Elite-Mass Agreement in British Foreign Policy

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Abstract: Thirty years ago, William Wallace likened British foreign policy to a musical tug-of-war between the 'Anglo-Saxons' and 'Europeans', attributing 'all the best tunes' to the former. This study revisits Wallace's thesis and its main concept, national identity. It finds that Wallace was right to draw attention to the power of the ruling elite to shape Englishness and Britishness. However, the study also finds that 'global' foreign policy ideas were never the exclusive province of a segment of the British elite. Rather, they circulated in English and more broadly British society writ large, reflecting and reinforcing deep seated, even unselfconscious agreements between both 'Anglo-Saxon' and 'European' elites, on one hand, and much of the mass consumer public, on the other. It follows that the constraints posed on possibilities of foreign policy change were always greater than Wallace had suggested.

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‘We are no longer a great power. We will never be so again’, declared Sir John Major on November 9, 2020 at Middle Temple in London. An outspoken critic of Brexit – the United Kingdom’s exit from the European Union (EU) – the former Conservative prime minister warned of a ‘brutal’ future, which he blamed on the negotiating ‘failures’ of the Conservative government of Boris Johnson: ‘Because of our bombast, our blustering, our threats and our inflexibility – our trade will be less profitable, our Treasury poorer, our jobs fewer, and our future less prosperous’. Furthermore, Brexit increased the ‘risk of breaking up the UK by increased support for Scotland to leave the Union, and Northern Ireland to unite with the South’. But rather than ending on a wholly pessimistic note, Major proposed a foreign policy recalibration. ‘Global Britain’ – a policy slogan introduced by Johnson’s predecessor, Theresa May – was still a good idea, assuming, he said, ‘we’ forswear the fantasy of ‘British exceptionalism’.¹

The speech sparked outrage among Conservatives. David Cameron, who stepped down as prime minister in 2016 after calling and then losing the fateful referendum on EU membership, went on Radio 4’s Today programme to explain why Britain’s economic, cultural, diplomatic, and of course military heft should never be underestimated. Others were more direct and personal. ‘There are no small nations, only small minds’, quipped Conservative MP Sir Desmond Swayne, thus connecting Major’s speech to an earlier anti-Brexit jibe.² Then, within ten days of Major’s speech, came the biggest rebuke: the prime minister’s statement in the House of Commons announcing the largest military spending boost since the Cold War. In it, Johnson invoked ‘global influence’ twice, vowed ‘to end the era of retreat’, and likened his budget increase to some famous foreign policy decisions made by Winston Churchill, Margaret Thatcher, and, for good measure, Labour’s Clement Attlee. ‘In each case, Britain tipped the scales of history and did immense good for the world. Now we have a chance to follow in this great tradition’.³

Taking place within the specific context of ‘final’ Brexit talks – and the Covid-19 pandemic –, this ‘debate’ nevertheless stirred a sense of déjà vu. In his address to Chatham House on 26 September 1990, its then Director of Research William Wallace observed the existence of the competing ‘Anglo-Saxon’ and ‘European’ camps within the UK’s foreign policy establishment. Whereas the former viewed the UK as a mini superpower, always ready to join the United States (US) in exerting ‘hard power’ in all four corners of the globe, the latter sought to capitalize primarily on diplomacy and on close relations with the European allies, France and Germany above all.⁴

¹ Major, ‘The State We’re In,’ 9 November 2020, <http://www.johnmajorarchive.org.uk/2015-2/sir-john-majors-speech-middle-temple-treasurers-lecture-the-state-were-in/> On Global Britain, see Robin Niblett, ‘Global Britain, Global Broker’, Chatham House Report, 11 January 2021 <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/01/global-britain-global-broker>

² Natasha Clark, ‘Major Error’, *The Sun*, 11 November 2020, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/politics/13165509/david-cameron-john-major-global-power/>. The aphorism ‘there are small nations and there are countries that have not yet realized they are small nations’ goes back to late Belgian prime minister Paul-Henri Spaak but some EU politicians revived it in the Brexit years

³ PM statement to the House on the Integrated Review: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-to-the-house-on-the-integrated-review-19-november-2020>

⁴ For a sense of Chatham House’s ‘diplomatic’ sensibilities at that time, see William Wallace, ‘Chatham House at 70: To the 1990s and Beyond’, *The World Today* 46: 5, 1990, pp. 75-77.

The argument appeared in *International Affairs* the following year. Britain's expansive foreign policy, Wallace argued, reflected the dominance of the 'Anglo-Saxon' version of 'British national identity.' With its distinctive concepts of Britain as a unitary state, of English common law, of parliamentary sovereignty, and of 'English exceptionalism – a free country confronting an unfree European continent' –, 'Anglo-Saxonism' clashed with 'internationalizing trends' and thwarted policy reform.⁵ So, speaking as both an academic and a Liberal Democrat foreign policy practitioner, Wallace pleaded with his fellow 'Europeans' – those in the Conservative and Labour parties in particular – to try and 'refashion national myths and symbols to fit current needs'; 'if the issue is one of fundamental national beliefs, why should the Anglo-Saxons have all the best tunes?'⁶

Wallace's analysis deserves to be revisited – and not only because of UK departure from the EU. To do so, I rely on some insights from Stuart Hall's cultural sociology, as well as on some recent discourse analytic research on British national identity. I find that Wallace was essentially right to suggest that 'the whole ethos of this country's foreign policy continues to be biased by ideological assumptions which date from the Edwardian era and before'. In one form or another, 'Anglo-Saxon' myths are eminently observable not only in the period between the Attlee and Thatcher years, which was the focus of Wallace's analysis, but also in the following decade and a half. It was, for instance, both normal and commonplace in the 2010s to revel in the diversity, inclusivity, and openness of the British society without pausing over the nation's imperial and colonial past. More importantly, said myths were never an exclusive province of an 'Anglo-Saxon' elite sitting in Downing Street, Whitehall, and Westminster, or, for that matter, in the City and Fleet Street. Rather, they circulated throughout English and more broadly British society, with 'official' and 'popular' culture consistently displaying more-or-less congruent 'Anglo-Saxon' ideas about the UK and its place in the world.

This re-reading of Wallace provides a different view of Brexit, suggesting that its sources are more likely to found in a two-way interaction between 'elites' and 'masses' than in some 'Anglo-Saxon' grip on news and educational media. I also suggest that a 'lesser' foreign policy may not be possible in the foreseeable future absent political alternatives designed to appeal to the uncritical and often unconscious preferences of the British society writ large.

The rest of the essay breaks into five sections. I begin by bringing Wallace's and Hallsian analyses into dialogue at the theoretical level. I then move on to methodological issues, where I consider definitions of elites and masses and make a case for an inductive analysis of elite and mass discourses of British national identity. The third and fourth sections respectively discuss the main findings and then relate them to aspects of UK foreign policy.

