

7. Globalisation

Following on from essay 5, which discussed “old British” (Celts and Anglo-Saxons), this essay will consider the “new British”, the people of more distant races and nations who have come to live on the islands. The theme of this essay is identity and it will ask how British people are adjusting to globalisation. It will cover the historical period that began in 1914, when tensions between Europe’s imperial powers finally broke, triggering a world-changing war.

The first half of the 20th century was marked by ideological conflict, social disintegration, unspeakable brutality and war. The second half was marked by an accelerating expansion of production and trade, a revolution in communications and the dissolution of national economies into one single world economy. All these things have profoundly affected human minds and identities.

Immigration

The development of the commercial-industrial economy in Britain (the first in the world) was significantly helped by immigration. In the 1650s, England’s brief republic allowed Jews to return after nearly 400 years of exclusion. Soon after, French Protestants, known as Huguenots, came as refugees. 40-50,000, including many skilled silk weavers settled in East London (Spitalfields). The population of London at the time was about 500,000, so that makes this immigration alone almost 10%.

Ever since English seafarers laid a network of trade across the world, people have moved in all directions along its threads. Many Indians for example, were employed as servants and labourers on ships. In 1660, a law was introduced to limit their numbers to no more than $\frac{1}{4}$ of a crew, no doubt prompted by British sailors facing wage depressing competition.

As Indians settled in Britain they gradually escaped heavy labouring work and branched out. The first Indian restaurant selling curry “The Hindoostane Coffee House” was opened in London in 1810. By around 1900, there were thought to have been 70,000 people from the region living in Britain, still only 0.02% of 38 million, which was the total population at the time.

Through the 18th century, when Britain led the lucrative transatlantic slave trade, most of the people taken from Africa went to America. A relatively small number came to Britain. The only estimate of numbers we have is 15,000 from the mid-18th century. There are some interesting accounts of their lives at this time, written by freed slaves living in London, such as those of Olaudah Equiano and Robert Wedderburn. After the abolition of slavery in 1807, still fewer came. Both before and after, their work was pretty much the same, mostly domestic service.

The 1840s saw a massive humanitarian disaster, and an inflow of refugees to Liverpool, Glasgow and East London. It was caused by the loss of potato crops in Ireland, and was made worse by ideological economic policies that blocked famine relief. Liverpool for example, settled 90,000 Irish people, about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the city’s population.

At least 140,000 Jewish refugees came from Russia in the decades of persecution that began in the 1880s. In the period covered by this essay, many more came, particularly in the 1930s, when around 90,000 fled the persecutions in Germany and Italy are believed to have come at this time. Although some moved on to the USA or Israel, or went back after the war, many settled. Although most Jewish people have fully into British society, some distinct religious communities exist, such as those in East and North West London.

The earliest recorded Chinese communities in Britain were in the port areas of Liverpool and East

London. They came from in or around Britain's colonial outpost of Hong Kong, on the South China coast. One incident in particular, illustrates the alienation of immigrant cultures in Britain, in the first half of the 20th century and the brazen racial outlook of some public bodies.

During the 2nd world war, Chinese men working on British Navy ships were paid less than British men doing the same job. After complaints and non-cooperation, the Navy conceded equal pay. Then, when the war ended, around 2,000 of these Chinese workers were transported to Hong Kong, on the pretence of a shortage of housing for returning soldiers in Liverpool. Without warning many of these men were separated from their wives and families and never saw them again.

After the 1st world war, the British Empire gradually broke down. The Anglophone countries were granted "home rule" and equal status from 1926. After the 2nd world war, liberation movements grew everywhere. Full independence was conceded to India in 1947, and then to all the other colonies, with Swaziland, the last significant African territory, becoming independent in 1966. Immigrants, from many of these places came to Britain, creating cosmopolitan cities, especially the Capital. In 1968, around 15% of the population of London was born outside Britain.

