National identity in politics

An analysis of British parliamentary debates on European integration 1957-1975

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Introduction

The process of European integration has defined postwar European politics to a large extent, both on national and international levels. To this day the merits of the European integration project remain subject to debate, not least in the national political spheres of the European Union's own member states. Questions of politics, economics, legal and administrative issues are all vigorously debated on and have been for decades. Throughout these discussions and debates, which are both historical and contemporary, conceptions and narratives of national identity have played their part in complex ways. A better understanding of the complex dynamics that characterise the role of national identities in these debates would be beneficial to two strands of research. Firstly, the study of the historical and contemporary functioning of national identities could benefit greatly from an exploration of these fertile grounds for research, as the contours of the European national identities are so distinctively visible in relation to the process of European integration. Secondly, studies of the history and contemporary development of the European integration process could benefit from a better understanding of the part played by narratives and conceptions of national identity. This study will focus on the role of national identity in the early British parliamentary debates on European integration from 1957 to 1975. In 1957 the United Kingdom deliberately distanced itself from the efforts to create a European Economic Community, but afterwards it applied to become a member a total of three times before being successful. Then, after becoming a member, an 'in-or-out' referendum was held in 1975, which finalised British membership of the EEC at long last. The drawn out nature of this process provides us with the necessary material, in the form of parliamentary debates, to effectively study the functioning of national identity narratives in politics.

British political thought had become familiar with ideas of federalism and supra-national union during the second half of the nineteenth century. Global visions, related to empire amongst other things, had gradually permeated political thought of high-minded theoreticians and political thinkers. The challenges concomitant to maintaining an empire had given rise to the idea of 'Greater Britain', in which the 'Old Dominions'[1] would be united with the motherland in a global federal state, with Westminster as political centre. This idea of a Greater Britain was thought to be a sound strategy to ensure the permanence of the cultural, political and economic ties of these Anglophone countries. The concept of federalism was inspired for a great part by the union in America, which had proved its solidity and vitality by holding together after the most disastrous domestic conflict imaginable, the Civil War of 1861-1865. The continued existence of the United States of America as a federal state made federalism a form of government to be seriously considered. These notions of

[1] The 'Old Dominions' consisted of the English speaking settler-colonies of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

federation were also applied on a world and European scale, envisioning a 'World Government', with a European federation as a constituent part or as a federation in its own right.[2]

However, these considerations were bound to Empire and had real significance only in a British context. They were quite apart from the continental initiatives for European cooperation and union, which surfaced during the Interbellum. The adherents of European integration were mostly French and German intellectual political activists, as the French-German relationship was one of the driving forces behind the movement. A resurgence of the German economy and of German international power was thought to be inevitable; tight cooperation and coordination between the two foremost continental powers seemed crucial. Another factor which spurred on the movement was increasing trepidation caused by the increasing economic power of American businesses and a fear for future dominance of American capital in European markets. Two prominent politicians gave credence to the ideals of economic and political union; they were French Foreign Minister Aristide Briand and German Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann. Briand had publicly advocated 'European organization', whereas Stresemann was his most eminent supporter. On the 17 May 1930 Briand issued *the Memorandum on the Organization of a System of European Federal Union*, which was disseminated to European (and other) governments for consideration. It was to be carried out in concordance with the League of Nations, to ensure a thorough and transparent process. The Memorandum provided a detailed sketch of the institutional framework of the prospected union. As such it presented a firm step forward towards actual European integration. The death of Stresemann (who had died before the issuing of the Memorandum) and Briand, together with the general political disarray into which the continent fell during the 1930's, prevented the plans from coming to fruition. Nevertheless, a solid foundation for the idea of European union was established, that would inspire the 'Europeans' both during and after the Second World War.[3]

The 'European Idea' was far less conspicuous in Britain during the Interbellum and Briand's proposals only got a tepid response in the United Kingdom. Public opinion leaned towards the Commonwealth or the League of Nations in matters concerning international cooperation, while the British Secretary of State for Colonies and Dominions Leopold Amery in May 1930 pointed out that, as far as the British government was concerned, Britain could not be involved in a Pan European and a Pan Brittanic scheme simultaneously. In public opinion, a cautiously positive response to Briand's proposals did materialise, from Winston Churchill amongst others, although it was very reserved. The idea of closer association with Europe had some support, but real enthusiasm for integration into a European economic and political union was close to nonexistent. It was no surprise then, that the

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[2] D. Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain. Empire and the future of world order, 1860-1890* (Oxford 2007) 92-98 and 231-238.

[3] C.H. Pegg, *Evolution of the European idea, 1914-1932* (London 1983) 88-165.

response of the British government to Briand's memorandum was that all the stated objectives could be dealt with within the framework of the League of Nations.[4] During the Second World War Churchill, now Prime Minister, flirted with the 'European Idea', conceiving new structures, thereby largely ignoring Briand's proposals and European continental thought on the matter. After the war he became involved in the United Europe movement, delivering the famous speeches at the Hague Congress of Europe extolling European cultural bonds and recalling the horrors of war.[5] This was well received in the intellectual circles of supporters of the 'European Idea', whereas Britain itself was still caught up in post-war national renewal. When the Conservatives returned to government in 1951, with Churchill as Prime Minister once more, Britain failed to join the new European initiatives towards closer economic cooperation, such as the European Coal and Steel Community. The attitudes from before the war had remained dominant, the commitment to the 'European Idea' still resembling admiration from a distance more than genuine interest. When the process towards deepening European integration got underway, Britain remained on the sidelines.

The lack of enthusiasm and effort in Britain for schemes of European cooperation, along the lines of serious economic and political integration, during the first phases of that process on the continent is clearly visible in the actions of British politicians, the writings of the press and public opinion. Many factors, both historic and more contemporary, had played a part in the formation of this state of affairs. A lot of these factors were embedded in a narrative of national identity, which served to explain and legitimate many varying political actions and points of view. This study will not concentrate on how this situation of British detachment from continental integrationist efforts came to be; this has been studied extensively and there is a rich historiography on the subject. This study will focus on how ideas or conceptions of national character and identity influenced, surrounded and perhaps defined the process of British involvement in European integration from 1957, when the Treaty of Rome was signed, to 1975, when the British electorate finally approved EEC membership in a referendum.

As said, the main source material for this study will be the parliamentary debates in Westminster from 1957 to 1975. In the historiography there has to this day been scant attention for parliamentary debates in the context of studies on the applications for EEC membership; neither has there been much attention for other periods of European integration for that matter. No thorough analytical review of this material, on this subject, has been performed. That alone is a reason to consider the study of these source materials worthwhile. A passionate historian dreams of the day when he can do valuable work in the archives. In this case the archives are digitally available online,

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[4] L. Passerini, *Europe in Love, Love in Europe: Imagination and Politics in Britain between the Wars* (London 1999) 61-62.
[5] H. Young, *This Blessed Plot: Britain and Europe from Churchill to Blair* (London 1999) 19-20.

which one may consider a boon when faced with unassailable time restrictions, or conversely as a loss of romance in historical research. Nevertheless, this development towards greater availability is what allows a student at a Dutch university to study these sources without crossing the North Sea. But the ambition of this study reaches farther than being an intrepid pioneer. The approach taken to this subject will also take a form not yet seen, at least not rigorously applied, in the existing historiography. As Nicholas Crowson, who wrote a recent study on British political history since 1918 puts it: "the process of governmental administration has essentially been the emphasis of the overwhelming majority of studies on Britain and Europe, with relatively little on popular and cultural aspects of the relationship".[6] This qualification applies to the whole historiography on Britain and Europe, the chronological range of which precedes the second world war, but is mostly focused on the post war period. And it also refers to the fact that studies on the political aspect, which has been the main focus of research on European integration so far, has been aimed disproportionately at governmental administration, international politics and diplomacy. In this way, the historiography has largely ignored an important part of everyday political practice, namely parliamentary debates. It is thus this combined gap, consisting of on the one hand to this point underused source materials and on the other a partial focus on relevant approaches to this subject, that this study seeks to address and hopefully fill. In order to be clear about what the new approach to this subject actually entails, the proposed methodology and underlying theory for this study will now be elaborated on.

When one studies political history and political speech in general it is of paramount importance to not lose track of the whole range of nuances and influences that underlie it all. Influences can include for example personal or group motives, ideologies or dominant discourse or novel means of expression. Examples of nuances that can determine a speech act or an individual's behaviour include the difference between intended meaning and ascribed meaning, or the discrepancy between motive and message, when what an historical actor says does not directly correspond to his motives, which he may have concealed deliberately. These influences and nuances are generally not immediately apparent and once they are comprehension does not necessarily follow instantly. Two concepts from historical theory apply to the matter of influence and nuance, namely intentions and discourse. To say something definitive about the intentions of a person, especially an historical actor, is bound to be met by a great amount of, justified, contestation. Therefore it is not the goal in this study to simply ascribe intentions to historical actors and go on from there. Essentially, the best that can be done concerning intentions is to work on the basis of "inference to the best explanation", as Mark Bevir envisions.[7] In that way it is possible to make a proposition without claiming absolute, unchallenged validity of that proposal. However, since this

[6] N.J. Crowson, *Britain and Europe: a political history since 1918* (London 2011) 15.
[7] M. Bevir, 'How to be an Intentionalist', *History and Theory*, vol.41 no.2 (2002) 211.

study is not a conventional political history, where political posturing and manoeuvring and all the acts and behaviour that accompany this are usually the central point of study, intentionality will have to take a back seat to discourse. This because the primary goal of this study is to investigate in what ways or forms and by what means politicians could appeal to ideas of British national identity. Parallel to that is to find out through discourse analysis which appeals to British national identity were successful and which ones were not. So what this study is concerned with is mainly in what ways and with what narratives it was possible to appeal to ideas about British national identity in a convincing manner. As said the examination of intentions is secondary to the analysis of narratives and discourse and serves only to guarantee full understanding of the parliamentary debates. When it comes to intentions, one might think of a politician using an identity narrative, whilst being driven by (personal or political) motives related to social or economic issues. The focus of this study is not on carefully documenting the various motives of all separate actors in these parliamentary debates, but specifically on analysing the identity narratives. Thus, this is a study on identity, narrative, form, style and delivery, which are staples of the political trade that cannot be ignored and often (in many instances regrettably) supersede facts, contents and substance. As such these factors in politics, which are central to this study, co-determine the outcomes of political processes to a considerable extent, together with for example cold hard economic, material interests and social issues (for instance related to equality and power). However, the extent to which these factors related to identity narratives co-determine the outcomes of political processes is hard to quantify. In this sense this is in fact an exploratory study, which could inform broader studies trying to capture the entire history of the United Kingdom's gradual involvement in schemes or efforts of European integration. The presence and the dynamics of (national) identity narratives in these processes should definitely be included in future comprehensive, all-encompassing studies on the larger subject of European integration, even if only because they continue to play a significant role in contemporary politics. This study may be considered as a first step in that direction.