⁵ Wallace, 'Foreign Policy and National Identity in the United Kingdom', *International Affairs* 67: 1, 1991, pp. 65–80, at p. 69–70.

⁶ Wallace, 'Foreign Policy', p. 70. The political and normative liabilities of the term 'Anglo-Saxon' are well known. Srdjan Vucetic, *The Anglosphere: A Genealogy of a Racialized Identity in International Relations* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 1–5.

Swinging to the Anglo-Saxon Tunes

Wallace's article defines 'British national identity' as the 'concepts of our position in the world, from which flow presuppositions about which other nations are our natural allies or enemies, which share our values and which do not'.⁷ Look at the UK's political class, Wallace noted, and you see no shortage of people espousing 'Anglo-Saxon' myths.⁸ Conversely, look at the occupants of the UK's highest office, and you see but one leader who could *possibly* qualify as 'European' in the author's schema: Edward Heath, a Tory prime minister from 1970 to 1974 best known for his idiosyncratic views and for declaring a record five states of emergency.

Wallace's explanation for this historical development followed a particular theory of the state and nation. Not only did he suggest that unprecedented degrees of 'Anglo-Saxon' dominance over national identity stemmed from control of state and political institutions, but Wallace also understood his own 'European' position in the context of concrete conditions of power. To change these conditions, he argued, 'Europeans' needed to push for a new 'national' curriculum, one that would bring not only *British* history to *English* schools, but also more *European* history.⁹ They likewise had to push against some academics and newsmedia moguls – a powerful network of homegrown 'Anglo-Saxons' and their continental, Canadian, and Australian counterparts who did so much to normalize 'admiration for the idiosyncrasies of the British constitution', love for 'economic liberalism,' 'resistance to closer relations with the European continent' and 'babbling about sovereignty and past centuries'.¹⁰

So viewed, Wallace's analysis reveals a top-down conception of politics in which 'Englishness' and 'Britishness' are elite projects imposed onto passive mass publics. An alternative view holds that said phenomena are in fact constituted through broadly shared, more culturally rooted meanings that have no single origin. Nations, says Stuart Hall, are 'systems of cultural representation' produced and reproduced in and through, among other things, 'national histories, literatures, the media, and popular culture'.¹¹ As he put it in his W.E.B. Du Bois Lectures at Harvard University in 1994:

We know what it is to be English, British, American, or Jamaican because of the ways that 'Americanness' or 'Britishness' or any of these other identities has come to be represented as a

⁷ The author's list encompasses politicians as diverse as the then prime minister Margaret Thatcher, former Labour Party leaders Hugh Gaitskell and Michael Foot, and the Tory reactionary Enoch Powell. Wallace, 'Foreign Policy', p. 66.

⁸ Wallace, 'Foreign Policy', p. 69.

⁹ Wallace, 'Foreign Policy', p. 75.

¹⁰ Wallace, 'Foreign Policy', p. 70, 75.

¹¹ Hall, 'The Question of Cultural Identity', in David Held, Don Hubert, and Kenneth Thompson (eds), *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 595–634, at pp. 612–613. On the concepts of nations, nationalism and national identity, and on how they hang together (and apart) in sociological research (on the modern UK), see David McCrone and Frank Bechhofer, *Understanding National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 9–18, 190–196.

set of shared meanings within the national cultures in which they are shaped at different historical moments.¹²

Hall's approach to national identity builds on several strands of twentieth century left thought. From Antonio Gramsci's notion of 'cultural hegemony', Hall took educational, artistic, and intellectual institutions to be among the most effective expressions of power in society. The reason for this is their capacity to transmit the ideology of the ruling elite onto the rest of society, such that most of the population accepts them as 'common sense'. But Hall also endorsed Gramsci's conceptualization of cultural hegemony as a process – a constant struggle for power between competing, historically situated social forces over shared and oftentimes deeply sedimented meanings. So, in addition to being mostly unreflective, common sense also arises from multiple sources, from elite-controlled, 'national-popular' institutions to various subcultural, counter-cultural, and diasporic practices.¹³

Hall famously refused to "autonomize" race or ethnicity, preferring instead to situate them in relation to national identity formation. He was likewise strongly influenced by structuralist theories of language, signification, and classification, and even more importantly post-structuralist views of the subject, power, and knowledge.¹⁴ On this view, meaning is discursive and contextual. '[N]ational identities', Hall writes in his Du Bois Lectures, 'are not attributes we are born with, but are formed and transformed within discourses and other systems of representation'.¹⁵ There he also acknowledges the influence of his feminist historian spouse, Catherine Hall, whose path-breaking work on the gendered and raced character of Englishness and Britishness proceeds from the discursive model as well.¹⁶

Taking the couple's respective scholarly contributions together, we can speak of a 'Hallsian' approach to national identity, according to which social and textual processes are assumed to be woven into each other, and the analytical goal is to better understand how nations come to represent themselves, by whom, how, and with what consequences for politics and policy. In the field of International Relations (IR), it was Jutta Weldes who first demonstrated the promise of this approach in her 'critical constructivist' studies of, respectively, national interest and popular culture.¹⁷ Soon thereafter came a variety of complementary research agendas, including Mark Rupert's neo-Gramscian

¹² Hall, *The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, Nation*. Edited by Kobena Mercer; foreword by Henry Louis Gates (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2017), p. 137.

¹³ This 'processual ontology' compelled Hall to occasionally replace 'identity' with 'identification' and 'diasporization'. Hall, *Fateful Triangle*, p. 126, 162-174; and Hall, 'Who Needs Identity?', in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage, 1996), pp. 1–17, at p. 6.

¹⁴ Hall, *Fateful Triangle*, pp. 45-48, 127-130.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 137. Space prevents me from detailing Hall's key concepts of articulation and interpellation, or the influential exchanges he had with other prominent thinkers about Marxism.

¹⁶ See, above all, Catherine Hall, *Civilizing Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination. 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).