As Britain retreated from empire, it turned toward Europe. From trade and commercial treaties, Europe gradually evolved toward greater union, culminating in the formation of the EU in 1994. Free movement was allowed, and perhaps because of its global language, Britain became the most popular destination for mobile Europeans. Currently 33% of Londoners were born outside Britain. Integration and immigration were the main issues that lead to the 2017 decision to leave the EU.

Being British and being Global

Debates over the merits of the British Empire are still alive. Liberation movements have naturally stressed its condescending, oppressive and exploitative character. Now there seems to be a widespread consensus amongst commentators and historians that the Empire was unjust, occasionally brutal and sustained a systemic economic privilege for its mother country.

Nevertheless, it has been pointed out that many of the pioneers of the Empire were liberal and humanitarian. Lord William Bentick for example, was an Imperial officer in India in the 1820s, who inspired the campaign to outlaw "Suttee", the burning of a widow on the funeral pyre of her husband.

It is wrong to judge historical phenomena like Empires, simply as good or bad. The British Empire was the vehicle that carried the new industrial-commercial system to the corners of the world, and reflects the vices and virtues of that system. Just as the Roman Empire brought money to Britain, the British Empire brought an advanced money system to the rest of the world. Money stimulates the division of tasks and increases productivity; it nurtures personal independence and breaks down old ties of mutual obligation. Money systems also mix together people and ideas from different races and cultures.

In the 2nd half of the 20th century, container shipping, air transport, oil pipelines and advanced telecommunications have broken down the barriers between different economies and nations. The European model of imperial centralism, succumbed to the American model, of independent states bound together by finance. Now, isolation is fatal. A single, global economy is forming.

Thanks to its history, Britain has a role in this process disproportionate to its size. It is a relatively wealthy country, with a strong industrial base and a powerful financial sector. Despite being a small country (22nd of 196, 0.86% of the world's population), it is the world's 5th largest producer (by GDP, or 9th with GDP adjusted for purchasing power).

Because of its relative wealth and the reach of its language, Britain has become a significant cultural exporter. Its news and entertainment products are ubiquitous, while its scientists and academics are disproportionately prominent. This special position means that aspects of British culture, shaped by the history covered in these essays, will have a significant effect on the global culture taking shape around us.

National and racial feelings are alive in Britain, and have been evident in unwelcome reactions to immigration throughout history. Nevertheless, particularly since the experiences of the first half of the 20th century, political expressions of these feelings have been weak. Europe's recent centrifugal tendencies were reflected in the decision to leave the EU. Yet it is worth noting that the nationalist party that rose to reflect this mood (UKIP) never got more than 13% popular support.

These centrifugal tendencies have also been expressed within Britain itself, for example in the rise of Scottish nationalism and the call for independence. It is worth noting however, that even these nationalists talk of “independence within Europe”. Today, states, small or large, are locked into agreements enforced by supranational agencies. Global production, trade and finance are increasingly making borders irrelevant. Issues of nation are becoming less like freedom struggles and more like administrative restructuring.

Global consciousness; breaking down prejudices, chauvinism and national stereotypes, is the most striking phenomenon of the late 20th century. At the end of the period covered in these essays, there is light at the end of the tunnel. Tribal and national loyalties, which have fuelled so many of the worst horrors of the past, are dissolving, as more and more people identify with humanity as a whole. The age of national histories is coming to an end.

The world at the beginning of the 20th century

About 3 million British people went to the United States in the 19th century, leaving about 38 million at home. Likewise, as many as 5 million Germans and 1½ million Scandinavians, went. The effect was a gradual westward shift in the heart of the world economy.

Most of these migrants were farmers, moving ever further inland where there was no aristocracy to tax them. They produced for the market, and supplied the industrialising cities. Despite its talk of free trade, Britain wanted its colonies to supply it with commodities but not compete in manufacturing. This is shown by the fact that it was illegal to take plans of machines to the colonies.

Nevertheless, it was possible to see machines, memorise how they worked and reproduce them. This happened many times as people travelled frequently between the United States and Britain. Famously, Francis Cabot Lowell, deliberately memorised the construction of a textile mill and built one in Boston in the USA in 1812.