Although, even for an historian concerned mostly with modernity, the period under scrutiny here is not far off chronologically from our own lives, it may come to a point when this text is read by someone who consciously lived through this period; still it is historical. But nonetheless, this study differs markedly from a study of a subject from, say, the seventeenth century, where one is confronted with entirely different epistemological bases, practices and modes of understanding and thought. One may only hope that this proximity facilitates successful discourse analysis, but one must not assume that this is naturally the case. To quote Pocock: "It is a large part of our historian's practice to learn to read and recognize the diverse idioms of political discourse as they were available in the culture and at the time he is studying: to identify them as they appear in the linguistic texture of any one text, and to know what they would ordinarily have enabled that text's author to propound

or say".[8] Replace 'text' with 'speech act' or 'utterance' and this quote becomes one hundred percent relevant for the study of political parliamentary discourse. Even though contemporary conceptions of national identity or the shape and form of political discourse may not differ very much, they do obviously differ. What is truly new about this approach is that it is meant to try to better understand the possible routes to conceptions of national identity. Only after carefully analysing and evaluating political discourse is it possible to say something valid and convincing about these historical conceptions of British national identity and the role of identity narratives in the political process. So apart from the notion that this study differs from most of the available historiography, it also differs in that it seeks to re-establish or construct anew the understanding of specific historical conceptions of British national identity. Or, at least, it means to bring forward convincing proposals in that direction. Opposed to simply 'applying' earlier constructs of these conceptions and trying to read them *into* the texts, with this study it is intended to *extract* them from the texts. Whether an appeal to national identity was successful or not may be inferred primarily from how other participants in the debates responded, or from how it fitted in with the general character and substance of the debate or, if there is a relevant connection, how public opinion related to it. Now public opinion is somewhat of a mythical beast, especially so in relation to historical studies, because how can one reconstruct the entirety of public opinion with limited sources? One way to make a courageous attempts to do so is to analyse sources in the press, which if it does not directly correspond to public opinion at least attempts to represent it. Furthermore, some work has already been done on the subject of the press and public opinion and that of political opinion polls, so these studies are available and useful to us. By way of this methodology it is the intention to provide new insights that may add to the already existing knowledge of the role of national identity narratives in politics in general and specifically in British politics in relation to European integration.

This study will necessarily follow a chronological order, since its framework thematically revolves around the most important events of this period, between 1957 and 1975. These events are chosen because they represent the periods of most intense discussion and also the events that were anticipated and debated on most passionately in advance. The first of these events is that of the drawing up of the Treaty of Rome by 'the Six'[9]. Obviously the United Kingdom was only marginally involved in these talks and its sovereign parliament had very little influence to exercise upon these proceedings. Nonetheless, or maybe because of this lack of power, these treaty talks were subject of thorough discussion in parliament during that time. The second and third events are the applications which the consecutive UK governments handed in, the first in 1963 under Prime Minister Harold

[8] J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, commerce and history: essays on political thought and history, chiefly in the eighteenth century* (Cambridge 1985) 9.

[9] This term references the six original members of the European Coal and Steel Community which were also involved in the treaty talks: France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg.

Macmillan, the second under Prime Minister Harold Wilson in 1967. It needs little clarification as to why these were times of intense debates; not only were there the expected economic and political consequences, there were also issues concerning identity and the re-evaluating of political priorities. The last event to be scrutinized is that of the 1975 referendum and its run-up. When the UK finally did become a member state of the European Economic Community, discussion already started and from then on only intensified on whether or not this step had to be legitimated by a direct appeal to the public. This unprecedented referendum naturally provoked political discussion. To keep the chapters clear and coherent, each chapter will be structured roughly as follows: first, the relevant and necessary context of the period in question is elaborated on to clarify the specific circumstances in which the debates were carried out. Second comes the analysis of the debates themselves and possibly other relevant sources; the analysis will of course form the main body of every chapter. Lastly, each chapter will have its own brief and preliminary conclusion, in order to keep the overall argument in sight.

Main questions will guide the analysis in each chapter, though they will not be held to in a rigid fashion. The fluent and thorough performance of discourse analysis will be leading. Examples of questions that will be kept in mind are: when and why, to what ends, did politicians refer to conceptions of national identity? Were these conscious acts and are there overt or hidden motives to be found? Do these references to conceptions of national identity constitute instances of apparent fixed or essentialized notions of national identity, or is there a more "banal nationalism"[10] at work? What were the effects of these references to national identity? Were they successful, blatantly unsuccessful, or contested? Were they original or part of broader, known discourse of political argument? Did they fit into the tone of the debates or did they strike a new one? These are just a few examples of questions to give an impression of the components that will make up the discourse analysis. Asking such a multitude of questions constantly and unhesitatingly will facilitate the acquiring of tangible results.

[10] Banal nationalism is the conjuring up of everyday images of national identity, such as a flag or in the case of England perhaps a bobby, in pursuit of political or rhetorical goals. It is discussed in: R.F. Dewey jr., *British national identity and opposition to membership of Europe, 1961-63: the anti-Marketeers* (Manchester 2009) 19-21.

Chapter One

Plan G

In this first chapter the period from 1955 to 1958 will be under scrutiny. During these years the United Kingdom held back from joining the deepening bonds of European integration which 'the Six' were creating as a furtherance of the already existing European Coal and Steel Community. First the general historical context of the period will be outlined, concerning the British stance towards European integration. After this, the main body of the chapter will centre on the analysis of political discourse in the parliamentary debates in Westminster on European integration, focusing on the dynamics of identity narratives. This will be followed by a few concluding remarks.

Miriam Camps, an employee at the American embassy in London at the end of the Second World War, who later was involved in the creation of the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC), said the following when she was reflecting on her involvement in postwar Britain: "It would have been almost unrealistically far-sighted for any British government in the immediate aftermath of the war to have realised fully the shifts in relative power that a decade later had become obvious".[11] This sentiment, that shifts in relative power had occurred in the decade since the end of the war, was not yet as widespread at the beginning of 1956 as it would become in the course of the following two years. The events that took place in this period in the sphere of international politics caused a necessary reappraisal of the estimation of British power. In the summer of 1955 a conference was held in Messina in Sicily, where ministers representing 'the Six' debated on going beyond the cooperation and institutions of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The government of the United Kingdom also received an invitation and had sent a delegation, which did not include a cabinet minister because, at least as a French senior official was told: "[Messina was really] a devilish awkward place to expect a minister to get to".[12] The Spaak Committee, the forum for further negotiations on the creation of the EEC by 'the Six', named after the former Belgian Prime Minister and figure head in European postwar politics Paul-Henri Spaak, also received an underwhelming British delegation, consisting only of a civil servant from the Board of Trade, Russell Bretherton.[13]

Although its participation was minimal, Britain still remained involved in these talks. This ended abruptly however when the cabinet, at this time still working under Prime Minister Eden, decided to withdraw completely from the Spaak Committee. This decision mostly reflected political concerns and in Whitehall the civil servants, especially in the Treasury department, started worrying about the consequences of this decision. Their view was that ultimately it was inevitable that Britain

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[11] M. Camps, 'Missing the boat at Messina and other times?', in: Brivati, B. and H. Jones (ed.), *From reconstruction to integration: Britain and Europe since 1945* (Leicester 1993) 135.

[12] R. Denman, *Missed chances: Britain and Europe in the twentieth century* (London 1996) 196.

[13] Crowson, *Britain and Europe*, 71.

would join whatever form of cooperation would come out of these talks. Naturally, their most immediate concerns were directed towards the developments and expected outcomes of the Spaak Committee negotiations, which had continued at the same speed after the British delegate was called home.[14] These apprehensions also affected policy makers however, such as Peter Thorneycroft, the President of the Board of Trade, who said: "on any analysis it seems clear that we cannot afford that the Common Market should either succeed, or fail, without us".[15] Nevertheless, the participation in the negotiations which the Eden government first mandated was based more on abstract principles of European cooperation than actual shared interests. The government had soon taken the view that the ongoing negotiations and its outcomes could prove to be damaging to British interests. It concluded that it would be wise not to participate any further. This view was mostly based on the Commonwealth commitments which the cabinet considered to be of paramount importance, but also on the British preference to keep working within the OEEC context rather than shifting the focus of activity to newly created economic institutions. A strong underlying motive for this preference was the American involvement in the OEEC operations, combined with Britain's relatively strong position within this organisation. Another concern which caused the British government to withdraw from the Spaak Committee was the fear that a mostly 'continental' common market would discriminate against British trade and might even lead to the creation of a hostile political bloc.[16] But what seemed politically and economically expedient at that moment was questioned immediately. Apart from the previously mentioned expectation in the Treasury department that the United Kingdom would have to join the newly created institutions eventually, other scenarios were also contemplated. It was believed that Britain would become marginalized politically, since US attention would shift from the OEEC to the 'the Six' and their efforts; the resulting organisation would also encompass certain forms of political cooperation, which the UK would not be involved in. Economically, the prospect of an expanded home market for France and especially for Germany, through the creation of a customs union, alarmed British business representatives. Not only would Britain have to contend with a much larger European market and be stuck domestically with a relatively small market (in comparison also to the US and the Soviet Union), but its competitive position in the Commonwealth countries was also likely to suffer serious damage, as the scale of production and efficiency on the continent would only increase.[17]

[14] D.Gowland, A. Turner and A. Wright, *Britain and European integration since 1945: on the sidelines* (London 2009) 42-43.
[15] Gowland, Turner and Wright, *Britain and European integration since 1945*, 43.
[16] J.G. Giauque, *Grand designs and visions of unity: the Atlantic powers and the reorganization of Western Europe, 1955-1963* (Chapel Hill 2002) 22-23.
[17] N. Rollings, *British business in the formative years of European integration, 1945-1973* (Cambridge 2007) 94-106.

The stance of the British government towards the efforts of European integration thus remained one of caution and detachment. But the worries which were indicated above never abated and although the cabinet decision to withdraw in first instance seemed resolute and confident, it quickly became clear that the government simply could not ignore the Spaak Committee negotiations that were still underway and advancing at a steady pace. In the first place the intention behind sending a delegate to the negotiations had been to, if not obstruct, at least direct and slow down the entire process, in a way that was deemed beneficial to British interests. After the withdrawal of its delegation the government decided to try to replace or obstruct the integration process externally.[18] The means to do this were readily available, originating from a report drafted by a committee led by Paul-Henri Spaak and delivered to the foreign ministers of 'the Six' on 21 April 1956, not very long after the British delegation had withdrawn on 7 December 1955.[19] The report outlined the creation of a European Free Trade Area (EFTA) which was intended to allow other European countries, who did not want to become a member in the Common Market directly, to join the economic cooperation at an intermediate level.[20] Obviously the consequences for the UK would be that its influence on common market provisions would remain minimal and that the much desired exceptions, for the Commonwealth trade amongst other things, would not be guaranteed. Nevertheless, this alternative organisation, in which the UK would be a leading country, became the focus of cabinet policy and many members of parliament who shared the governments goals and reservations to some extent. The alternative of the free trade area would remain under consideration throughout the period that negotiations were still taking place amongst 'the Six'. It was also the subject of much discussion in Westminster over this period. Whitehall was responsible for the creation of policy options 'A' through 'F' on a possible free trade area and when eventually 'Plan G' was arrived at, it was presented to the cabinet by the Chancellor of the Exchequer Harold Macmillan on 14 September 1956.[21] This was the blueprint that would become subject of debate in parliament until and beyond when the Treaty of Rome was eventually signed by 'the Six'. The signing of the treaty by 'the Six' occurred in March 1957[22], by which time Britain still had not managed to give much shape to its EFTA ambitions. Negotiations with potential member states had not even been started yet. In August 1957 member of the cabinet Reginald Maudling was made responsible for starting talks with the seventeen OEEC members who were potential candidates and in October the first steps of international deliberation were finally undertaken.[23] Just three months before the Treaty of Rome

[18] Giauque, *Grand designs and visions of unity*, 23.
[19] R.J. Lieber, *British politics and European unity: parties, elites, and pressure groups* (Berkeley 1970) 31.
[20] Ibid., 31-36.
[21] S. Greenwood, *Britain and European integration since the Second World War* (Manchester 1996) 84-85.
[22] Crowson, *Britain and Europe*, 74-75.
[23] Giauque, *Grand designs and visions of unity*, 26.

would come into force, on 1 January 1958, Britain was still struggling to set up an alternative to the plans for European integration devised by 'the Six'.