¹⁷ Jutta Weldes, 'Constructing National Interest', *European Journal of International Relations* 2:3 (1996), pp. 275-318; Weldes, *Constructing National Interests: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); and Weldes, 'Going Cultural: *Star Trek*, State Action, and Popular Culture', *Millennium* 28:1, 1999, pp. 117-34.

work on national and transnational common sense, a large Popular Culture-World Politics (PCWP) programme, and, importantly for this study, Ted Hopf's 'societal' and 'common sense' constructivisms.¹⁸

Following this literature, I propose a re-conceptualization of 'the link between the domestic constitution and Britain's international entanglement', as Wallace calls it.¹⁹ In simplest terms, foreign policy continuity and change is a function of discourses of national identity. In Hallsian terms, discourses of national identity carry common sense understandings that actors – elites and masses alike – draw upon to constitute action, construct meanings, and make claims in social and political life. Foreign policy is no exception in a sense that discourses of national identity continually shape what international entanglements are, as Weldes puts it, 'common-sensible', as opposed to strange, unacceptable, or traitorous. One mechanism for this is socialization. Policymakers in Downing Street, Whitehall and Westminster are all UK citizens, and therefore likely to use categories from national identity discourse to identify which countries are Britain's closest friends and allies. Wallace observed this himself, criticizing what he argued was an 'Anglo-Saxon' illusion that the UK had a 'special relationship' with the US and the 'Anglosphere' more broadly.²⁰

Discourses of national identity do not cause policy outcomes, certainly not in the conventional sense. Policymakers, like other 'situated agents', can, and do, exert agency in specific contexts – in the context of 'critical junctures' and 'policy dilemmas' for example – , thus creating opportunities for new directions.²¹ But this also means that discourses translate into foreign policy through institutional mechanisms, too. If we accept that in representative democracies a large segment of 'masses' are eligible voters who give electoral mandates, then we might also accept the causal power of 'elite-mass agreement': policymakers will always find it easier to marshal public support, when policies they advocate make sense at both elite and mass levels, that is, to the political community as a whole.

From the latter perspective, national identity discourses have a constraining effect similar to that of public opinion. Research based on Chatham House/YouGov surveys of the British public suggest that degrees of elite-mass agreement – this literature prefers the term congruence – on foreign policy issues affects public approval for leaders in office.²² Unlike the highly context-dependent public opinion,

¹⁸ Mark Rupert, *Ideologies of Globalization: Contending Visions of a New World Order* (London: Routledge, 2000); Kyle Grayson, Matt Davies, and Simon Philpott, 'Pop Goes IR? Researching the Popular Culture-World Politics Continuum', *Politics* 29: 3, 2009, pp. 155–163; Ted Hopf, *The Social Construction of International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), and Hopf, 'Common-Sense Constructivism and Hegemony in World Politics', *International Organization* 67: 2, 2013, pp. 317–354.

¹⁹ Wallace, 'Foreign Policy', p. 75.

²⁰ Wallace, 'Foreign Policy', p. 74. Wallace expanded on this argument in subsequent publications, e.g.: Wallace, *Europe or the Anglosphere? British foreign policy between Atlanticism and European Integration* (London: John Stuart Mill Institute, 2005). Cf. Vucetic, *The Anglosphere*.

²¹ Mark Bevir and Oliver Daddow, 'Interpreting Foreign Policy: National, Comparative and Regional Studies', *International Relations* 29: 3, 2015, pp. 273–87, at pp. 281–283; Martin Marcussen et al, 'Constructing Europe? The Evolution of French, British and German Nation State Identities,' *Journal of European Public Policy* 6 (4): 614–33, at pp. 616–617.

²² The relationship is not necessarily direct, not least because polling is elite-controlled. However, as the case of the Iraq War demonstrates, decision makers cannot consistently make decisions that clash with the expectations

discourses of national identity are said to be deeply embedded in everyday life, operating (almost) unselfconsciously. As such, they allow us to assess the degree to which 'society' is likely to support or reject foreign policy. In other words, if, as Weldes contends, 'representations of national interests are 'produced, at least in part, in domestic political and cultural contexts',²³ then a properly constructivist and interpretivist account of UK foreign policy requires a methodology for accessing (re)production of British national identity in a systematic fashion.

The proposed framework is consistent with Wallace's own approach, given its interest in 'national rhetoric and imagery' as well as in 'coded phrases [that] carry depths of conscious and unconscious meaning'.²⁴ What is new is a theorization of British national identity as intersubjectively shared *and* politically contested in 'national culture' as a whole, meaning not only among elites – that is, between 'Anglo-Saxons' and 'Europeans', as in Wallace's schema – , but also 'vertically', between elites and masses. This Hallsian twist enables us to answer two additional questions. First, was 'Anglo-Saxonism' dominant only or primarily among elites, or was it in fact vertically shared, that is, 'co-authored' by masses as well? Second, how did these commonsensical ideas ebb and flow over time? A succession of generational, social, political, cultural, and constitutional transformations within, and across, British state and society in the period under study strongly suggests that we should expect to observe at least some discursive shifts in national identity and identification.

In Search of Britishness

Wallace approached British national identity, a.k.a. Britishness, via secondary literature and personal observations of the British establishment going back to the 1950s (but with particular focus on the period since the Falklands War). To evaluate the proposed re-evaluation of Wallace's thesis, we must cover the same period plus the period since the publication of his article in 1991. More importantly, we need an interpretative methodology that can help us access not only establishment identity categories but also popular culture ones.²⁵ The Making Identity Count (MIC) project, a recent contribution to constructivist IR, meets these criteria. Focusing on ten great powers since 1950, it

of legitimate behaviour held by the public. For insightful discussions, see Jamies Gaskarth, 'Strategizing Britain's Role in the World,' *International Affairs* 90: 3, 2014, pp. 559-581; James Strong, *Public Opinion, Legitimacy and Tony Blair's War in Iraq* (London: Routledge, 2017), and Wilfred M. Chow, Enze Han and Xiaojun Li, 'Brexit Identities and British Public Opinion on China', *International Affairs* 95: 6, 2019, pp. 1369–1387. For an argument that elite-mass gaps on political attitudes tend to be overdrawn, see Joshua D. Kertzer, 'Re-Assessing Elite-Public Gaps in Political Behavior', *American Journal of Political Science*, 2020, EarlyView <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12583>

²³ Weldes, *Constructing National Interests*, p. 102. On the fundamental similarities, and some subtle differences, between 'constructivist IR' and 'interpretivism', see Mark Bevir, Oliver Daddow and Ian Hall, 'Introduction: Interpreting British Foreign Policy', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 15: 2, 2013, pp. 163–74.

²⁴ Wallace, 'Foreign Policy', p.79, n. 38. For a working definition of discourse, see Hall, 'The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power', in Held et al, eds. *Modernity*, pp. 185-227, at p. 201.

²⁵ On why the latter holds critical cues for taken-for-granted common sense, see Weldes, 'Going Cultural', p. 119.

assembles series of freeze-frame ‘national identity reports’ based on inductive discourse analyses of a variety of elite and mass texts that can credibly be described as highest circulating in a given year.²⁶

Behind the MIC method are several assumptions, starting with 1) that it is possible to assemble an archive (a.k.a. corpus) of representative texts for elites and masses for the purposes of 2) longitudinal (more specifically: comparative-static) and cross-national analysis of discursive repertoires from which said elites and masses draw to situate their political community and themselves in national terms. MIC’s approach to the elite-mass distinction does not differentiate between different elite sectors (academic, business, civil society, government bureaucracy, etc.), or between elites and sub-elites (the latter including backbenchers and middle managers, e.g.), or between different types of masses. Instead, it analyses texts from a variety of institutional production centers to distinguish between national identity categories circulating among the elites versus those held by mass publics. This distinction is of critical importance because it can help us determine the areas and degree of vertical, elite-mass agreement on foreign policy issues in the UK, not ‘just’ among the British elites.

