £9000 per year (max.) in England while the Scottish Parliament made universities entirely free of charge for Scottish residents from 2008. In Wales, the Welsh Assembly subsidises Welsh students attending any UK university who pays above £3465. In N. Ireland, where a devolved assembly also now exists, a more limited rise in fees was voted.

One of the key questions is whether devolution has started the UK on a “slippery slope” where more and more power is accrued by Scotland and Wales, leading one day to their independence. It should be remembered that devolution was meant to be an antidote to the growing force of political nationalism, by allowing greater autonomy within the UK to suit national specificities. It was certainly never intended to increase support for the

nationalist parties and the independence movement, quite the opposite. According to one Labour minister: “Devolution will kill independence stone dead” (George Robertson, 1995). Since the introduction of devolution, the SNP and Plaid Cymru have regularly been in government in the devolved administrations and since 2007 Scotland has been ruled from Edinburgh by an SNP government, headed by Alex Salmond, Scotland’s First Minister and SNP leader. In 2011, they won a second landslide victory in the Scottish parliamentary elections. Following this electoral success, the SNP plan on holding an independence referendum in Scotland in 2014, although despite the popularity of the SNP and its charismatic leader, opinion polls do not show for now the strong backing of the Scottish electorate for this move.

From an English perspective, devolution does not seem to have brought much stability either. England is the only country now without its own separate institutions (the case in NI shall be dealt with separately) and, with the exception of the new London Assembly (also a form of devolution), there seems to be no popular desire to have elected regional assemblies as was originally proposed for England. English voters seem increasingly dissatisfied by the influence that non-English MPs can have in the UK Parliament where they are allowed to vote on matters which do not affect their nation – e.g. in 2005 Tony Blair passed controversial health care legislation in the UK Parliament affecting England thanks to the support of Scottish Labour MPs, even though the new law did not affect Scotland at all since health is a devolved matter. This paradox which allows say Scottish MPs in Westminster to vote on matters affecting the English, and not the contrary, has been termed the “**West Lothian Question**”. To resolve this paradox, should Scottish or Welsh MPs thus be banned from voting on English matters in the UK Parliament as some Conservatives have suggested in a campaign of “English votes for English laws”? But would it continue to be a UK Parliament in this case? What constitutional problems would be raised if the UK Parliament continued to

demand tax revenues from the Scots and Welsh without ensuring them full political representation?

It is hard to see how this combination of rising English nationalism, constitutional anomalies, increased powers to Scotland and Wales, increasing disparities between the different countries, and a pro-Independence government in Scotland will fulfil the original promise of devolution leading to a strengthened union.

Topic 4: Northern Ireland

Ireland's history has often been a violent and troubled one, and the present day tensions which remain in Northern Ireland can only be understood by looking at Ireland's past. The divisions which characterise Northern Ireland – between Catholic Republicans (also called Nationalists) and Protestant Unionists (or Loyalists) take root in a history of colonisation and control by the English, and then British, state. We shall study not only how the violence in Northern Ireland came about, but also how efforts have been made to try to put an end to it.

1. Colonisation and control

A very cursory look at Ireland's past reveals a history of colonisation which helps us understand the island's troubles. Ireland, it must be remembered, was not a virgin land, but was populated by descendants of the Celtic tribes, who had been largely unaffected by the arrival of the Romans or Anglo-Saxons in Britain, leaving the Irish with an identity quite different from that of the English.

Anglo-Norman noblemen began to colonise the island, claiming land and power, from the 12th Century, although these early settlers were to become assimilated as Gaels, adopting the customs and traditions of the native Irish. The English began to extend their control into Ireland, but by the 15th Century they controlled only the area around Dublin known as The Pale. The Reformation in England was precipitated by King Henry VIII's rejection of the Pope's authority and the creation of the Anglican Church with the English monarch at its head (1534). Contrary to England (and Scotland's) mainly Protestant populations, Ireland remained Roman Catholic: this religious difference would exacerbate hostility in the centuries to come.

Partial control was a dangerous situation for the English which left them open to attack and revolt from the native Catholic Irish. Colonisation intensified in the 16th Century with a deliberate campaign of settlement known as **Plantations** which sought to strengthen English control of Ireland by encouraging Protestant Englishmen (and later Scotsmen) to take over the land of the native Irish. This helped leave certain areas with a Protestant majority, such as in Ulster. This dispossession of the native Irish was meant to consolidate British control, but also encouraged revolt among the Irish against their unjust treatment.

In the 17th Century a clear cycle of Catholic revolt and further Protestant repression could be seen, particularly when Irish Catholic Royalists in the 1640s and 1690s were crushed by British forces (e.g. the massacre of Irish Royalists at **Drogheda** in 1649 by Oliver Cromwell, or the defeat of Irish Royalists by William of Orange at the **Battle of the Boyne** in 1690 – a symbolic Protestant victory still celebrated by Unionists today). Subsequent legislation, known as **Penal Laws**, officially discriminated against Catholics, limiting their ability to own land, horses, weapons and depriving them of any political power. Some of these measures were relaxed in the late 18th Century, e.g. allowing Catholics the right to vote.