This largely improvised course of action, undertaken by the government to safeguard British interests, turned out to become potentially damaging to those very same interests. These developments took place in an already tumultuous context, wherein British leadership in international politics was increasingly under strain. Concurrently ideas regarding the future of Britain, tied to conceptions of national identity, were in flux. A major development that slowly unfolded during the period under consideration in this chapter, roughly from 1955 to the signing of the Treaty of Rome, without which British politics and conceptions of national identity cannot be fully understood, is the Suez Crisis. The Suez Crisis is a much discussed subject in the historiography on British politics in this period and logically so. The term crisis truly applies to the events and developments that it encompasses, which started in midsummer 1956 and lasted until the end of the year, with the ripples of the wave of incidents that it caused only flattening out well into early 1957. The crucial event that started it all occurred in July when Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser appropriated the Suez Canal, which Britain and France held to be vital to their trade and empire interests. In early November the conflict erupted into violence, when a long delayed invasion by French and British forces was organised from the Mediterranean near Port Said to support an Israeli military operation already underway in the Sinai desert. The Americans had been opposed to intervention from the beginning and after only a couple of days the invading French and British forces were called back under international pressure.[24] The crisis saw the fall of Prime Minister Anthony Eden. Prime Minister Eden, long a foreign affairs prodigy and certainly an expert, landed into trouble, quite literally, on what was considered to be his own turf. As important a turn of events as this was for domestic politics, it was even more significant for British status internationally. The 'special relationship' with the United States, which existed ever since the Second World War, cooled noticeably, as the United States disapproved of the joint British-French-Israeli military action against Egypt in the strongest possible terms. The indignation on the side of the Americans left little to the imagination and it was quite clear that the 'special relationship' had turned sour, for the moment at least. These events dented the perceived power of Britain globally, in the context of the Cold War, but had consequences for the relations of Britain with its European allies as well. Partly because of the UK's diminished status, but mostly because the French were livid about what they saw as their being abandoned by British forces in the midst of conflict. Of course, by the late fall of 1956, when the Suez debacle reached its high point, it had already been a year since Britain had withdrawn from

[24] T. Shaw, *Eden, Suez and the mass media: propaganda and persuasion during the Suez Crisis* (London 2009) ix-xvi.

the negotiations for the EEC.[25] The impulsive reaction to Egyptian provocation certainly did not help their effort to create a viable alternative to the EEC as their leadership position in Europe came to be questioned and to contemporary observers these combined facts were likely to signal a downward turn for British global power-status, possibly with no end in sight. The postwar alliance with America and British leadership in Europe could no longer be taken for granted.

The Suez Crisis and its manifold consequences certainly caused consternation at home, not least in Westminster. Two pillars of British foreign policy that also upheld visions of the greatness of Britain, being the alliance with America and leadership in Europe, had fallen into a state of disrepair. Politicians wondered about how to deal with these situations. In the debates on the relation of Britain to the efforts of 'the Six' the language was rarely hyperbolic however and remained for a large part modest, neutral even and above all practical. Nevertheless, national sentiments were present in the parliamentary debates and the subject of European integration received much attention at intervals, being connected to issues such as Commonwealth relations, the economy and broader foreign policy as well. In comparison to the later periods of this research, much attention was given to the economic side of the story, specifically the EFTA alternative. However, the framing of the issue in terms of identity narratives had already begun and would become more and more pronounced in the course of the following decade and beyond. The repercussions of the recent events for conceptions of British national identity were widely felt; the British were quite provocatively labelled 'the eccentrics of Europe' by the German magazine *Der Spiegel*.[26] Whilst dealing with practical political issues, in Westminster the representatives of the British people also had to think of ways to formulate these issues in a manner that appealed to the people they spoke for. Equally though, the ways in which the members of parliament expressed themselves reflected the wider discourse or discourses that were current among the wider British public. Identity narratives are in fact very much a two way street, with political expression being influenced by broader public discourse, whilst at the same time politicians try to guide or at least direct public opinion. These expressions, implicitly or explicitly relating to conceptions of national identity, will be analysed now in the rest of the chapter. Before we begin the analysis however, it is useful to point out that party political divides on this matter cannot simply be split in half along the lines of the Labour Party on one side of the political spectrum and the Conservative Party on the other, certainly in this early period of European integration. Both parliamentary parties had the full range of opinion among their ranks, from MPs who either favoured or were sceptical of European integration, to those who were either neutral or of a purely practical disposition. The smaller Liberal Party generally had a more distinctive voice, as did the crossbench or independent members of parliament. Generally, those involved in the debates

[25] Greenwood, *Britain and European integration since the Second World War*, 87-89.
[26] K. Robbins, *Great Britain: identities, institutions and the Idea of Britishness* (London 1998) 309.

shared the ambition of maintaining British global great power status as the highest objective.[27] Nothing less was expected naturally, after all, to safeguard national interests is the primary duty of a national parliament. Westminster furthermore, was a hallowed institution, the centuries long continuity of which was a central feature of British national identity, bound as it was to the tradition of parliamentary politics.[28] Consequently, Westminster itself was (and is) an important symbol of British national consciousness.

By the summer of 1956, MPs were very aware of the fact that the British positioning in relation to the process of European integration raised more questions, rather than providing any definitive solution, or as Conservative MP Geoffrey Rippon formulated it on 5 July:

> The real question remains as to how far it is in our interest…that we should remain on the side line until the treaties have been drafted and signed and we are presented with a fait accompli. It is not just the simple question of deciding in principle whether we are for or against a common market. May it well not be the case that, while a common market in one form might be acceptable, in another it might not?[29]

Rippon was wondering whether the withdrawal from the negotiations of 'the Six' was wise. He would have preferred Britain to stay involved in the talks and thus retain some influence on the outcome of the negotiations. As said, this debate took place in July 1956; it was the first to be devoted specifically to the subject of the European Common Market. By this time the government had not yet declared its intentions in relation to the ongoing European integration process. This lack of clarity provided MPs the opportunity to declare their own proposals for a policy and to embellish their propositions at their leisure. Geoffrey Rippon did so by quoting perhaps the most important authoritative figure in British politics at that time, Sir Winston Churchill, whose remarks had an evocative quality that needed no further justification, at least according to Rippon. This is a good example of the remoulding of a wider discussion into an identity framework:

> It is very important that this House should get its relations with the Commonwealth and with Western Europe, and theirs with us, in the right perspective.
> In that respect, I do not think that I can do better than refer to the Guildhall speech of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 30th April, 1948, in which he said: "We in the United Kingdom are not merely a Power geographically situated on the western edge of Europe. We are also the heart and centre of a great Commonwealth and Empire…The question we have to consider, is therefore, is there

[27] P. Ward, *Britishness since 1870* (London 2004) 108-112.
[28] Ward, *Britishness since 1870*, 107-108.
[29] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 555 (5-7-1956), col. 1668.

> any fundamental clash between the conception of ourselves as the heart and centre of the British Commonwealth and Empire and the conception of ourselves as a member of a Western European Union. I am convinced that there is not. The dilemma is, in truth, largely an artificial one.[30]

Rippon quoted Churchill to make his argument that British identity was both linked to its place in Europe and its place in the Commonwealth. Churchill's role as the leader of Britain's National Coalition government during the Second World War, his speeches in the late 1940's on European federalism and his second term as Prime Minister from 1951 to 1955 had made his reputation as one of the single most authoritative figures in British postwar politics.[31] While it was common practice to quote 'right honourable friends' in parliament, usually from the same debate but sometimes from years before as well, quoting Churchill would have been understood as having added connotations. This was a rhetorical tactic by Rippon meant to validate his arguments. It can be interpreted in two significant ways. Firstly, it solidified his argument by pointing out that his argument had been made before and by a politician of whom other MPs knew that he was held in high regard. The fact that the political context was not the same as roughly eight years before, when Churchill spoke those words, does not reduce the rhetorical effect produced by this tactic. Secondly, the fact that this connection could effectively be made shows how this was an appeal to certain notions of national character, which were epitomised in this case by 'a hero' of (recent) British history. This double effect reveals how something that would seem to be straightforward enough was in fact a means to evoke many things without having to go through great lengths to explain what is referred to. To many people Churchill embodied good British values. By doing this, Rippon added to the basis of the debate, appealing to collective memory and introducing a narrative of national identity.

Another perspective on British national identity can be seen in the speech by Liberal Party MP Arthur Holt, who made the same argument, for involvement in the process of European integration, in the same debate, though in a different way. His arguments followed a line of thought quite contrary to ideas about national greatness, but still referred to ideas of national character:

> There is very little future for little entities with barriers round them of one kind or another. If Europe is to take any part or have any influence in the world in the future, and if the institutions of civilisation are to go on developing and playing a powerful part in the world, we have to make a step in the direction of greater unity…We shall do a grave disservice to European unity if we are not prepared to make suggestions, to back them actively and to get put forward our point of view that we are genuine in the matter and want to move onward.[32]

[30] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 555 (5-7-1956), col. 1670-71.
[31] Robbins, *Great Britain: identities, institutions and the Idea of Britishness*, 329-331.
[32] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 555 (5-7-1956), col. 1672.

Holt indirectly refers to the United Kingdom as a 'little entity' in the field of international politics, thus taking a practical approach whilst at the same time opposing narratives of national greatness. What Holt also said is that Britain, as a European nation, had a responsibility in the development and empowerment of 'the institutions of civilisation'. By saying this he was implicitly arguing that the European or Western world represented civilisation and that the United Kingdom was part of this. In this way his argument implies that Britain had a responsibility to further the cause of European unity precisely because it was European. By constructing his argument in this way Holt managed to make the same argument for British involvement in European integration as Rippon, but with a subtle difference in his view on British national identity and from a different political perspective. Although it was not a prerogative of the Liberal Party to take more contrary views, as Holt did by arguing that Britain was a 'little entity', it does seem likely that being a smaller party, its members could take more liberty and be critical of widely accepted ideas. This relates to the nature of a political with large parties dominating the political field. Larger parties, in this case the Conservative and Labour parties, had to formulate their conceptions of shared identity in such a way that a broader range of political preferences could be encompassed by it. Necessarily, such unifying efforts result in a vaguer or more imprecise use of language, in order to present a narrative that is acceptable to more people, and a more positive conception of shared identity. The fact that Holt also disengaged from the purely factual by making a normative argument (specifically his civilisation argument), as Rippon did, shows how effective and infectious it could be to recast an issue into terms of shared identity. The different line of argumentation that Holt takes and concurrently the different identity narrative that he subscribes to, has everything to do with Holt being of another political background than Rippon and valuing conceptions of British national identity differently. And yet, policy-wise, he is making a comparable argument for European integration.