The online Appendix summarizes the historical sources MIC researchers used to analyze British national identity in eight calendar years – 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010, and 2015.²⁷ Anchoring the ‘elite’ end of each sample are two well-publicized prime minister speeches (typically: one given in parliament, one given at the ruling party’s annual conference), followed by two widely used high school history textbooks on modern English/British history; followed by a sub-sample of editorials, columns and op-eds published in the two most-circulated national newspapers.²⁸ For ‘mass discourse’, MIC researchers coded letters to the editor for the same two newspapers, the top two bestselling novels by British authors and the top two most-attended British-directed and/or British-produced movies.

This approach has both advantages and disadvantages. One advantage is sensitivity to historical context and socio-technological settings in and through which nations are discursively produced. UK newspaper selections, for one, followed the rankings based on the Press Council and Audit Bureau of Circulations circulation figures (or the closest equivalent), but with an eye on variance in the ownership structure and ideological orientations. In the case of ‘bestsellers’, attention was paid to the mid-twentieth century paperback revolution, since it profoundly changed the meaning of ‘bestselling UK

²⁶ The project website is <https://makingidentitycount.wordpress.com/> For alternative methodological approaches to Britishness, see McCrone and Bechhofer, *Understanding National Identity*, pp. 33-42.

²⁷ Available at <https://srdjanvucetic.wordpress.com/appendixuk/>. On the MIC method, see Ted Hopf and Bentley Allan, eds. *Identity Count: Building a National Identity Database* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), especially the chapter by Bentley Allan: ‘A Method for Uncovering National Identity’, pp. 20–48. Also see Hopf, *Social Construction*. For complete reports, see <https://makingidentitycount.wordpress.com/countries/united-kingdom/> The 2015 report was added specifically for its insights about Britishness before the EU referendum.

²⁸ To randomize the last subsample, coders collected newspaper items from the editions published on the fifteenth day of each month.

novels', much as the subsequent rise of UK-US film co-productions complicated the definition of the national 'blockbuster movie'.²⁹

The main advantage of MIC, however, is its inductive, manual coding of text. Analysts are asked to put aside any prefabricated ideas about what it meant to be Britain or British and simply code identity categories appearing in selected texts on three dimensions: valence (positive, negative, neutral, ambiguous); aspirational/aversive (if the identity is one that the Self aspires to or is trying to avoid); and significant Other (which refers to any broadly national categories to which the Self compares itself in time and space). This methodology lets 'the subjects to speak for themselves,' which in turn allows for identification of habitualized, naturalized, and contingent meanings that would likely be lost in computer-assisted text analysis. One example is relevant deployment of deixis, including pronouns, possessive adjectives, locatives, and any references to the nation and other structures of belonging: e.g., 'In *this* society...', 'We have always been tolerant', 'Our empire was different'.³⁰

As for MIC's limitations, here I will only foreground England-centricity and a narrow operationalization of mass agency. With respect to the first, a principled case is made for privileging England and, more specifically, London as the dominant site for the discursive production of 'Britain', or more accurately a polity historian David Edgerton calls 'national UK'.³¹ Furthermore, just because Britishness tends to be conceptualized as a *state* identity does not imply that people in England, Scotland and elsewhere cannot understand the same as their *national* identity.³²

The response to the second criticism is both principled and pragmatic. Principled, because, while it is always elites who produce newspapers, novels, and movies, masses still exercise agency by deciding on whether to consume them. Indeed, authors like Agatha Christie or JK Rowling will pursue certain ideas because they know they resonate with the reading public. The pragmatic response concerns the size of the sample: yes, it would have been desirable to collect and analyze more texts tapping into British popular culture – radio documentaries, soap operas, cooking shows, perhaps even the Mass Observation surveys, too. However, this would have also required an untold amount of additional coding hours. In short, while we can agree that the historical documents MIC uses are far from optimal, we can also agree that optimal sources do not exist for observing the evolution of popular, everyday ideas about Britain and the British at successive points in the seven decades since World War II.

²⁹ In the report for 1960, for example, Fleming's fresh-off-press James Bond novel *For Your Eyes Only* was dropped in favour of Fleming's 1958 novel of the same series, *Dr No*, because the latter had just become available in paperback. Similarly, changes in newspaper readership in the Internet era necessitated the inclusion of *The Guardian* in 2015. These methodological choices are discussed in MIC's online supplementary files.

³⁰ The method likewise requires coders to differentiate mere themes and platitudes ('leisure is good') from national identity categories or moves to nationalize non-national categories ('Englishmen like good leisure').

³¹ David Edgerton. *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation: A Twentieth-Century History* (London: Allen Lane, 2018).

³² Some sociologists make this case using the etic/emic distinction in social anthropology (McCrone and Bechhofer, *Understanding National Identity*, p. 47), while some political scientists opt for the term 'nation state identity' in the hopes of obviating this discussion altogether (Marcussen *et al*, 'Constructing Europe?', p. 616, 632, n. 2).

Agreements and Disagreements

Due to the confines of this essay, in this section I focus solely on MIC findings that have significant implications for Wallace's thesis.³³ The first finding confirms his view that UK elites predominantly, though not exclusively, constructed Britain as an English project. The masses in fact agreed. This was more explicit in 1950 and 1960, when every other text seemed to conflate Britain (England, Wales, and Scotland) and even the United Kingdom (of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) with England, than after the 1970 Scottish devolution referendum, much less after actual devolution of power under New Labour. Yet England was always Self, except when it referred to an unhappy past version of itself, as in 'Victorian England,' while Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, both north and south, wavered between Self and Other, depending on the context.