It was at this time that the US government adopted a policy to reduce its dependence on Britain. It was called the “American system” and involved high import tariffs, a national bank lending to the government, and subsidies for road and canal building. Although the official policy didn't last long, the system became a norm that helped the economy grow until the American Civil War.

After that war, which ran from 1861-1865, there was a period of instability culminating in the recession of 1873. Then the United States entered what became known as its “Gilded Age”. In this period, agricultural production went up more than 3 times, coal production, which shows the consumption rate of industry, went up 9 times, and railways, which show the interconnectedness of

industry, up 6 times. By the end of the century, productivity in the United States overtook Britain.

In Japan, the Meiji Emperor, who reigned from 1868-1912, carried out a concerted plan of industrialisation. It involved sending people to Europe and the USA, and bringing experts back, something like 3000 in total. Like the American system it also involved trade barriers, centralised finance and state-sponsored infrastructure building. The same strategy was briefly adopted in China, in the so-called “self-strengthening” movement, but was obstructed by powerful aristocrats.

Meanwhile, realising the danger of German expansion, the British turned to their old strategy of making sure no European state could get too powerful. Since the 1890's, Britain and France had established an alliance, formalised in treaties from 1904 known as the “entente cordiale”. It was then expanded into the “Triple entente”, to include Russia, effectively surrounding Germany.

Germany led its own “triple alliance” with the Austro-Hungarian Empire (which ruled over the Slavic countries of the Balkans) and the Turkish Empire (which ruled over the Arab countries of the Middle East). There was a permanent state of tension between these blocs, as each state fixated on its own prosperity and security, while trying to undermine the others.

Oil, Nationalism and the 1st World War.

One strategy to undermine a rival was to encourage national revolt in its colonies. The famous British poet-adventurer T.E Lawrence, for example, first worked as an archaeologist in the area that is now Eastern Syria. Then in January of 1914, he was secretly employed by the British Intelligence service to encourage and channel British support to Arab nationalists. He later wrote his adventures into a famous book called “The Seven Pillars of Wisdom” and became known in popular British culture as “Lawrence of Arabia”.

Whether or not there were British agents working amongst any other national minorities, we don't know. Their operations were a secret. It is an undisputed fact however, that on 28th June 1914, the tension between the European empires finally broke, and within two months spiralled into war. The trigger was the assassination of Arch-Duke Ferdinand of Austria by Serbian nationalists.

In 1914, the Austro-Hungarian Empire ruled over the area known as Bosnia-Herzegovina, which has an ethnically mixed population. Squeezed between the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its ally, the Turkish Empire, was the small state of Serbia. Some Serbians living in Bosnia-Herzegovina, such as a group called the “Black Hand”, wanted the area to break from the empire and join their neighbouring homeland. Undoubtedly some Austro-Hungarian imperialists saw no point in the Serbian state at all.

The Arch-Duke was inspecting troops and opening museums in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, when he was attacked and killed. The Black Hand claimed responsibility. The Austro-Hungarians blamed the Serbian state, which denied involvement and tried to defuse the situation. The terrorist attack however provided the perfect excuse for invasion. When Russia moved to defend Serbia, Germany joined in to support its ally. It declared war on Russia, and for good measure, on France.

It was at this point that Britain became involved. France and Germany were separated by the neutral state of Belgium, which was a “buffer state”, that is, one preserved by greater powers to keep rivals apart. The British government declared that it would defend the state of Belgium. So when German forces occupied Belgium to attack France, Britain declared war. It was for this reason that Britain is said to have fought in defence of tiny Belgium.

There were however, much bigger things at stake. For example, it was around this time that technological developments were increasing the use of oil for industrial and military purposes. Engine development had been happening gradually throughout the 19th century. As the 20th century began, the world was on the verge of making viable road vehicles.

The engineers who gave their names to famous products and companies were doing their best work in this period. In 1892 for example, Rudolph Diesel built a working engine using compression and ignition. In 1896, Karl Benz built an engine that was smooth and compact, making the age of the road vehicle imminent. Both these engineers were German, and it seems that Germany was just ahead in this development race.