2. Union and Partition

In an attempt to normalise the situation in Ireland by limiting both Catholic revolt and Protestant tyranny, an **Act of Union** between Ireland and Britain was adopted by both Irish and British Parliaments and came into effect in 1801. Catholic Irish supported this measure as it was meant to be in exchange for full **Catholic Emancipation**, i.e. the right for Catholics to become MPs. This measure, however, did not come into effect until 1829.

The 1840s saw Ireland (now fully part of the UK in status) severely hit by a **Potato Famine** which, it is estimated, left 750,000 dead and led 2m people to emigrate. The issue intensified the feeling among many Irish that they would never be treated by the British as

anything other than second-class citizens. Calls for **Home Rule** for Ireland began to be heard from the 1870s and by the early 20th Century the issue completely dominated British politics. A number of bills were proposed, but failed in the UK Parliament: one issue was the opposition of the Protestant majority in Ireland's Northern counties to a Home Rule Irish Parliament which, following Catholic emancipation, would now inevitably be dominated by Catholics. Finally, a third **Home Rule Act** was passed by the UK Parliament and became law in 1914, but did not come into effect because of the onset of WWI.

This delay exacerbated frustration among Irish Nationalists who stormed key buildings in Dublin in 1916 in an attempt to create an Irish Republic by force. This armed insurrection, known as the **Easter Rising**, was violently ended by the British who had the 16 ring-leaders executed, thus creating martyrs to the Nationalist cause and confirming in many Irish minds the brutality of British rule. When **Sinn Fein**, an Irish Nationalist Party created in 1905, won two thirds of the Irish seats in the 1918 UK General Election, they boycotted the UK Parliament and instead unilaterally proclaimed an Irish assembly and named a President of the Irish Republic. This led to immediate repression by UK police and army forces in Ireland, which was resisted by Nationalist paramilitaries. The **Irish Republican Army**, the armed wing of Sinn Fein, waged a guerrilla war against the British and the state of quasi civil war, coupled with international pressure, forced the British to attempt to resolve the problem by proposing the partition of Ireland into two distinct entities.

The 1920 Government of Ireland Act led to the partition of the island between the Catholic south and the counties of the North where there were a majority of Protestants. In 1921 **Northern Ireland** came into existence, choosing to remain within the UK with its own Parliament (**Stormont**). The Southern part of Ireland, with its Catholic population, became a **Dominion** (like former colonies Canada or Australia) known as the **Irish Free State** with its own Parliament. This country would become a fully independent Republic in 1949.

3. The “Troubles”

By the 1960s Northern Ireland remained a province of the UK with its own semi-autonomous Parliament in Stormont. However, the Protestant majority dominated industry, local politics, the police and local government, leading to widespread discrimination against the Catholic minority in terms of housing and jobs etc. Inspired by the US Civil Rights movement, Catholic groups began to campaign for equal rights in the late 1960s, however their peaceful demonstrations and marches often ended in confrontation with the Protestant dominated police force (RUC) and in harassment by hardline Unionists. The situation quickly degenerated into rioting and violent disorder between Catholic and Protestant communities, and in 1969 the UK army was sent to Northern Ireland, ostensibly to help protect the Catholic community from attack, although they were perceived by Catholics as the forces of British oppression. As a result of increased inter-communal violence, Catholic and Protestant communities often found themselves forced into distinct neighbourhoods, separated by high, secure “peace walls” where murals on house-fronts would indicate the politico-national affiliation of the inhabitants. 1969 also saw the creation of the **Provisional IRA**, a Republican paramilitary organisation dedicated to ending British rule in Northern Ireland by force of arms.

This militarisation of the conflict in Northern Ireland led to over thirty years of violence in both Northern Ireland and the British mainland and the loss of over 3,500 lives. The Provisional IRA (often shortened to “IRA” or “Provos”) targeted British army posts in NI, but also Protestant communities (pubs etc), symbols of the British Establishment, members of the UK Government, and directly targeted cities in the UK mainland, such as London (Downing St, Hyde Park, financial district etc.). Protestant paramilitaries, such as the

Ulster Volunteer Force, meanwhile waged an unofficial war, shooting and bombing Catholic targets in Northern Ireland. Some of the most notorious incidents of the Troubles include:

- Jan 30 1972 Bloody Sunday: 13 unarmed civilians shot dead in Londonderry by UK army who claim they were fired at after banned civil rights march.
- March 1972 N. Ireland's parliament – Stormont – suspended. Direct rule by Westminster imposed.
- 1979 Lord Mountbatten – the Queen's cousin – killed by IRA bomb.
- 1981 IRA prisoners, seeking status of political prisoners, go on hunger strike. 10 die, including Bobby Sands, elected to the UK Parliament as MP during the hunger strike, as the UK government refuses to negotiate.
- 1984 IRA bomb hotel of Conservative Govt. during party conference. 5 die.
- 1991 IRA launch mortar bombs against 10 Downing St, residence of Prime Minister.