This changed in later years, whereby greater acceptance of the UK as a union-state, as opposed to a unitary one, corresponded to greater identification with the UK's plural national identities. Two examples drawn from the opposite ends of the MIC archive capture this evolution. In Agatha Christie's *Murder Is Announced*, a mass discourse source for 1950, characters in a fictional English village do not pause at racism directed at the Irish as well as at 'Mittel Europeans.'³⁴ By the 2000s, 'only' the latter are problematized, given their propensity to come to live and work in the UK in large numbers, alongside people from 'the Muslim countries.' With 'this week's photographs from Calais, Kos and Macedonia, showing throngs of Middle Eastern and African migrants, determined to reach Europe's richer nations,' said a *Daily Mail* op-ed in 2015, '[i]t is hard to overstate the anger about uncontrolled immigration, which is a sentiment that seems entirely justified'.³⁵

In these examples one can observe an implicit linking of the national 'we' to certain white Protestants with an imagined claim to England/Britain. We see the same in a near absence of empire from historical narratives of Britain's industrial rise and of World War II victory. Outside a few self-consciously revisionist texts, all identity discourses pegged British success in each to a combination of good luck, clever institutions, and/or the resourcefulness and resilience of the people in the metropole

Complicating this mythology was the presence and movement of non-white people from the imperial periphery. As one textbook from the 1980 sample explained, 'Commonwealth immigration into Britain increased dramatically after the war,' such that by the 1970s it became a political issue, 'culminating in the panic moves to slam the door on the Kenya Asians.'³⁶ Under the 1948 British Nationality Act, 'the Kenya Asians' were indeed British citizens with extensive rights to migrate to the UK who then progressively lost those rights through the passing of a series of immigration control acts, each

³³ I also present them in their most simplified, compressed, and stylized form, which in turn occasionally implies essentialism and uniformity to where none exist. For a more detailed discussion, see Srdjan Vucetic, *Greatness and Decline: National Identity and British Foreign Policy* (McGill-Queen's, 2021).

³⁴ A police officer in the novel puts it thus: "He could have shot her from behind a hedge in the good old Irish fashion any day of the week, and probably got away with it." Cited in MIC UK 1950, p.3. For this and other MIC reports referenced below, see <https://makingidentitycount.wordpress.com/countries/united-kingdom/>

³⁵ *Daily Mail*, April 15, 2015, p. 14, cited in MIC: UK 2015, p. 14-5.

³⁶ Sked and Cook, *Postwar Consensus*, p. 200, 284, cited in MIC: UK 1980, p. 18.

more restrictive than the previous. However, dominant discourses of Britishness disagreed that such 'panic moves' either negated or contradicted Britain's essentially inclusive character. On the contrary, rather than fretting about Hibernophobia, Islamophobia or whatever, the British were always more likely to offer a smirk or smile: if not outright anti-racist, 'we' were certainly 'not racist', or at the very least 'not as bad as others.'

Same national common sense shaped gender norms, roles, and relations. Although the heteropatriarchal, masculinist construction of (British) men as physically and mentally strong, and (British) women as weak(er) was dominant, and often criticized as such, British society held that UK women had it better than their European counterparts. In 1970, a time when travel abroad was still aspirational for the British middle class, German women were represented as docile and repressed: 'German girls in England are changing their apron strings for G-strings,' ran a story in *Daily Express*.³⁷ A decade later, the same newspaper suggested that having women in top leadership roles – Thatcher in Downing Street, Elizabeth II in Buckingham Palace – was at once a monument to the country's exceptional progress and progressiveness and a signpost to future achievements: 'only when we have a true representation of women MPs will Westminster have a true connection with the nation – and Britain a real democracy'.³⁸

The sense of British superiority vis-à-vis the continent was also rooted in the quality of its 'social' and 'liberal' responses to a world altered by advanced industrial capitalism and by new technologies. The National Insurance Act of 1946, the history textbooks explained, borrowed from German social legislation introduced in the Bismarck years. However, it was Labour and Conservative governments who together built an exemplary model of the welfare state, with the National Health Service as its centerpiece. '[T]he NHS was much admired in western Europe,' said one history textbook from 2010. Another, from the same year, elaborated further: 'In Britain today, we take it for granted that the state pays for health care, education, social services, unemployment benefits and many other services for whoever needs them'.³⁹

Between the elites and masses, the latter were far more distanced from the continent. Take two examples from 1990, a year in which Wallace drafted his essay. In one scene of the movie *Shirley Valentine*, the eponymous heroine finds herself at a seaside café in Greece trying to change its menu to include 'eggs and chips' as a way of catering to British tourists and their conservative tastes. As for the French, the British had every reason to be wary of them, as one letter to the *Daily Mirror* explained:

It's typical of the underhand French to hang back from the Iraqi confrontation – especially since the British are involved. We received no thanks for freeing France in 1944 and we have little to

³⁷ 15 February 1960, in MIC: UK 1960, p. 11 That said, *some* German women were cold-blooded killers – see Irma in the 1970 blockbuster *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* and Ingrid in the 1980 bestseller *Wild Justice*. Raw counts of identity categories coded by MIC researchers show that, between the two, the German Other was marginally more significant until 1980. The most significant overall were the US and, before 1990, 'Soviet Russia'.

³⁸ 15 April 1980, in MIC: UK 1980, p. 9.

³⁹ Quotes, respectively, are from Collier and Rowe, *AQA History AS: Unit 1 Britain* (2008), and Walsh, *GCSE Modern World History* (2001), p. 51, cited in MIC: UK 2010, p. 6.

thank them for over the Falklands War, in which French missiles took many British lives. French self-interest is again served by keeping out of the Gulf trouble, since they supply Iraq with weapons.⁴⁰

Importantly for what would later become known as British 'Euroscepticism', the European integration process was commonly described and understood as 'French-led'.⁴¹ This was the case in 1970 and 1980, when British society was only beginning to pay attention to the Common Market, but especially after 2000, when the New Labour government expressed interest in the common currency, the euro. Indeed, the very idea of European integration seemed to clash with the British tradition of 'parliamentary sovereignty.' We see this in both elite and mass discourses: however critical the reactions to the lack of legitimate democratic power *in London* – from women, from 'the Celtic fringe', from young Britons – , they followed a familiar script, unlike whatever it is that went on in *in Brussels*.

Maintaining 'Western unity' was paramount in all years surveyed. 'We simply cannot afford great fissures in the Western Alliance over Iran, or over Afghanistan,' said one letter published in *Daily Express* in 1980.⁴² Yet it was clear that Britain's closest friends and ally was 'America', not 'Europe'. We see this in both elite and mass discourse. In the James Bond franchise, and also in the thrillers by both Frederick Forsyth and Wilbur Smith, it comes as no surprise to anyone that the British Secret Service and the US agencies would work closely together to defeat various miscreants. Similarly unsurprising is the closeness of parts of what Churchill used to call 'the English-speaking world.' For example, *Force 10 from Navarone* and *Battle of Britain*, two World War II texts consumed *en masse* in 1970, each feature an 'old Commonwealth' protagonist (a white New Zealander and a white Canadian, respectively).

The British Empire/Commonwealth lost salience across the decades. Although the successive stages of mid-twentieth century British imperial withdrawal, from Suez to East to Suez, prompted various types intra-elite and elite-mass splits, usually along the Conservative-Labour divide, we see in MIC analyses a basic agreement that 'we' always let 'our Empire' go without fuss, responsibly and even graciously. A 1960 *Daily Express* op-ed on Cyprus, for example, concluded that '[t]he Greeks and Turks on the island would long ago have torn each other to pieces if British soldiers had not kept them apart'.⁴³ However, apartheid South Africa was subject to a vertical disagreement. Whereas the political leadership talked about embargo and expulsion from the Commonwealth, the masses worried about '700,000 loyal white people who voted for the monarchy and share our traditions and ideals'.⁴⁴

Together, MIC findings at once confirm and to some extent complicate Wallace's thesis. To begin with, we see a remarkable consistency in elite discourses over time. As the passage of time

⁴⁰ 15 August 1990, in MIC: UK 1990, p. 18.