It became increasingly clear that oil would become an important commodity in the future. A British-Australian businessman and prospector, William Knox D'arcy, while drilling for oil in Persia (which is now called Iran), came very close to bankruptcy before British government support helped him find oil there in 1908. The following year the Anglo-Persian Oil Company was created.

The year 1911 is when we first hear of the young Winston Churchill. As Lord of the Admiralty (the Government's man in the leadership of the Navy) he pushed for bigger, heavier guns on British warships. This required bigger ships, and that meant they would be slower and fatally vulnerable, unless they converted from coal to oil-burning engines. In June 1914, the British government bought a controlling interest in Anglo-Persian Oil, making William Knox D'arcy a very rich man. Later it became British Petroleum (BP).

Meanwhile, the Turkish government was also looking for oil in the Arab countries. The Turkish Petroleum Company was established with heavy investment in 1912, opening up exploration in what is now Iraq. Germany had, since 1903, been building a railway across its ally's territory to Baghdad. In June 1914, it was somewhere approaching Aleppo, about 960kms from its intended terminus. The first battle of the First World War was a long way from Sarajevo. It was in Basra, just 200km south of Baghdad.

Fascism

The 1st World War was horrific, psychologically transformative and it did not end decisively. In October 1917, a revolution in Russia brought a new government that immediately made peace. Soon after, a revolution in Germany broke up its army. The United States joined in, tipping the balance. The Austro-Hungarian and the Turkish empires were broken up by British, French and Americans drawing lines on maps.

Significantly, the British took over Palestine, which had been Turkish controlled, but the people were Arabs. It was also regarded as their historic homeland by the Jews, and some British Jews, now easily able to travel there, went and settled. Two decades later, there were 300,000 Jews in a land of just over 1 million Arabs. Their rival claims for the territory became permanent sources of violence and instability.

The bigger problem however, was in Europe. The revolutionary spirit of 1917 had spread everywhere. In Italy for example, militant workers took control of several cities, while the nation as a whole, still overwhelmingly rural, remained religiously and politically conservative. When the army took over in 1922 it tried to neutralise the threat of revolution with a cultural campaign based on a particular moral philosophy. Humans they said, don't have natural rights, they should learn their place in society, they should obey their masters and there should be no organisation except the state. This was the ideology of "Fascism".

In Germany, the British, French and Americans had a dilemma. Should they occupy the country, risking provoking the revolutionary people against them, or should they leave it alone, risking its recovery as an imperial threat? They chose a compromise that turned out to be the worst of both. International investment flowed in and interest flowed out. The economy was stimulated just enough to pay its war “reparations”, but not enough to provide work and security for its people. Foreign domination was obvious to the Germans, and some units of its wartime conscript army formed nationalist militias with no occupying army to stop them.

The war had bankrupted the German state, yet because of the danger of revolution the government could not afford to impose new taxes. Instead it kept printing and spending money. At the same time, there was an imbalance in the world economy. German companies were exporting in order to pay their debts to international financial institutions. Production for domestic consumption was low, while the money supply was high. The effect was “hyperinflation”. In the last six months of 1922, prices increased fifteen times. By the end of 1923, they had multiplied millions of times. When people got hold of banknotes they had only minutes to spend them before they became worthless.

As the economy broke down, the appeal and confidence of the nationalist militias grew stronger. They copied the Italian Fascists, and although their first coup failed, they survived to rebuild. Paid by employers to break up strikes and attack workers' organisations, they recruited from the unemployed, who they fed and clothed. Then they joined forces into a relatively wealthy, business-backed Fascist party, called the National Socialists, or “Nazis”.

The Nazis were anti-Semitic, that is to say, they encouraged hatred of Jewish people. They blamed Jews for losing the war, for the financial crisis and said that they were a foreign nation sabotaging Germany from within. This was an effective psychological trick, giving the people someone to blame for their problems while identifying the “out-group” and strengthening the “in-group”.

There were so many strikes, and so much unemployment, as well as endless campaigning and political instability, that life in Germany became increasingly hard and insecure. Faith in democracy collapsed, and the people were prepared to accept anyone who could end the chaos. That's what lay behind the election of 1933.