Holt's more European-oriented picture of European integration, referring to 'the institutions of civilisation' and thus including institutions other than British ones as well, was a manifestation of the political agenda of the Liberal Party, which echoes older ideas on (European) federal union.[33] By not subscribing to ideas of national greatness and by putting greater emphasis on a European perspective, Arthur Holt managed to strike a different tone. But he did still refer to ideas of what Britain was or should have been according to him. That he was not alone in seeing the UK as a 'little entity' becomes clear in the reaction to Holt's remarks by Conservative MP Sir Robert Boothby:

> I have never liked this conception of a six-Power Europe; it is too small. As the hon. Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Holt) has said, we are confronted by Asia, Russia, China, India and, on the other

[33] Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 92-98.

> hand, the United States. Those are continental economies of continental scope. In this age of mass production, how can these separate little nations of Europe really hope to survive without really close economic co-ordination? It is not possible. I say that there must be more than six nations participating; it must be Western Europe as a whole, and that can be achieved only on one condition—that we take the lead.[34]

Boothby based his argument on the same notion of 'littleness' as Holt, but he put a twist on it to arrive at a different conclusion, namely that Britain should take the lead. Holt did not propose this and neither did he refer to the same conception of European unity. Holt subscribed to an idea of European union which was related to ideas about federal union, as mentioned earlier. Boothby's argument however must be interpreted as an attempt to justify the position of the British government that Britain should be involved in the process of European integration, just not with the Common Market that 'the Six' intended to create. So while they had some overlap in their argumentation they were giving expression to opposing plans, which reflected different views on British national capacities and its future, as well as on national policy. Neither Holt nor Boothby backed up their arguments with economic arguments; the same goes for Rippon. Their contributions to this debate revolved purely around implicit conceptions of national identity and policy priorities.

We move on to 26 November of 1956, when the next debate on European integration was held. 'The Six' were coming closer and closer to signing a treaty and the cabinet was giving the first concrete expression of its stance towards the ongoing developments, via Chancellor of the Exchequer Harold Macmillan. However, his speech amounted to little more than an expression of a profound uncertainty as to what was possible. It showed that while the UK government was in favour of a free trade area, it was still dependent on the resolution of the Common Market negotiations of 'the Six'. At one point Macmillan mentioned that his expectation was that the EFTA could not be operational for another ten years, provided that the prospective members could even come to any kind of agreement soon.[35] It had become definitive though that the UK would not be joining the Common Market as a full member of the EEC. Harold Wilson, Shadow Chancellor at that time, nevertheless expressed his dissatisfaction with the unresolved nature of the government position:

> [I] wish that [the Chancellor] had devoted his energies and his time to dealing with something a little more immediate today, and that instead of giving us an assessment of what the future of European trade looks like over the next half century…he should have given us some survey of Britain's and

[34] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 555 (5-7-1956), col. 1673-74.
[35] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 561 (26-11-1956), col. 53-54.

> Europe's economic prospects—not in the next twelve or fifteen years but in the next twelve or fifteen months, or even weeks. That is what the country really wants the Chancellor to tell us.[36]

The awkward situation in which the government found itself provided a challenge: how could the United Kingdom have ended up in such a precarious political position? One attempt to rationalise the situation was made by Labour MP Frederick Mulley:

> The Continental countries, especially France, by training, tend to think in terms of logic and well-argued written constitutions, treaties, etc., whereas we have got on well enough without a written constitution, and if we can run the country without a written constitution, we are not so insistent upon having a written treaty before we proceed to work in economic co-operation with others. That has been shown by our preference hitherto for the O.E.E.C. approach as opposed to the Schuman Plan approach.[37]

While his argument does seem to have an internal logic, it hardly justified the rather erratic British conduct in the recent negotiations on European integration. In fact, if anything, it suggests a quite inflexible nature of British policy making. But apart from that, the most interesting part of this statement is the dichotomy that Mulley puts forward between how 'Continental countries' tend to think about treaties and the British inclination towards unwritten conventions and agreements. The basis of this divide which Mulley addressed is real and relates to the existence of Civil Law codes, which indeed dominate the continents' legal systems, and legal systems of Common Law.[38] To what extent these two legal systems are or were mutually exclusive and incompatible is up for law experts and legal historians to research; what matters here is the structuring of a legal divide as a cultural and identity phenomenon. For Mulley it followed logically from the Common Law tradition in Britain that it is disinclined towards written agreements or treaties. A contemporary of Mulley could wonder whether this should in any way have prescribed British conduct in the contemporary European integration process. Many however would not have doubted his arguments, simply because the idea of the Common Law tradition was so ingrained in British conceptions of national identity that this statement would have made perfect sense to most British observers. Yet this rationalisation of British conduct so far did not amount to a future course for policy decisions in Mulley's view:

> Our friends in Western Europe are a little tired of having our blessing and encouragement and very little else. I am reminded of the story of the padre who used always to say to his guests as they left

[36] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 561 (26-11-1956), col. 55.
[37] Ibid., col. 76.
[38] Robbins, *Great Britain: identities, institutions and the Idea of Britishness*, 129.

"God be with you always. I will go with you as far as the station". In many of the developments towards a united Europe, that has tended to be the British attitude.[39]

So although he was essentially pro-integration and critical of the government's handling of the issue he still felt the need to rationalise the actions of the government before making his general point, which was essentially related to economic policy-making:

> I suggest that the economic adjustments which may be necessary if the scheme is set up and we take no part in it could be as big as, if not bigger than, those if the scheme is set up and we participate in it and, in addition, have some say about the way in which the readjustments can be planned, and about their tempo.[40]

In the same debate another Labour MP, Frederick Bellenger, dealt with a more specific issue that another MP had raised. It concerned the protection of domestic industries from increasing competition in the markets. Bellenger in his reaction extended his opponent's views to the point of absurdity, thus using humour as a debating tactic. By doing this he also hit upon conceptions of continuity bordering on nostalgia in conceptions of national identity. What happened was that his opponent, Conservative MP Nabarro, had argued that British industries had to be protected from the expected increase in competition, to which Bellenger replied:

> Whether he likes it or whether he does not, and whether the Government introduce these proposals later on by way of legislation, he can be quite certain that at some time or other his constituency is to suffer unemployment because of the competition it will inevitably face, whether we have a free trade area or tariffs and all the rest of it. The hon. Gentleman had better make up his mind about it and come a little farther from those luscious days in which we lived for 150 years when Britain had the world markets. Today we no longer have them.[41]

Obviously, a Labour MP who makes light of issues of employment does so because he wants to reinforce his overriding argument. Otherwise it would be impossible to explain, why he as a Labour MP would have called the previous 150 years 'luscious'. What he was implying was that British industry had had an exceptionally strong, perhaps inflated competition advantage for decades and that further protection for their benefit could only damage the general competitiveness of the British

[39] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 561 (26-11-1956), col. 77.
[40] Ibid., col. 79.
[41] Ibid., col. 128.

economy. Therefore he strongly disagreed with his opponent, who had his doubts about joining a European Common Market. Bellenger had a little more fun however before he finished:

> I have no doubt that in the days when we had horse traffic, trams and horse buses, there was a great demand that we should protect the horse industry because motor cars were just coming along. In those days women used to wear cotton stockings, but they do not want them any more. They want artificial silk and all the rest of it. We have to go forward with the times, and if we do not provide these things somebody else will.[42]

By ridiculing nostalgic ideas of continuity, Bellenger undermined the argument of his opponent which ran along the lines of 'this is how we have always done things', being focused on the protection of the British economy. As such, Nabarro's argument was partly an appeal to tradition (besides his main argument which was clearly of an economic nature) which is always an effective way to conjure up notions of shared identity, but carried extra weight in conceptions of British national identity due to the sense of pride that was taken in Britain's stability. Bellenger chose to focus his rebuttal on Nabarro's appeal to tradition, thus partly but effectively sidestepping a discussion on the value of economic protectionism. Institutional, societal and political continuity, even through periods of uproar and chaos on the continent such as the Napoleonic wars or the Second World War for example, was something that was widely understood as an intrinsically British virtue.[43] It went back as far as 1790 (and presumably beyond that) when Edmund Burke, the renowned Whig member of parliament, elaborated on how revolutions such as the French revolution were contrary to British nature.[44] Bellenger's debating tactics were thus extremely effective, because he managed to frame the issue in a way that made protecting industries seem old-fashioned and harmful. Britons, or so Bellenger claimed, wanted to move forward, they wanted 'artificial silk and all the rest of it' and protection of industry was not the way to achieve that. It implied a national spirit that wanted to improve economically and essentially 'become more modern'. He managed to paint a picture of Britishness as inherently forward looking, instead of backward looking.[45] Who would not want to subscribe to such a positive identity? This shows how the paths towards conceptions of national

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[42] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 561 (26-11-1956), col. 129.
[43] Dewey, *British national identity and opposition to membership of Europe*, 27-28.
[44] Robbins, *Great Britain: identities, institutions and the Idea of Britishness*, 149.
[45] A forward looking or more modern conception of Britishness had been the crucial message behind the organisation of the 'Festival of Britain' in the summer of 1951, which during and after was understood as a powerful political statement by Clement Attlee's Labour government. It embodied a vision of the British national future that was linked to modernist themes such as science, industry, technology and modern design. It was specifically understood as a counter-narrative to Conservative views on national identity. Bellenger's narrative of an ideal of modernisation is proof of the continued existence of that mentality, which was connected strongly to the political agenda of the Labour Party at the time. See: J. Baxendale, 'The Festival of Britain: A Land and its People', *Contemporary British History* vol. 27 no. 2 (2013) 236-238 and P. Hendon, 'The Festival of Britain and the Voice of the People', *Critical Quarterly* vol. 41 no. 4 (1999) 15-27.

identity were not necessarily all going the same way and could be played with, or manipulated, to political effect. In a broader perspective, the fact that it was possible to formulate notions of identity in diverging ways and contest other conceptions of national identity undermines ideas of fixed national characteristics. On the whole, as far as debating tactics go, Bellengers' was effective; he managed to address both the economic argument and the appeal to tradition.

In February 1957, the negotiations between 'the Six' were close to conclusion and no concrete EFTA alternative had been proposed yet and negotiations had not started either. On 8 February Conservative MP Charles Doughty spoke at some length about the necessity of European cooperation. He touched on many concepts relevant to this study. Firstly, he combined European Federalism with favourable views of the Commonwealth, which was an unlikely combination in this particular political context, as Commonwealth priorities mostly indicated opposition to European integration:

> A strong Britain as part of a strong and United Europe is essential to the Commonwealth and Empire, just as it is to the rest of the world. If we are weak, our Empire is weak. If Europe is divided and quarrelling, it reflects upon us and all the other countries here in Western Europe and those feelings of disunion and weakness radiate throughout the world. Therefore, it is most essential that Western Europe should be united and strong.[46]

He succeeded in combining these European and Commonwealth ambitions, which others would be hesitant to put together, into one great European-British-global ambition. Doughty's view on this was a remarkable combination of two different political points of view that were bound to two different identity narratives (that were usually mutually exclusive): one seeing the Commonwealth as the organisation through which Britain could preserve its national character in unison with those of the Old Dominions, the other looking towards the European continent and the inherent European nature of British national identity. Since the feasibility of his plans are of no import here, we can focus on the language and underlying discourse. He placed this ambitious vision in the context of the Cold War:

> When we look at the map and see what a small area today is represented by Western Europe, what a small area is left on this side of the Iron Curtain, we must at times, perhaps, tremble a little. It is, however, a small but extremely vital part of the world, and it must unite and co-operate to the maximum extent. It has some of the oldest traditions and some of the oldest populations of the world.