4. The Peace Process

Key problems to finding a diplomatic solution to the “Troubles” included the following issues:

- The Republic political party **Sinn Fein**, which existed as the sister organisation (the “**political wing**” of the IRA, was rejected by the UK Government who refused to negotiate with it in peace talks as they considered it to be complicit in terrorism.
- The suspicion and animosity towards the Republican Catholic community as a whole by hardline Protestant politicians, such as the firebrand **Reverend Ian Paisley**, leader of the **Democratic Unionist Party**.
- The Republic of Ireland's constitutional claims over the Northern part of the island.
- NI Catholics' distrust of the Protestant-dominated police force, the **Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC)**.

Nevertheless, beginning in the 1980s, a peace process began which attempted to resolve some of these issues.

The 1985 **Anglo-Irish Agreement** between the UK and the Republic of Ireland gave the Irish Government some consultative rights over the future of Northern Ireland and both

countries adopted the principle of self-determination for the province, i.e. the status of Northern Ireland would be decided by the majority will of the population (thus, so long as there existed a Protestant majority in Northern Ireland one would expect NI to remain British.) However, elements of this agreement were hostile to both Unionists (the involvement of the Republic of Ireland) and Republicans (the implicit recognition that Northern Ireland was to remain British).

In 1993, after secret talks between the UK and Irish Governments, the UK Prime Minister, John Major, announced the future participation of Sinn Fein in talks on the future of Northern Ireland on the condition that the IRA ordered a **ceasefire**. This announcement, known as the **Downing Street Declaration**, was indeed followed by an IRA ceasefire which lasted between 1994 and 1996, the year the IRA bombed Manchester and the City of London. After the election of Tony Blair in 1997 a new ceasefire followed, which allowed the tentative peace process to start up again.

There was initial optimism in 1998 when the **Good Friday Agreement** (also named **Belfast Agreement**) was agreed upon by the British and Irish Governments, with the support of NI's political parties. It foresaw the creation of a new devolved Northern Ireland Assembly (Stormont) which was to be headed by a **power-sharing executive**, where Republicans and Unionists would run NI's affairs in a coalition government which obligatorily represented both communities. Additionally, the Republic of Ireland withdrew its constitutional claims on NI and in return to play a greater role in cross-border, all-Irish consultative bodies. However, 1998 was also marked by the worst terrorist outrage of the Troubles: the town centre of **Omagh** was bombed by a dissident Republican group, the **Real IRA**, killing 28 civilians.

Tensions remained over the participation of **Sinn Fein** in the new assembly, as Unionists, represented in particular by the **Ulster Unionist Party**, demanded stronger

guarantees over **IRA decommissioning**, or disarmament. The Stormont Assembly and power-sharing finally became operational in December 1999. The executive was headed by a Protestant, UUP leader David Trimble, but also included Republicans. The issue of IRA decommissioning dogged the assembly, however, causing it to be suspended several times in the years after 1999. Many Unionists doubted the IRA's commitment to peace, despite their claim in 2001 that they had begun to destroy their significant arsenal of weapons that included rocket launchers, missiles, heavy machine guns, 3 tonnes of plastic explosives, handguns, rifles, grenades etc.

Despite another suspension, elections were nevertheless held for the suspended Assembly in November 2003, with the more hardline groups in each community gaining power. The two largest political parties in NI became Ian Paisley's **Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)** and Sinn Fein. The virulent anti- Republican Ian Paisley (nickname "Dr No") at first remained firm in his opposition to the Good Friday Agreement and vocally rejected power-sharing with Sinn Fein, refusing to even meet its leaders. Despite the IRA's public announcement that it had officially ended its armed campaign (2005) and despite an independent commission confirming that the IRA had indeed destroyed all its weapons and disbanded its chain of command (2005, 2006), the DUP remained sceptical. The UK Government had set a deadline of November 2006 for the parties in NI to reach a deal on power-sharing, with the threat that if not Stormont could be definitively closed, with power over NI returning to the UK Parliament. After fresh talks, the DUP, in a move that surprised many, finally accepted to work with Sinn Fein and share power according to the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement. Ian Paisley became NI's First Minister in May 2007, with Sinn Fein's Martin McGuinness – who during the years of the Troubles was none other than the IRA's former military commander – taking the post as Deputy First Minister.

Following the Good Friday Agreement, and until the economic and financial crisis began to hit Northern Ireland, the province appeared to be experiencing something of a boom in terms of business and property. It was no doubt connected with the fact that for the first time in a generation both populations in NI were able to go about their business without the constant fear of a terrorist bomb or a sniper's bullet. However, since then, we have witnessed a rise in inter-communal violence and the resurgence of Republican splinter groups who are committed to opposing the Good Friday Agreement through renewed paramilitary activity. All this suggests that the question of the status of Northern Ireland is far from settled in many people's minds and that the sectarian divisions that have caused such damage are still very present.