Although the Nazis were a minority in Parliament, they managed to get their leader, Adolf Hitler into power. In the twelve years between then and their final defeat in 1945, they led over 7 million Germans to death in a futile war. Tens of millions died, including an incredible 27 million citizens of the Soviet Union.

Even more disturbing was what happened inside Germany itself. Anyone who stood in the way of its absolute power or didn't conform to its perverse idea of normality, was killed: political opponents, homosexuals, people with learning disabilities, Freemasons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Roma, etc. About 7 million people were killed, of which around 6 million were Jews.

All of these people were subject to slave labour, medical experiments, inhuman internment and ultimately, to mass, industrially organised execution. It's hard to imagine that the world could get as bad as this, and it was only 80 years ago. It is as if all of the horrors of history climaxed in the early 20th century.

Imperialism and war

Step back to 1914 and imagine you are a young British man. You have been brought up to believe that you come from a nation of Empire builders. You regularly sing “Rule Britannia, Britannia rules the waves. Britons never shall be slaves”. The Empire not only protects you from being enslaved, it

is also a civilising force in the world. It brings modern production, modern attitudes and sound morality, to the world.

The stories you read as a child were of brave, British adventurers going to far off lands, conquering the wild, defeating savages and bringing peace to warring, tribal, primitive people. You wanted to be part of the project, but you were too young. Now suddenly there is a foreign state threatening to attack your heroes and steal what they have built. It even threatens to unite the European continent and isolate Britain. What should you do?

The government is urging you to sign up for the army. Your friends are joining. In the mood of the moment, nearly ½ million (of 5½ million men of fighting age) joined the British army in the recorded two month period when the war started. Many were workplace “pals”. Celebrity recruiters were used to encourage groups of workers to sign up together. The peer pressure, that is to say, the feeling of not wanting to let down your “pals”, worked to encourage mass recruitment.

The war however, turned out to be a long way from imperial adventure. Modern weapons, including long range mortars, warships, aeroplanes and tanks, made the enemy invisible. In the wars of the past, when you came face to face with the enemy, there was a sense that your fate was in your hands. Now, killing was remote and victims were random.

It was important to stay out of the enemy's sight, so land wars involved a lot of digging. You could dig trenches and move closer to your enemy, but at some point you would have to get out and fight. Modern mines, grenades and automatic rifles, meant that going “over the top” as it was called, was often suicidal. So trench warfare became a kind of stalemate, with both sides waiting for the other to advance.

The stalemate had a bizarre effect in the Christmas of 1914. Soldiers on both sides stopped firing and walked across what was called “no man's land” into each others' trenches. Drinks and cigarettes were shared, games were played, including football in no man's land. There are reports of drunken soldiers falling asleep and waking up in the wrong trench, apologising and leaving. These are the earliest signs of how the world was changing. The fear of foreigners that sustained so many wars of the past, was beginning to fade.

It must have terrified the Army Officers, who made sure it never happen again. The stalemate however, continued year after year, and conditions in the trenches deteriorated into malnutrition and sickness. In 1916, the government replenished the ranks by conscripting 2¼ million men. They started with unmarried men aged 18-40, not in essential services. Then gradually extended it to all men up to the age of 51. By the end of the war 46% of British soldiers were conscripts.

The stalemate became a war of attrition, that is to say, it kept going until one side ran out of resources. Germany broke first and descended into a brief revolutionary civil war. In Britain, the enemy was disease. 228,000 people were killed by a smallpox epidemic, almost certainly brought back by soldiers returning from four years in the unhygienic conditions of the trenches.

The psychological impact of the war was enormous. Even during it, it had been described as “the war to end all wars”, not only referring to its aim, but to its effect on people's minds. The age old ideas of duty, honour and glory sounded increasingly absurd. For many, war became something to be avoided at all cost. Pacifism grew strong.