[46] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 564 (8-2-1957), col. 776.

> It is more densely populated than any other part of the world, except, perhaps, some parts of China, and it is the centre of a large part of the world's civilisation.[47]

A good explanation for these words is that he was trying to summon anxiety into the hearts and minds of his public in order to persuade them of the necessity of European cooperation, grounding it in a narrative of Western European democratic traditions to which Britain subscribed in his view. And which, as he seemed to expect, his audience (or at least part of it) would hold in the same high regard. Doughty's argument resembled that of Arthur Holt in its emphasis on European civilisation.

His overall argument concerned the creation of a single European council or parliament, to replace the manifold institutions that already existed and according to him did not have sufficient power as separate institutions. Giving up part of British sovereignty was something so natural and necessary to him that he did not even feel that he needed to address it when he first mentioned it. He also expressed the following idea, which comes from the same source of British conceptions of federalism that was mentioned earlier: "Physically, we are much closer to each other in Western Europe than we ever have been before, because of the rapid improvement in transport, both by air and by land, in the last few years".[48] This was an argument for closer political unions which was first made in the second half of the nineteenth century, when ideas on federalism became gradually more widespread.[49] To repeat it unmistakeably revealed the origins of his thought as coming from the federalist tradition which was conceived mostly in the late nineteenth century. Later on he did explain why he believed that sovereignty should not be a main consideration:

> Since the war, there has been in the world undoubtedly a growing feeling of nationalism. Countries big and small, particularly small, feel that they must be independent, entirely self-contained and self-supporting. That is, in fact, one of the difficulties and troubles of the postwar years. I do not believe that that feeling has made for the co-operation or strength of the nations of the world. Against that feeling there has grown up in Western Europe the idea that the countries of Western Europe must co-operate more closely. To put it in perhaps rather crude terms, we must either hang together or hang separately.[50]

He clearly conveyed his apprehensions of nationalist sentiment and directly linked it to the postwar international political atmosphere. Essentially he argued that in the interest of civilization, or

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[47] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 564 (8-2-1957), col. 776.
[48] Ibid., col. 776.
[49] Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 63-91.
[50] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 564 (8-2-1957), col. 777.

Western liberal democracy as he saw it, national interests absolutely needed to be transcended. His central argument left no doubt as to how and why he wanted to achieve this:

> There must be, in my view, a body in which Parliamentarians can meet and discuss and settle all European internal questions…If this House were divided into five or six different assemblies sitting in different places at different times they would individually be bodies with little strength or purpose. As it is, in this assembly all matters can be discussed, internal and external, and it is in that that our strength and unity reside. It is with the object of establishing a European body of comparable strength and unity that I am advocating for West—or free—Europe one comprehensive council.[51]

In Doughty's view, Europe needed to have one comprehensive council just as Britain has one sovereign parliament in order to be effective. But even though he felt that national interest should not be paramount, he was not arguing the invalidity of its existence per se. He clearly proposed closer cooperation, not complete deconstruction of national identities. In fact, he himself used arguments of British ingenuity and character to waylay worries of unrivalled economic competition:

> Some people are frightened that the great industries of Germany will invade our markets. In some cases they will, but we shall also invade theirs. I am certain that the industry of our people, the brains of our technicians and our sources of raw materials from overseas will enable us fully to compete and take full advantage of this market.[52]

His certainty betrayed his affinity to certain conceptions of national identity, because he did not give any further explanation as to why, other than their ingenuity and character, the British labour force and British industry would succeed in meeting the German competitive challenge. Doughty failed to give any detailed economic argument for the competitiveness of British markets, relying rather on pointing out the qualities of the British people; lacking further elaboration this remark, in itself, suggests to the audience a belief in inherent national character traits and could have easily been interpreted that way. Doughty being a politician who was aware of his audience, this was most likely not coincidental, but a means to frame an argument on the basis of conceptions of identity. Lastly, he also touched upon 'the special relationship' between the US and the UK:

> My remarks are confined entirely to Europe. That is not because I am anti-American or anti-world. Indeed, I have always said openly, inside and outside the House, that I believe that co-operation between this country and Western Europe and the United States and, of course, the rest of the world,

[51] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 564 (8-2-1957), col. 777-78.
[52] Ibid., col. 782.

> is vital to us and to them, vital to our mutual advantage. I believe that a stronger and more united Europe is to the interests of the United States.[53]

To maintain a modicum of realism and pragmatism, especially after the Suez Crisis presumably, he felt the need to confirm that 'the special relationship' was of importance to him as well. However, he did not frame it as a reason for British great-power status, but more as a necessary relationship to ensure stable international politics. The Suez Crisis definitely had an impact on national confidence, early in 1957. Sir Robert Boothby restated the argument he had made in the summer of 1956 for European integration under British leadership, referencing the events of the last few months: "recent events have demonstrated once again the political impotence and the economic inadequacy of the individual countries of Europe, acting separately, in the modern world"[54], adding that "I think that we have one more chance to take the initiative and leadership in Europe, but I am pretty sure that it is the last"[55]. This shows that, although he spoke of "the exercise of [British] political genius in the unification of Europe"[56], he was fully aware that 'the Six' were soon to conclude their talks and with that take a definitive lead in the process towards European cooperation. Both Doughty and Boothby had been prominent in the debates on European integration and both continuously incorporated conceptions of national identity into arguments concerning policy. In often implicit ways they and other politicians made use of or expressed conceptions of shared identity in their arguments.

No debates were held on the subject of European integration during the rest of the spring of 1957, but some questions were put to government officials. Bernard Braine, a Conservative MP, once again argued that Commonwealth support was crucial in late March. The unresolved nature of government policy had lasted for months and Braine wished to point out that this lack of initiative was hurting efforts to create a free trade area: "Does my right hon. Friend appreciate that… the lack of such information is jeopardising the popularity in this country of our association with the Free Trade Area?".[57] He especially meant the popularity of the EFTA alternative with Commonwealth-adherents. The strength that Commonwealth and Empire considerations had in parliament at this time is reflected in this statement, making it essential for political support for European integration. Commonwealth support would hold a strong position in the parliamentary debates throughout the period chosen for this study, yet its role would be constantly diminishing. Decolonisation had only strengthened the will to forge lasting Commonwealth ties during the 1950's, however, the degree of

[53] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 564 (8-2-1957), col. 780.
[54] Ibid., col. 794.
[55] Ibid., col. 801.
[56] Ibid., col. 801.
[57] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 567 (21-3-1957), col. 532.

political support it held was at a high point during the years dealt with in this chapter.[58] Affinity to Commonwealth (trade) relations was mostly combined with a believe that British leadership had to be upheld, even if it meant not joining the EEC, where it was felt that British leadership would not be achievable, whereas in the Commonwealth it was thought to follow naturally from political and culture bonds related to empire and specifically, in the case of the Old Dominions, British culture.

In November 1957 the negotiations for the creation of the EFTA were finally under way. A debate on 13 November was the moment the Labour leader in the House of Lords, Viscount Alexander of Hillsborough, chose to vent once more the doubts that existed about opening up the markets:

> It is true that, for some reason or other, the Government are to enter into a European Common Market, which will throw open many of the industries which have built their prosperity on the basis of protection under the Safeguarding of Industries Act and the subsequent measures. They will now be subjected to a wintry blast of free competition from Europe… I should say that the Government must first of all remember that the working people of this country will not again stand the conditions of 1920 to 1931, or even 1935. I say to the Government: After you have been in office for six years the great thing is to put your own policy right. You promised the moon, and now you are in this position.[59]

Apart from the obvious political point made against the Conservative government, he also referred to collective memory in order to illustrate the plight of working class Britons whom he felt would be hit disproportionately by opening up the markets. But besides conjuring up shared memory of unfavourable economic circumstances, he also posited an alternative to what the Conservative government was willing to do for the people, according to his view, by implicitly referring to an idea which gained currency particularly in the postwar period. This idea, which was a constitutive part of postwar British national identity is that of the creation of a 'New Jerusalem'. In 1945 Labour won the general elections in a landslide, dethroning wartime Prime Minister Churchill. This election victory was widely regarded and felt to be an effort to break with the pre-war past which was associated widely with unemployment, economic slump and inequality. The Labour government, under Prime Minister Clement Attlee, followed a new policy path which aimed to create a social welfare state. It succeeded for a large part to guarantee certain social rights. The nationalisation of industries was another important part of these economic policies. When the Conservative Party came to power again in 1951 it had to accept the by now practically irreversible achievements of the previous government. To do otherwise would have meant political self destruction, since the newly attained

[58] A.C. May, 'The Commonwealth and Britain's Turn to Europe, 1945-73', *Journal of International Affairs* vol.102 no.1 (2013), 29-39.
[59] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), Vol. 206 (13-11-1957), col. 334.

rights and policies had come to be regarded as part of 'a new Britain' and as such a central part of conceptions of national identity.[60] That the Viscount raised the standard of the working class against the spectre of an uncontrollable integrated capitalist market, with no eye for the British worker, is relevant because it seems a precursor for ideas which would later on come to play a significant role in the opposition to European integration within the Labour Party.[61] It was a mix of ideas about social justice and a sort of narrowly defined nationalist protectionism to prevent that British workers would be confronted with what was considered unfair competition from low-wage countries. In this way, clear socio-economic interests had become interwoven with national identity narratives. However this Labour narrative does not take away the fact that the Labour Party, as well as the Conservative Party, had both opponents and supporters of European integration among its ranks. Especially in these early years the Labour Party did not have a uniform policy on the issue. The Lord Chancellor for the Conservative Party made the following comment in reaction to the Viscount Alexander:

> The prize of the Common Market is a more prosperous market of 250 million people in Europe who have a great industrial and commercial tradition behind them. I have said that because I wish to put the matter in the balance in which it must be looked at.[62]

Thus, even though his opponent had appealed to widely held conceptions of national identity, the Lord Chancellor disagreed with him, reflecting how the political stance of the Conservative Party towards social and economic policy differed. Perhaps the appeals by the Viscount were not that effective on the whole or perhaps the fact that this was after all a debate within the congenial confines of the House of Lords lessened the effect of his appeals. All in all, it is important to note the place of the social welfare state and the economic policy of nationalization in post war conceptions of national identity, which was not only expressed and defended among anti-EEC Labour politicians, but was also something which had to be taken into account by pro-EEC politicians, be they left or right wing, Labour or Conservative. This combination of a national identity narrative and ideas on social and economic policy was appealing to large parts of the electorate, as we will see in the next chapters.