⁴¹ Euroscepticism is a catch-all term for a continuum of negative framings of the EU. See Simon Usherwood, Nick Startin and Simona Guerra (eds.), 'Confronting Euroscepticism', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 51: 1, 2013.

⁴² Letter from 15 April 1980, cited in MIC: UK 1980, p. 14.

⁴³ *Daily Express*, 15 August 1960; MIC: UK 1960, p. 12.

⁴⁴ *Daily Express*, 15 October 1960, letter, in MIC: UK 1960, p. 13. Eventually the masses would agree that the future for South Africa lied in a peaceful transition to 'non-racial democracy', as the Queen's Speech put it in 1990.

disrupted economic and other realities at home and abroad, some of ideas about the state and nation, about parliamentary sovereignty, and about Europe were reworked, but never radically so. For example, following devolution, English exceptionalism morphed into British exceptionalism – pride in Britain’s democratic adaptability inspired expressions of confidence that the British people and nations would find a way to build a better union-state. Next, we see ‘Anglo-Saxon’ self-conceptions as standing apart from elite-mass disagreement on the economy. In 1950 and 1960, the elite and masses had different ideas about the balance and integration of the capitalist and socialist – or, rather, social democratic – elements in British society. However, this debate did not translate into foreign policy. Prime Ministers Attlee and Harold Macmillan agreed: ‘There is no question where Britain stands here. Britain stands with the West.’⁴⁵

Consider also the elite-mass split on ‘national decline’. Though present in all years in various forms at both elite and mass levels, this identity category was most systematically repeated and reworked in 1970 and 1980, when the nation’s industrial economy and its masculine ideals—strength, pride, assertiveness, and independence—came under attack, and after 2010, when the government’s ‘austerity’ rubbed salt into the wounds caused by the financial crisis and MPs’ expenses scandal. In each case, vertical disagreement was palpable, with the masses expressing reluctance to jettison the welfare state in exchange for elite promises of ‘reform.’⁴⁶

This split received full-blown discursive expression in the Blair years and after, which is when ‘ordinary people’ turned against politicians and their Macmillan-styled claims that collective British life was ‘now better than ever before.’⁴⁷ This mass yearning for a return to the ‘good’ postwar years was notably directed inwards, meaning at good jobs at decent wages, good housing and infrastructure, solidarity and unity, and a more beautiful country (the dominant aesthetic representation still being southern counties of England).

Unsurprisingly, in longing for the good old ‘national UK’, the masses cast a suspicious eye on the EU. They also constructed empire with a great deal of ‘forgetfulness’, or selective myopia. *The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, the second most-watched UK film in 2015, is set in Jaipur, where a group of British retirees is shown to be more interested in a well-off American visitor than in Indian politics. As I suggest next, these findings tell us that rather than being abandoned, ‘Anglo-Saxon’ ideas were renegotiated in the twenty first century, implying foreign policy continuity through change.

⁴⁵ Macmillan’s Scarborough Speech, 15 October 1960. MIC UK 1960, p. 9.

⁴⁶ In contrast to selective rule-enforcement that characterized the 2008 financial crisis and its aftermath, the capitalism of tax cuts that Thatcher introduced had fans across the elite-mass divide. See, for example, letters to newspapers in 1980 attacking the NHS for ‘low quality service provision’ or the action hero protagonist of Smith’s *Wild Justice* who pauses to mock European income tax rates: ‘A millionaire Italian living in his own country had to be the earth’s most endangered species after the blue whale.’ MIC: UK 1980, p. 5, 17.

⁴⁷ According to the vast majority of texts coded as elite-oriented, the British masses were not supposed to think of themselves as particularly immiserated, certainly not in comparison to the masses elsewhere.

Brexit and After

Whereas Wallace framed British foreign policy orientations exclusively in terms of elite beliefs and debates, this study situated them in everyday discourses of national identity circulating in society as a whole. The results show that Wallace's analysis was basically correct: 'Anglo-Saxon' ideas were indeed dominant. However, these ideas circulated not only or primarily among the ruling elites but were in fact vertically shared with the masses as well. No less important, 'Anglo-Saxon' ideas observable not only in the constitution of hegemonic discourses, but also in some discursive systems through which elites and/or masses sought to project alternative ideas about what it meant to be British.

These findings put elite-centric analysis of foreign policy in a new light. Analyzing 'Europe' in the discourses of UK, German, and French political elites since the 1950s, Martin Marcussen *et al* give further credence to Wallace's thesis, arguing that neither 'French exceptionalism' nor 'Germanness' ever achieved the levels of discursive domination comparable to what they call – in a nod to Wallace – 'Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism'.⁴⁸ "Europe' simply does not resonate well with identity constructions deeply embedded in national political institutions and in political culture', the authors conclude.⁴⁹ Following the present study, we should be reluctant to theorize 'resonance' only at this level. Instead, we might say that a whole system of 'Anglo-Saxon' discourses approximating cultural hegemony in Gramscian terms all but guaranteed the reproduction of the existing order in an automatic way. Those benefiting from the structures of hegemony could therefore count on 'society' to support them in maintaining the status quo.

Whatever our theoretical and analytical focus, it appears that the idea of Brexit resonated with the British. As European integration accelerated since the late 1980s, with the EU claiming more and more powers for itself, scores of politicians across member states found new reasons to express second thoughts about 'Brussels' and to fight for national opt-outs on key parts of EU legislation. In the UK, this was especially consequential, given that its elites and masses already 'knew' that national sovereignty must be protected to the utmost. In fact, the passage of time only solidified British Euroscepticism in a sense that 'parliamentary sovereignty' and other 'Anglo-Saxon' commonplaces become more prominent in the identity discourses, even as British history and memory became noticeably less English amidst collective nostalgia for temporally marked 'postwar' selves. Little wonder, then, that in 2015 'European' voices had so much difficulty defending UK membership. One first had to acknowledge the bloc's fundamental shortcomings ('Why I'll be voting to stay in the comic, wasteful, inefficient mess known as the EU'), and then argue that Britain was indispensable to it ('a vital partner who is both effective and influential in so many important international spheres', 'one of the best-performing countries,' 'one of [the EU's] most dynamic and economically advanced members').⁵⁰ Either way, 'Europe' was 'over there'.

At this point, critics of Hall and Hallian approaches would jump in to say that any overly culturalist and discursive theoretical framework undermines the analytical power and critical

⁴⁸ Marcussen et al, 'Constructing Europe?'