On November 11th 1919, one year after the war ended, at a banquet to honour the French President at Buckingham Palace, a ceremony of remembrance was added. This was later taken up around the country. To this day, poppies are worn, wreaths are laid at monuments, and at the moment when the

guns stopped, at 11am on November 11th, a one minutes silence is held.

Ideology and war

It is not surprising that this psychological change would have political effects. Britain between the wars was marked by big social conflicts. The 1920s were a mixture of working class radicalism and economic optimism. The 1930s were a time of depression and pessimism.

As soon as the war ended, the Liberal Prime Minister, Lloyd George, called an election and won. He was a popular war leader who now promised “a land fit for heroes”. Significantly, this was the first election in which women, of 30 years or older, were allowed to vote. This had come after decades of campaigning by the “suffragettes”.

The Labour Party adopted a “socialist” constitution in 1920, and in 1922 became the second biggest party in Parliament. In 1923, a brief coalition was formed, giving the Labour Party its first Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald. The coalition fell apart almost immediately amongst accusations of revolutionary conspiracies. The election of 1924 saw a collapse of the Liberal vote. From this moment, Labour and the Conservatives would form a two-party system.

At the end of the war the German government paid the British government money as “reparations”. With the hyperinflation in Germany, its money became worthless, so the payments were made in coal. British coal mines lost much of their market, and miners' pay was cut. The miners went on strike and the Trades Union Congress organised support. In 1926 a general strike lasted nine days, and ended with the workers conceding defeat.

The first election in which all women were allowed to vote was held in 1929. It led to another minority Labour government, which fell in 1931, as the world economy went into a deep recession. Under the coalition “National” governments, and Conservative governments that followed, the mood of the nation was for peace. The word “appeasement”, meaning conceding power to keep the peace, was a positive word, right up until 1939.

In that year, Germany and the Soviet Union divided and occupied Poland. The Prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, who had stood for appeasement, resigned. The belligerent Winston Churchill took over and by 1940 the fighting had begun.

Although nationalism played a part in this war, for the majority of people it was very different to the previous war. British people were aware of Fascism. Some had volunteered to fight it in Spain. Stories told by refugees from Germany had circulated. When this war started the mood was of dark necessity, not glory. This was a war against an immediate threat and an abhorrent idea.

When Germany attacked the Soviet Union in 1940, the British and French gained a new ally, which, over the next five years, gradually pushed Germany back, divided it and turned its Eastern third into a “Communist” state. In December 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour, an American naval base in Hawaii. This mobilised the United States for war and it joined the British and French alliance.

Britain and the post-war world

European industry was devastated by the war. The United States, whose mainland was untouched, became the world's creditor and soon dominated world finance. The Soviet Union and its allies were cut off from the world economy, yet still managed to produce an industrial economy and a formidable war machine. The Post-war world was characterised by a military stand-off between the

US dominated alliance (NATO) and the Soviet Union's (the Warsaw Pact). It became known as the “cold war”.

Meanwhile, the large American navy policed the expanding world trade system. The huge American banks financed spreading industrialisation. There was even an agreement that all oil sales had to be done in US dollars. As the USA grew super-rich, economic inequalities stretched and its now massive military establishment became the “world's Policeman”.

From the 1960s, container ships eased and significantly boosted world trade. Telecommunications began to develop. By the end of the 20th century, the whole world was locked into a single, global economy. Its financial heart was in America, most of its money was dollars, and its language was English. This was the “American century”.

Despite his status as a great war leader, Churchill lost the election of 1945. British people wanted a new kind of society, one that would end forever the five “Giant Evils”: squalor, ignorance, want, idleness and disease. This is what the Labour party offered as it formed its first majority government. It set standards that even the Conservatives in the 1950s and 60s were forced to follow, including the idea that it was the government's job to make sure everyone who wanted a job could get one.

In these years, the veterans of interwar conflicts and the struggle against Fascism became middle-aged. New values permeated society. They changed the media, entertainment, academia, education and politics. The old conservative values: family, nation, religion and respect for authority, slowly began to fade away. By the 1960s a new generation was growing up that was educated, liberal, creative and cosmopolitan. British and global identities were changing.

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