Overall, these years from 1955 to 1957 were characterised by British indecision in the face of an outwardly self assured and economically resurgent continent working towards ever closer union. The unclear and changing position of the United Kingdom in international politics was underlined in this period by the aloofness of Britain towards European integration and the disastrous sequence of

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[60] Robbins, *Great Britain: identities, institutions and the Idea of Britishness*, 329-331
[61] H. Lazer, 'British Populism: The Labour Party and the Common Market Parliamentary Debate', *Political Science Quarterly* vol.91 no.2 (1976), 259-277.
[62] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), Vol. 206 (13-11-1957), col. 344-45.

events during the Suez Crisis. Yet this lack of clarity did not necessarily impede expressions of national identity narratives or the basic assumptions of shared identity. Existing patterns of expression could still be used to discuss and comprehend the events. Overall, there was little innovation in discourse and little play with conceptions of national identity. Although Frederick Bellenger did stand out as an example of how ideas about national identity could be challenged to great effect. Generally the members of this national institution in Westminster had little trouble to explain events and propose courses of action using accepted ideas. However, this period did see the first instance of a wider discussion involving identity narratives and conceptions of national identity in the context of broader debates on European integration and would signify the start of a development which would only strengthen in the years to come.

Chapter Two

Waiting outside in the cold

As we have seen in the last chapter the British government had pulled out of the negotiations towards further European integration of 'the Six' at an early stage in December 1955. This left the British stuck on the sidelines as 'the Six' fulfilled their Common Market ambitions, culminating in the signing of the Treaty of Rome in March 1957. By means of the EFTA alternative the British government had managed to prevent political and economic separation from Europe. The period under consideration in the last chapter ran from 1955 to 1 January 1958, when the Treaty of Rome came into force. In this chapter we shall jump ahead a little to 1961, when the government proposed to start negotiations to enter the EEC as a full member. The end of the period under consideration in this chapter will be the Spring of 1963, when De Gaulle had prevented British accession with a firm 'no'. This choice to skip ahead is based on the dual approach of this thesis; it is thematic, in that the parliamentary debates are analysed in accordance with the prospected 'event' that was being discussed, but also chronological, because a crucial part of the analysis is to find out whether there is a development across time. It is essentially a diachronic comparison of consecutive time periods. Before we start with the analysis of the parliamentary debate, a sketch of the political context of this period will be given, evaluating the most relevant and most recent historiography.

The over-arching narrative of 'Britain in decline', that is found or discussed in a majority of the historiography on the subject of Britain and European integration has to be put into perspective in order to understand the contemporary parliamentary debates. This narrative of decline was certainly perceived as a valid point of view at the time, when political issues often required rethinking British international political strategy, while economically the maintenance of British wealth and competitiveness was central. But decline was not considered the only possible explanatory narrative for the contemporary situation. A summary of the issues that confronted the UK in the early 1960's could well support a narrative of decline: the power of the USSR and related defence issues (nuclear option vs. conventional forces); declining Commonwealth trade and cohesion (e.g. the expulsion of South Africa against UK advice); the troublesome state of 'the special relationship' with the United States ever since the Suez Crisis and the formation of the EEC; balance of payment issues.[63] These were definitely issues that occupied politicians (and the public alike) and that certainly got attention. But it is a different thing altogether to say that all British politicians at that time felt that the country was in a state of perpetual crisis or that a definitive solution was needed to solve this 'problem' of (supposed) decline. In other words, this narrative of decline that is now dominant in the historiography must not be taken to necessarily represent the entire experience

[63] Crowson, *Britain and Europe*, 78-81.

of that time. To jump ahead temporarily to the parliamentary debates: when Prime Minister Macmillan announced on 31 July 1961 that the government intended to open negotiations for accession with the EEC, this decision was not necessarily understood as a desperate and necessary measure to halt British decline. Some politicians would have argued that 'a solution' for the singular 'problem of decline' was not required. Some simply did not subscribe to the idea of decline or the idea that a single policy action would provide a sufficient solution. Thus, it would be anachronistic to assume that British politicians at the time had a prescient understanding of 'what the problem was' and what consequences any alternative solutions would have. Furthermore, it would be presumptuous for us historians to claim to know *precisely* what the defining quality of British politics at the time was. And besides, alternate suggestions to confront the issues at hand mainly originated from the opposition (i.e. the Labour Party), but this did not mean that all Conservatives agreed completely with the government's rationalisation of the chosen course, or that the Labour politicians were, without exception, vehemently opposed. The argumentation was more nuanced on both sides, even though ultimately both parties would take more circumscribed contrasting positions. Thus, the narrative of decline, that is a central feature in the historiography on the British relation to European integration, should not be understood as necessarily having had a crucial influence on all political opinions and decisions of the period under consideration in this study.[64]

However, the Macmillan government did arrive at the conclusion that to join the EEC would be beneficial for the United Kingdom. On 31 July 1961 Prime Minister Macmillan announced to parliament his intention to apply for membership.[65] Commonwealth relations were considered to be in decline, both economically and politically. The 'special relationship' appeared to the government to become less mutual every year. And domestically, the Conservative Party election slogan of the 1959 elections, 'you've never had it so good', had become a burden to the government since the UK experienced a period of economic and budgetary problems in the early 1960's.[66] Politically the moment seemed opportune to apply for membership, domestically and internationally. The application was explicitly portrayed as a Conservative initiative by Macmillan, in the hope that the party would come to be associated with progressivism as opposed to Labour's reputedly regressive emphasis on national planning and protectionism. [67] This presentation of the initiative as overtly political brought to light the problem of Conservative division on the subject of Europe, as anti-Marketeer and other anti-European sentiments were not absent from the party, nor even from the ranks of Conservative MPs.[68] Dissent was especially pronounced among the Conservative

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[64] Crowson, *Britain and Europe*, 82-83.
[65] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 645 (31-7-1961), col. 928-931.
[66] Denman, *Missed chances*, 208-209.
[67] Giauque, *Grand designs and visions of unity*, 166.
[68] Dewey, *British national identity and opposition to membership of Europe*, 155-209.

‘backbenchers’[69]. Internationally, joining the EEC was believed to offer new leadership opportunities in international relations, in face of the perceived decline in international stature. It was expected that France under leadership of President De Gaulle would prevent a smooth entry for Britain and it was widely believed that De Gaulle was seeking to ensure French prominence in continental affairs through the EEC. His disaffected stance towards the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ countries served as an explanation for this ambition at the time. The cabinet relied on a shared disapproval of supranational integration to gain French approval. This very basic consensus was the government’s biggest hope to prevent a French veto, which was thought to be imminent if there were no attempts made to placate the French.[70] President De Gaulle’s veto, announced on 14 January 1963, proved a setback for British political interests internationally, but it was a shock for Macmillan and his Conservative government especially, who had devoted so much time and political capital to joining the EEC. It damaged the reputation of the Prime Minister whose nickname ‘Supermac’ reflected his perceived ability to get things done effectively.[71]

These developments had been subject to parliamentary discussion throughout. The proposed British involvement in European integration had been a contentious issue, as it still internally divided the two major parties. The Prime Minister and his cabinet had nonetheless succeeded in getting sufficient support for its policy. This had not been a straightforward matter, however. MPs were able to take their own positions in the debates apart from party considerations and the dividing lines were not completely along party-political lines. This plurality of opinions within the parties did coincide with the appearance of a more formal opposition-government positioning on the issue in the course of the debates. Apprehensions were most pronounced among Labour MPs, but this did not restrict Labour pro-Europeanism entirely, nor did it exclude Conservatives from a critical stance. Different views on Britain’s past and future were a constituent part of the variance of political opinion. To better understand this situation, we now turn toward an analysis of the parliamentary debates in the period of the first British EEC-application, from 1961 to 1963.

As mentioned, Harold Macmillan announced the intention of the cabinet to apply for membership of the EEC in July 1961. This move made it an absolute necessity for the Conservative leaders in both houses of parliament to support the government unambiguously. However, there were no certainties yet as to what the conditions for entry would be. Therefore support for the

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[69] ‘Backbenchers’ are the MPs who due to their less prominent position within the parliamentary party would sit on the back benches of the House of Commons, as opposed to the ‘frontbenchers’, the more prominent MPs who occupied the front benches, which indicated their seniority and their increased political weight in debates. However, backbenchers were crucial at times to the political leadership, since they made up the majority of MPs. Widespread or organised ‘backbench’ dissent could seriously hinder the government or party leadership in carrying out its policy priorities in parliament.

[70] Giauque, *Grand designs and visions of unity*, 161.

[71] Gowland, Turner and Wright, *Britain and European integration since 1945*, 63.

government on this issue had to be given in abstract and imprecise wordings, also to prevent these figureheads of the Conservative Party being forced to account for their own words and early commitments by the opposition at a later stage in the negotiations. The situation at the time differed in this way from the period under scrutiny in the previous chapter, as the contours of a party-political divide on this issue were beginning to take shape, that is to say mostly for the parties' leadership. This division on an issue that was directly related to questions of sovereignty and the British past, present and future, enticed politicians to phrase their political positions in national identity narratives. In this instance, the Conservative party leaders were directing their remarks not only towards the public or the opposition, but also towards their own parliamentary party colleagues, since it was not at all certain whether sufficient support existed within the Conservative party. Concurrently, abstract and appealing phrasings could also lure pro-EEC members of the opposition towards supporting the government on this specific issue, by blurring the lines of political differences and by phrasing their political argument in terms of a shared identity narrative. In order to achieve political goals an inclusive story had to be told, that was convincing enough to garner support among undecided MPs. Since tangible bargaining points were not available to lure in hesitant backbenchers, apart from political loyalty appeals, an appeal had to be made to shared ideas, shared values and shared identity. Of course, appealing to certain sentiments among MPs also meant not to violate or undermine these sentiments. A narrative that was too circumscribed and exclusive would scare off potential support. These sensitivities, whether political or related to personal and shared identities, had to be appraised and appeased. The Conservative leader of the House of Lords, Viscount Hailsham, when announcing the cabinet decision to the house on 3 August, was balancing the overtly political goal and the means to reach that goal, namely common conceptions of national identity:

> We are conscious of an ideal and a fabric to which we should be glad to belong, and with which we could express our full sympathy. For the truth is, that Britain does not seek to enter Europe either as a suppliant or as an alien. Being British is only another way of saying that we are part of Europe, culturally and spiritually. Our language, our law, our literature, our religion; the things which make us characteristically what we are, what we have been and what we want to be; the things which we have passed on to America and to the Commonwealth, old and new; the very failures which leave us far short of what we would be all these are European and Christian. Our roots go deep down into the soil of European history and experience; our present has been inextricably intertwined with the agony and bitterness of the twentieth-century European tragedy, of which we are the fellow-sufferers and in which we have been the joint participants. If we deserve to survive, as survive we mean to do, the chaos and the darkness of the present international anarchy, it is because we are, with others, the joint guardians and heirs of something more precious than ourselves, which thousands have died for,

> which some, indeed, have betrayed, and which more still who are alive to-day desire to live for and pass on to unborn generations.[72]

The inclusive language that Hailsham used, referring to language, law, literature and religion, was a specific rephrasing of accepted conceptions of national identity, which only becomes clear when the narrative is viewed as a whole. He hardly seems to be making a political point at first glance and that is precisely the sought after effect of such uses of language and shared conceptions of identity. He was not referring to any economic, financial or budgetary issues; he was not evaluating domestic or international political hierarchies; he was not contemplating what changes in policy and practical politics would have to be made if the application was successful. Basically, he was saying that to apply for membership is a good thing, because in doing that Britain would only be acknowledging and fulfilling its European identity. A politician vehemently opposed to the idea of getting involved with European schemes of integration could have readily attacked him, if he had referred to any concrete political issues. This hypothetical politically opposed MP would have been able to convince others of his points of view and clarify the faults in pro-EEC reasoning. However in this instance, in this context one could hardly start arguing that the English language is not European, that Christianity was not the majority religion of the British and European people or that British literature was not influenced by European literature. The fact that Hailsham could make a political point, without being vulnerable to any concrete criticisms, is key. However superficial and gratuitous it may seem, this tactic served a purpose and a very important one at that: allowing people to relate what one has to say to their own values and beliefs and appealing to their sense of identity makes it all the more likely that they will give the attention that is sought for and that they will more seriously (and more sympathetically) consider what is being said. This is a very obvious thing to note, but it clarifies what was being done by Viscount Hailsham in this instance; there is a reason why rhetoric is always political[73] (politics in the broadest sense that is, i.e. getting people to accept the things that affect them, that one proposes). Hailsham, or any politician for that matter, would have known that it is far more effective to appeal to undecided individuals, than trying to proselytize those individuals that are deeply and forcefully opposed to what one proposes. This speech by Hailsham thus was not designed to admonish the unbelievers, but to placate those that were not entirely opposed from the outset. What is central here then, is not that a politician managed to tell a nice story and appeal to crowds, but that these obvious conceptions of British national identity could serve to do that. These conceptions did not have any necessary or unchangeable political connotations domestically.