⁴⁹ Marcussen et al, 'Constructing Europe?', p. 626.

⁵⁰ *Daily Mail*, June 15, 2015, p. 14, and *The Guardian*, op-ed, 15 May 2015. MIC: UK 2015, p. 9, 6.

commitments of scholarship on political economy. This is a point Hall always readily recognized, which is why he insisted on tracing the processes through which certain ideas connect with a particular system of power. Accordingly, rather than an already existing script, British Euroskepticism is better seen as emerging from a mutually reinforcing relationship between ‘Anglo-Saxon’ discourses on one hand and assorted ‘situated agents’ in politics and newsmedia on the other.⁵¹ Britain’s ‘European’ politicians were caught up in this circle themselves, usually for electoral purposes. This process of hegemonic domination arguably paved the road to UK departure from the EU: ‘Asking the people to accept the logic of Eurosceptic discourse but vote to Remain was a strange contract: some might say counter-intuitive bordering on the illogical’.⁵²

Whatever one’s position on theory, the findings affirm that the presence of a sustained desire for close and friendly relations with the US. Some constructivists call this process ‘vicarious identification’ – the special relationship remained special (only) because it buttressed the UK’s sense of self, security, and status in world politics.⁵³ Deeply habitualized, the construction of the US as an extension of Self centered on the hot and cold wars of the twentieth century. The moment the Cold War became nuclear, and especially after the Suez Crisis, the British society came to a firm vertical agreement that London had to cede sovereignty to Washington in order to help defend ‘the West.’ This was indeed logical. ‘Everyone’ agreed that Britain was no superpower, and that the two nations were united by many traits– language, cultural and ‘civilizational’ values, shared memories, liberal politics and economies, family and business ties, and more. The same logic of extended selfhood also sometimes applied to the democracies of the ‘old’, a.k.a. ‘white’ Commonwealth – Australia, Canada, and New Zealand.

Fast forward to the Brexit debate, and we might see how these identifications might have influenced those who argued that Britain should forget the EU and deepen trade and other ties with the Anglosphere. Following Wallace’s thesis, one might be inclined to dismiss such ideas as myths that a segment of the British elite resuscitated for specific political purposes. Nevertheless, the findings of the present study, as well as some recent surveys of British attitudes towards the UK’s international priorities, strongly suggest that the English public remains deeply connected to ‘the English-speaking world,’ including in the context of ‘global power’ foreign policy.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Oliver Daddow, ‘The UK Media and ‘Europe’: From Permissive Consensus to Destructive Dissent’, *International Affairs* 88: 6, 2012, pp. 1219-1236.

⁵² Oliver Daddow, ‘Brexit and British exceptionalism: the impossible challenge for Remainers’, LSE Brexit Blog, 10 April 2018: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2018/04/10/brexit-and-british-exceptionalism-the-impossible-challenge-for-remainers/>

⁵³ Christopher S. Browning, Pertti Joenniemi, and Brent J. Steele, *Vicarious Identity in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), Ch. 4. Compare this to what historian David Reynolds terms ‘the policy of power by proxy.’ Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 177-8.

⁵⁴ On Chatham House-You Gov surveys, see Robin Niblett, ‘Global Britain’, p. 27-8; on the Future of England Survey, see Ailsa Henderson and Richard Wyn Jones, *Englishness: The Political Force Transforming Britain* (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 2021), Ch. 4; and on expansive English nationalist imagination, see Ben Wellings, *English Nationalism, Brexit and the Anglosphere*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009, esp. Chs. 5 and 7.

The concept of vicarious identification reminds us that a Hallsian perspective invites us to pause over 'outside' influences on the discursive and cultural contexts within which representations of national interests take places.⁵⁵ Consider UK national interest-formation in the wake of the aforementioned Suez Crisis. In contrast to the fall-out between the US and France, that between the US and the UK was relatively short-lived. President Eisenhower and Prime Minister Macmillan travelled to Bermuda in March 1957 to restore the special relationship, and, a few months later, Queen Elizabeth II and her husband, Prince Philip, made their first state visit to the US. By 1958, a joint 'peacekeeping' intervention in Jordan and Lebanon signalled a return to the 'old normal.' This is how the American diplomat Henry Kissinger described it in his Chatham House speech a quarter century later:

The wartime habit of intimate, informal collaboration thus became a permanent practice, obviously because it was valuable to both sides. The ease and informality of the Anglo-American partnership has been a source of wonder—and no little resentment—to third countries. Our postwar diplomatic history is littered with Anglo-American 'arrangements' and 'understandings', sometimes on crucial issues, never put into formal documents.⁵⁶

From this observation it follows that one cannot fully analyze 'the complicity of the British masses' in the production and reproduction of 'Anglo-Saxon' foreign policy, let alone 'vicarious identification with the US', without at least some attention to what in good Hallsian fashion we might call the diasporic, transnational and international dimensions of 'national-popular.'

We might conceptualize these dimensions relationally, as an extensive series of feedback loops, whereby the ideas, institutions, and practices of UK-US 'specialness' are at once cultivated through multiple channels of contact between and across the two countries *and* consistently fed into everyday discourses of British national identity. We can then distil some hypotheses about the effects of these processes. If Americans were overwhelmingly represented as close 'friends' and 'allies' – or, as in some best-selling spy novels and their movie adaptations, 'cousins' –, then it made sense to support a foreign policy that minimizes problems of communication and trust and maximizes what Kissinger calls 'arrangements' and 'understandings'. It even made sense to stick to a policy of 'Anglobal power' in the service of the so-called liberal international order. With 'our' powerful cousins still in charge, 'we' could continue to sit, if not at the top of the table, as per most scripts in the James Bond franchise, then at least next to the very top, as in much of the rest of Bond-like spy thriller fiction. It is no stretch to

⁵⁵ Role-theoretic IR literature is helpful in this regard. See, *inter alia*, Gaskarth, 'Strategizing'; David McCourt, *Britain and World Power since 1945: Constructing a Nation's Role in International Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014); and Kai Oppermann, Ryan K. Beasley and Juliet Kaarbo, 'British Foreign Policy after Brexit: Losing Europe and Finding a Role', *International Relations* 34:2, 2020, pp. 133–156.