[72] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), Vol. 234 (3-8-1961), col. 223-4.
[73] The reason for the inherent political nature of rhetoric is that both are a call for position-taking in order to decide on what action to perform, either as an individual or as a community.

Precisely because they are 'national' they are general; because they are general they can be applied to anyone belonging to 'the nation'. They become politically coloured precisely because they are re-contextualized into political discourse. Actually, conceptions of national identity only make sense if they are framed politically, either internally (appeals to values, beliefs and identity made to propagate a political agenda), or externally (delineating who belongs to 'the nation' and who does not). This is because a 'national identity' implies that there are people who do not belong to that nation and this exclusionary function of national (or other types of shared) identity is necessarily political, because it is related to power and community. However, all those that do belong to the circumscribed nation can be addressed convincingly by means of the conceptions, narratives, ideas and values that underlie the shared identity, even if the underlying political message is not favoured by all that are addressed. When the political argument is concealed or phrased inclusively enough it is possible to convince more people of the soundness of it on the basis of an appeal to shared identity. In the context of British politics, appealing to British national identity is likely to increase a politicians' audience, as more people will feel to be part of the targeted audience. Such shared identity appeals thus have a two sided effect: on the one hand the potential audience is increased and on the other hand people are more likely to relate what is said to their own convictions or interests. The speech made by Viscount Hailsham in parliament was not directed purely to the politicians in the house, but also to the general public, although in an indirect way (as a majority of people would not be listening in on all parliamentary debates; they were more likely to be informed by means of the press). Producing an inclusive narrative so as not to alienate fellow politicians is one thing; with such a significant move, i.e. application for EEC membership, making sure not to alienate the public from this venture is equally (if not more) important politically.

A reaction to this speech by former Prime Minister Clement Attlee illustrates that in order to challenge a narrative that turns to conceptions of national identity to influence political discourse, one has to do precisely the same thing. It also illustrates the power and inescapability of identity discourse. Attlee seeks to alter the narrative, in order to make a different political point:

> It is all very well for the noble Viscount to say that we are not suppliants but we are, in effect, asking to go into this organisation. It is an organisation composed of two of the countries which we defeated in the Second World War, and four countries who owe their salvation to this country. But according to the Government which has been in power over the past ten years, we are so reduced, while they have done so much better than we have, that we have to beg to be allowed to join. I find that very depressing. I think it is rather ironical that this Government, which has professed itself to be saving this country and making her strong and free, should be taking this line.[74]

[74] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), Vol. 234 (3-8-1961), col. 228.

This indicates not only a different political point of view on Attlee's part, but also a radically different view on British national identity. Hailsham, his political proposal for integration left aside, conjured up images of a shared history, a shared culture and shared interests. He portrayed British involvement in Europe as a logical outcome of what 'Britishness' is. Attlee painted the picture of a proud nation that came to the rescue of other countries only because they needed saving. He did not see involvement in European continental affairs as following necessarily from a shared European identity. That Attlee's fervent opposition to the application was not at all characteristic of Labour Party opinion was revealed in a speech made the day before, on 2 August, by Labour and Lords colleague the Earl of Longford. His pro-EEC position could not have been more clearly expressed than this:

> This country has, at the present time, in spite of having had ten years of Conservative Government, the most effective Socialist democratic Party in the world. Either we in the Labour Party cast our influence in favour of a national policy which would more and more pool our sovereignty, or we are so reactionary, we fear the foreigner so much, that we draw in our skirts and preach to ourselves in Hyde Park without any noticeable influence on world affairs. I believe Britain to-day is presented with an opportunity which, properly handled, will bring us more influence than we have ever possessed in the past, an influence for still wider and nobler causes than we have ever served. But if we fail to take this chance, which is unlikely to recur for many years, we shall be condemned, and rightly condemned, for timidity and indecision, by generations not yet born.[75]

The Earl of Longford left no doubt about his Labour credentials and equated an anti-EEC stance with reactionary politics and 'fearing the foreigner'. According to the Earl, not joining the European integration project would leave Britain to preach to themselves in Hyde Park, a famous site in London where people would hold public speeches. What the Earl meant to say was that Britain would become isolated from international politics and thus he painted a negative picture of an isolationist Britain, of which he feared that it would become a reality. Furthermore, the Earl's strongly worded position makes it clear that the issue of Britain joining in European integration was not subject to any strict party line. That in turn reflects how this issue and the framing of it in terms of a narrative of national identity, was not simply divided into two clearly defined political camps. And even where it was, as between Hailsham and Attlee, conceptions of national identity were not neatly divided and fixed to certain political arguments, but were in fact applicable to various and differing political points of view. This is what we saw in chapter one and what we will see in the following.

[75] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), Vol. 234 (2-8-1961), col. 165-66.

The Earl of Longford did not stand alone in his pro-EEC stance. There was a substantial pro-European faction within the Labour Party. On the day that the Earl spoke out, 2 August, others within Labour did so too. Lord Morrison of Lambeth for example:

> Our island has had a great place in the world; it still has a great place. We have often done much in the way of helping the world towards sanity, and in world leadership I believe that the British have a part to play in the European community. Therefore, subject to the results of these negotiations, I think it is right to take the proposed step.[76]

Firstly it is important to note that the MPs were still dependent on the outcome of the negotiations and continued debating on an uniformed basis. Lord Morrison was an exponent of a smaller group within the Labour pro-EEC faction, that of the supporters of the 'world government'-idea. The opinions in the party were informed by a plurality of interests and ideals. In fact, the officially uncommitted stance of the Labour Party and the plurality of opinions would be maintained well into 1962, when the EEC-negotiations were starting to revolve around more concrete issues and conditions.[77] And even then, the political positioning was for the most part motivated by opposing government policy. Besides, not a lot was to be gained from opposing EEC-membership by focusing genuinely on the issues, which were uncertain and complicated; certainly so for the general public. Polls in 1961 showed that the public had no real in-depth knowledge of the functioning of the EEC and the consequences for the UK of joining. In fact, ignorance about the EEC was remarkably widespread. Shortly after the EEC was created in 1958 many people were under the impression that Britain was already a member and a majority of British people were not even aware of the existence of the EEC. By 1961, awareness had increased somewhat, but opposition to joining the EEC (25% in early 1962) mostly reflected opposition to the Macmillan government in general. In general, the public remained favourable towards joining the EEC, with around 40% remaining positive after De Gaulle's veto on 14 January 1963, which was itself a low-point in the polls.[78] This lack of public knowledge, together with the obscure nature of the negotiations (for those not directly participating in them), might go some way to explain why economic and purely political arguments remained highly speculative. Consequently, this uncertainty might also explain the marked presence of identity narratives in the parliamentary debates in this period.

Another example of a recasting of British history and identity into a pro-European narrative was given by the Conservative Earl of Bessborough, also during the debates in the summer of 1961:

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[76] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), Vol. 234 (2-8-1961), col. 183.
[77] L.J. Robins, *The reluctant party: Labour and the EEC, 1961-75* (Ormskirk 1979) 16-18.
[78] R. Jowell and G. Hoinville, *Britain into Europe: public opinion and the EEC, 1961-75* (London 1976) 18-23.

> Some people, especially protagonists of Commonwealth, have said that we make a mistake by going into Europe. Some people sometimes disparage Continental customs and ways of life. This seems to me to be a ridiculous attitude to be taken by a country which has developed as a result of an amalgam of races—Romans, Saxons, Normans, Danes, French Huguenots and even Russian, Norwegian and Austrian refugees, to say nothing of Italian and Spanish labour coming into the country at this moment. Are we really to say that this Island of Britain is not part of Europe?[79]

This very rough sketch of migration history in the UK was once again an effort to underwrite the inherent European nature of British identity. It was political, but it also emphasised the historic and contemporary link of British society with continental Europe. It provided nuance to the idea of a static and unchanging society, which undermines certain powerful conceptions of national identity. However, it is clear that the Earl was not politically neutral when he lavished praise on the Prime Minister for his decision to apply for EEC membership: "I consider that our Prime Minster has shown imagination, courage, enterprise and prudence of a kind which few other great Prime Ministers in our history have possessed".[80] This hyperbolic choice of words was matched by the Earl's Conservative colleague in the House of Commons, Anthony Fell, who got across the exact opposite message:

> Is the Prime Minister aware that he has made a shocking statement, full of political double-talk? [HON. MEMBERS: "Nonsense."] Is he aware that at last it has had the effect on one former supporter that he now thinks that the Prime Minister is a national disaster?
>
> § The Prime Minister rose—
>
> Mr. Fell
>
> No. I can be told to sit down by Mr. Speaker, but I cannot be told to sit down by the Prime Minister. Is the Prime Minister aware that this decision to gamble with British sovereignty in Europe…is the most disastrous thing that any Prime Minister has done for many generations past?... I suggest that the best service that the Prime Minister could do to the country would be to resign"[81]

Labelling a Prime Minister a 'national disaster' and calling for his resignation was bold enough for a member of the opposition, but for a party colleague to vent such dissatisfaction and frustration on his own government was quite extraordinary. Furthermore, considering this outburst it is evident that the issue of European integration was divisive in the Conservative Party as well as in the Labour Party. Anthony Fell's denunciation of the PM's 'gamble with British sovereignty in Europe' as 'the most disastrous thing that any Prime Minister has done for many generations past' suggest that he

[79] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), Vol. 234 (2-8-1961), col. 168.
[80] Ibid., col. 170.
[81] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 645 (31-7-1961), col. 934-35.

did not subscribe to the pro-European identity narratives of his Conservative colleagues, such as that of the Earl of Bessborough. For Fell, fulfilling Britain's inherent European identity by joining the EEC would not be a convincing argument. It is telling that the Labour politician Lord Stonham could express the opposite sentiment concerning sovereignty, clearly being more pro-EEC than Anthony Fell and even showing a willingness to relinquish sovereignties bordering on eagerness:

> I am equally sure that we shall never be certain of peace until we are wise enough to surrender or fuse certain basic sovereignties. I think it is true that, in the nuclear age, national sovereignty is an illusion, whether it is bolstered up by an expensive but totally inadequate Army or a hopeless determination to "go it alone" in a trade war. I would say that those who still believe in such things should ask themselves whether the British people can best fulfil their pride of race as equal partners in a prosperous, peaceful Europe or as sovereigns over a radio-active desert.[82]

Obviously this fatalistic view was related to Cold War anxieties, however others did not choose to see European integration as an answer to Cold War problems. In fact, many considered an 'independent', sovereign (and nuclear armed) Britain to be the best counterbalance between the United States on the one hand and the Soviet Union on the other.[83] The above overview of diametrically opposed opinions serves to give an insight into the plurality of the debates and the relative freedom of expression that the individual MPs still retained. Lord Stonham was a pro-EEC Labour politician, claiming that the British people could fulfil 'their pride of race' in Europe, while Fell as a Conservative MP considered joining the EEC 'a gamble with British sovereignty' of disastrous proportions. Both points of view were cast in terms of national destiny; both were contrary to the majority positions in their respective parties. This serves as an illustration of both the versatility of identity narratives and the absence of a full party political divide. Consequently, the relative openness of the debates in this period is something to be noted.