⁵⁶ Kissinger, 'Reflections on a Partnership: British and American Attitudes to Postwar Foreign Policy', May 10, 1982 speech to the Royal Institute of International Affairs, in commemoration of the Bicentenary of the Office of the Foreign Secretary. Available http://www.larouchepub.com/other/2002/2901_kissinger.html. Also see Kissinger, *The White House Years* (New York: Little Brown and Co., 1979), p. 90. On the (geo)political effects of such diplomatic habits, see Kristin Haugevik, *Special Relationships in World Politics: Inter-State Friendship and Diplomacy after the Second World War* (London: Routledge, 2018). For a glimpse into the scholarship on the cultural taproots of the special relationship, see Robert Hendershot and Steve Marsh, eds. *Culture Matters: Anglo-American Relations and the Intangibles of 'Specialness'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

suggest that the latter script was all too familiar to all postwar UK prime ministers. This includes the aforementioned Heath, too: however strong his 'pro-Europe' inclinations were, they were never as strong as his determination to preserve the UK's 'historical and global role: contributing to an Atlantic partnership essential for a stable world order.'⁵⁷

Wise to the power of 'Anglo-Saxon' vicariousness, Wallace referred to the American 'cousins' ironically, arguing that the UK should instead position itself as a 'bridge between Europe and the rest of the developed world,' and not 'merely' as a transatlantic bridge.⁵⁸ As far as Chatham House opinion goes, neither Brexit nor other upheavals have significantly diminished Wallace's argument. Robin Niblett, the institute's present director, envisions the UK as a global problem-solver.⁵⁹ Much like Wallace before him, Niblett believes this role hinges not 'merely' on greater alignment with Britain's European allies, but on greater investment in assorted 'soft power' resources, too. Mobilizing said resources – Wallace defined them as 'education, communication, cultural tradition, and innovation' – in turn requires an open, inclusive, and forward-looking Britain.⁶⁰ In Wallace's time at Chatham House, this meant abandoning Norman Tebitt's 'cricket test' and 'integrat[ing] the rising generation of black British into our national community'.⁶¹ These days, it means urging the Johnson government to rethink its rhetoric on the history and memory of Empire.⁶²

The present analysis questions the idea that elites can 'service' British national identity in this manner, not least for the purpose of improving Britain's global problem-solving capacity. The kind of cognitive and affective break from the dominant national identity discourse that Wallace advocated demanded an unprecedented collective public response. Yet, even if such a wholesale identity shift were to take place, there is no guarantee that 'Europeans' would get a foreign policy they want. We have arguably already seen this with Brexit, where a rare opportunity to introduce radical foreign policy reforms quickly gave way to the stuff and substance of 'Anglo-Saxonism' – see under the UK-US trade deal, Five Eyes 'policy expansion,' 'CANZUK', and the UK's own Indo-Pacific 'pivot' that is expected to be detailed in the coming 2021 Integrated Review.⁶³

⁵⁷ Henry Kissinger, Edward Heath International Lecture, October 24, 2016, London

<https://www.henryakissinger.com/speeches/edward-heath-international-lecture-by-henry-a-kissinger/>

⁵⁸ Wallace, 'Foreign Policy', p. 78

⁵⁹ Niblett, 'Global Britain'.

⁶⁰ Wallace, 'Foreign Policy', p. 79; Niblett, 'Global Britain', p. 17-8.

⁶¹ Wallace, 'Foreign Policy', p. 79. Introduced by the Conservative politician Norman Tebbit in 1990, the test was meant to judge immigrants, and descendants of immigrants, according to whether they 'still' supported the national cricket team of 'the old country'. The test was met with much criticism and derision, some coming from Stuart Hall himself. McCrone and Frank Bechhofer, *Understanding National Identity*, p. 151.

⁶² Niblett, 'Global Britain', p. 6.

⁶³ For further context, see Tara McCormack, 'When it comes to defence, Britain is trapped in a Cold War mindset,' LSE Brexit Blog, 2 July 2018 <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2018/07/02/when-it-comes-to-defence-britain-is-trapped-in-a-cold-war-mindset/>; Duncan Bell and Srdjan Vucetic, 'Brexit, CANZUK, and the Legacy of Empire,' *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 21: 2 (2019), 367–382; Jack Holland. *Selling War and Peace: Syria and the Anglosphere* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), and Srdjan Vucetic, 'More than a Spy Alliance? The Five Eyes Today,' CIPS Working Paper No. 14 (2021) <https://www.cips-cepi.ca/more-than-a-spy-alliance-the-five-eyes-today/>

Are the days of the ‘European’ versus ‘Anglo-Saxon’ tug of war over? Putting Johnson’s foreign policy aside for a moment, we might agree that the British society of the ‘first post-imperial generation’ has the potential to abandon attempts bridge Europe with either the US or ‘the developed world’ and instead try something completely new – becoming ‘a follower and a leader of networks and peoples across the global North and South’, for example.⁶⁴ But what if the UK breaks up? What foreign policies might its successor states pursue – and with what sort of intra-elite and elite-mass (dis)agreements in tow?⁶⁵ Whatever the future holds, the dance between national identity and foreign policy will continue.

Conclusion

Thirty years ago, in the pages of this journal, Wallace made an argument for a fundamental reorientation of UK foreign policy, advocating a more European path against the twin pursuit of Atlanticism and capacities for global hard power projection. A first step to such change was ridding the British political elites of their tendency to play ‘the Anglo-Saxon’ tunes’ – a body of inflated, self-indulgent and self-serving myths about Britain and its place in the world that harken back to at least the Edwardian era.

This study has revisited Wallace’s thesis, albeit from a different theoretical perspective. Instead of framing British foreign policy orientations exclusively in terms of elite beliefs, as Wallace and many others have done, I situated them in everyday discourses of national identity circulating in society as a whole. Applying this framework to the available MIC data and analyses on Britishness, I discovered some remarkable continuities in what Wallace argued was a constitutive link between national identity and foreign policy. Certainly, the elites were prone to think of Britain in ‘Anglo-Saxon’ terms, always affirming and boosting the notion that the kingdom must continue to project power globally, across a wide range of issues. But the British masses in fact agreed with this. Some ‘Anglo-Saxon’ myths were shared throughout – that our democracy is exemplary, that our military is superb, or that our society is inclusive and open. Other elements were more vertically contested, particularly whenever the economy struggled. Overall, however, the elites and masses alike abided by the idea that the UK should not hesitate to solve global problems, in tandem with its ‘traditional friends and allies’.

Wallace’s observations seem apposite today as they were then – a global foreign policy was, and still is, came naturally to the British. A Hallsian might add that such foreign policy remains a key aspect of scaffolding in the historical process that sustains the British ruling elite.

⁶⁴ Tarak Barkawi and Shane Brighton, ‘Brown Britain: Post-Colonial Politics and Grand Strategy,’ *International Affairs* 89: 5 (2013), 1109–23. at p. 1111. Like Wallace, these two authors also emphasize the critical importance of sweeping education reform (p. 1123).

⁶⁵ McCourt, Britain, p. 177–8. Andrew M. Dorman, ‘More than a storm in a teacup: the defence and security implications of Scottish independence,’ *International Affairs* 90: 3, 2014, pp. 679–96. Tim Oliver, ‘An English foreign policy?’ LSE Brexit blog, 9 June 2017. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2017/06/09/english-foreign-policy-what-if-the-uk-were-to-break-up/>