The overlap between political message and use of conceptions of national identity was not always as clear cut. The following statement by the Conservative Lord, the Earl of Gosford illustrates how the language could undermine the message:

> But—and this is the basis of my remarks—we shall not solve [the issues related to EEC membership] unless our negotiators are men who understand the Continental mind. After all, we have been cooped up in this island for a 1,000 years or more and it is difficult for us to realise what the Continental is thinking. The main impression that we must give the people of the Continent is that we are approaching them with a view to helping and not disrupting, to strengthening and not to weakening.

[82] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), Vol. 234 (2-8-1961), col. 190.
[83] Gowland, Turner and Wright, *Britain and European integration since 1945*, 61-63.

> Europe will not welcome us unless we discard the attitude of looking down our noses at the Continent. Unfortunately, that attitude still exists. We had an example of it when the Six offered us a chance of associating with them. If I remember rightly, we did not exactly snub them; we did not even bother to reply. That is the sort of attitude which has now disappeared, and I hope that it will not return.[84]

This was a very strange way to make a pro-EEC argument. This attitude of 'we must not scare off the Continental' sooner expressed the perceived otherness of continental Europeans, than being a plea for equal cooperation. It reflected the wish for British leadership in Europe which, as we saw in the previous chapter, had been problematized by the Suez Crisis and the initial disassociation from the EEC initiative. What he said seems most like an archaic attitude towards Europeans, composed of certain ideas of British exceptionalism, which the Earl could not break with. It matched in no way the positive tone that other Conservative politicians used to underline the in their view undeniable cultural bonds with Europe, which in their rhetoric served to legitimise British involvement in European integration. This exception is an indication of how the more Europe-oriented reframed conceptions of national identity differed significantly from earlier conceptions of national identity, that focused more on the unique quality of 'Britishness'.[85] These kinds of expressions had become incompatible with the mainstream of public discourse by this time, but they had not yet completely disappeared (although it has to be said that the House of Lords, where this occurred, differed in debating style, mostly in the length of speeches; often allowing for more creative or eccentric points of view).[86] Another expression along the same lines of thought, but expressed differently was made by Conservative MP Aubrey Jones in a debate about a year later, when on 6 and 7 June 1962 the first debates on the subject of European integration since the summer of 1961 were held and the negotiations still had no fixed outcomes or tangible results:

> Let us accept it whole-heartedly, confident that, although we may have lost a great deal, there is still enough political genius left in this country to give the new ideas in Europe a wider significance, a significance which otherwise I think they would far less easily acquire.[87]

This was a reference to 'a more outward looking quality' of 'the British political mind' which was a notion that was quite common and related to the Commonwealth link. However, it transcended the idea that the Commonwealth relation was what made Britain unique. It related to ideas of British

[84] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), Vol. 234 (2-8-1961), col. 194.
[85] Ward, *Britishness since 1870*, 108.
[86] That is assuming that they have disappeared or will do so. Such attitudes seem central to collective identity grouping. If the way in which the Earl of Gosford expressed himself had become uncommon, this does not mean consequently that these sentiments had disappeared from the public consciousness; it is more likely that they had been rephrased in order to become convincing and acceptable again.
[87] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 661 (6-6-1962), col. 537.

entrepreneurship, openness and a sort of general adventurousness that can be retraced to conceptions related to empire. It is a self-image that inspired great confidence in the British political ability to adapt and govern, born out of a certain conception of the British Empire and 'the genius of Britain' as the conqueror and just ruler of the colonies.[88] What was suggested was that Britain would certainly receive benefits from closer economic cooperation, but that the most important reason for Britain to join the EEC and the process of European integration was the political genius of the British, which people like Jones believed could make the whole European venture into an unmitigated success. This stable union under British leadership could then be a force for good in the world, or in other words be connected to the Commonwealth and international leadership. At least, that was the idea.[89]

The Lord Privy Seal, Edward Heath, had also made a point of the supposed 'British contribution' to the process of European integration. In the same debate as that of Aubrey Jones, in the summer of 1962, in which the ongoing negotiations were being discussed, Heath said: "As for the constitutional developments, I indicated our view that these will grow naturally to meet the requirements of developments in Europe. That is a typical British pragmatic approach".[90] In this instance, Heath referred to the so called 'functionalist approach' to European integration, where gradual progress towards closer cooperation is elevated above desires to reach the sought for integration in one fell swoop. This approach to constitutional matters was referred to in chapter one as well. It consists of a preference for a more ad-hoc and pragmatic attitude towards legal issues, related to the Common Law legal system prevalent in the UK. The combined idea of British leadership in Europe through the EEC and the control of the political direction in which the EEC would move was attractive enough to entice those politicians for whom entry to the EEC served as a remedy to declining British influence in international affairs. Another approach was propagated by the leader of the Liberal Party in the House of Commons, Jo Grimond:

> I am in favour of these negotiations, and I hope they will succeed. I think that one has to have a certain emotional response about this matter. I do not think that one can look simply at the terms, although I agree that the terms are very important. It is like a person buying a house. First, he has to make up his mind what sort of house he wants to live in. Then he has to look at the price. The price may be impossible. I do not deny that these negotiations may fail. But to my mind Europe is the sort of house into which the British people should go.[91]

[88] Ward, *Britishness since 1870*, 31-32.
[89] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 661 (6-6-1962), col. 534.
[90] Ibid., col. 506.
[91] Ibid., col. 555-56.

Here Grimond was arguing for a more instinctive approach to the EEC application and challenged the emphasis his colleagues put on the Commonwealth during this debate and how that could be preserved through joining the EEC. Grimond pleaded to put aside existing interests and look at the terms with an open mind, in order to be able to appraise the outcomes of the negotiations according to their real value. He felt that he was up against an insular scepticism of everything remotely 'un-British', which was reflected in the importance attached to the terms due to Commonwealth considerations. Grimond did not follow the same reasoning as many of the Conservative MPs, who kept emphasising the European roots of British culture. He was wary of such narratives that mask a vaguely defined pro-EEC position. He wished to see a less hesitant, less vague and more concrete expression of pro-EEC sentiment and in the process he burst the bubble of the Conservative MPs and their grandiloquent language, which to him was too non-committal and of little use in convincing people of the necessity of joining the EEC. Obviously he, as a member of the Liberal Party, was not constrained as much as Conservative MPs by the need to shape an inclusive identity discourse, in order to garner enough political support. This allowed him to break through the dominant narrative around conceptions of national identity and say something relatively 'new' and original:

> It may be that there would be the possibility of a new role for Britain in the world, but we might sink back into a small inward-looking and uninfluential nation lying off the shores of Europe. I do not believe that we can go on just as before. The decisions taken in the next year or two will be vital decisions, whether we think them good or bad, and it is no good blinking the facts… It is wrong to believe that we can go into Europe and get better terms by showing no real enthusiasm for the idea which is animating, for better or worse, the whole spirit of Europe today.[92]

Grimond came across as a pragmatist, which was beneficial rhetorically, but also fundamentally different from the tone of the rest of the debate. That difference in tone serves to illustrate how Grimond managed to break out of the spiralling efforts to reconcile involvement in processes of European integration with British national sensitivities that were related to interests, but also to identity. Grimond seemed to worry least about being acceptable to as many people as possible and more about making his point. The way in which he achieved this was dissimilar to how the dissenting minority of Labour and Conservative MPs, who took views opposing those of their party leadership, tried to repudiate the narrative of their colleagues. Instead of a very negative distancing, which the other MPs needed to push themselves away from their party leaderships, Grimond distanced himself from the dominant narrative in a positive way. He did not speak in terms of differing conceptions of identity (or call the PM 'a national disaster') as the other MPs did. He did not feel the obligation to

[92] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 661 (6-6-1962), col. 557-58.

rival the narratives of his colleagues by putting forward alternative interpretations of what characterised good British conduct and what were true representations of British identity or character. He put himself above such things to address the real issues at hand, which during the debates were more of an overhanging meta-narrative than the subject of actual debate at times, the more so because the ongoing status of the negotiations imposed a lack of certainty. In doing so he managed to come across as neutral, or at least as having more legitimate claims to being neutral. Which naturally he was not, he was a Liberal MP (which also relegated him to being rather obsolete when it came to voting on the issue of European integration). Yet the way in which his arguments contrasted with those of the two major parties is significant, because it puts emphasis on the fact that politicians in the Conservative and Labour parties were constrained by the need to give shape to an inclusive narrative in order to try to realize actual political majorities.

One incident that took place during these debates in the summer of 1962 showed how racialist conceptions of identity were frowned upon and subject to immediate criticism. Frederick Bellenger, the Labour MP whom we have also seen in the first chapter, said the following:

> I prefer the white Commonwealth, which has shown its practical adherence to the mother country when the mother country has been in danger, to the 53 million emerging black people in Africa who at present, as we all know, are not following some of the well-defined democratic practices for which we stand and for which I hope the European Economic Community stands.[93]

Such expressions were not tolerated, as Conservative MP Robin Turton replied: “he talked with contempt of what he described as the black Commonwealth. I hope that we shall try to conduct this series of debates on a rather higher level”.[94] Bellenger then said: “That was not meant to be a derogatory term. It was a term which I used to distinguish my feelings for what I call the old Dominions, which are mainly white, from my feelings about the new Dominions, which are undoubtedly black”[95]. The dispute was ended by a final remark by Turton: “I will leave the right hon. Gentleman. HANSARD will record his speech, and I know that many other hon. Members wish to speak”.[96] The quick response to perceived racial prejudice indicates that such discriminatory conceptions of British identity were unacceptable. This is especially relevant because during the postwar period many immigrants came to the UK from what were then still British colonies or newly independent Commonwealth states. These new members of British society, who often already were

[93] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 661 (6-6-1962), col. 540.
[94] Ibid., col. 548.
[95] Ibid., col. 549.
[96] Ibid., col. 549.

British citizens[97], caused a necessary reappraisal of British national identity. Racial conceptions of national identity were widespread at this time, having been a major part of British Empire history. The preference for the so called 'Old Dominions', i.e. the British settler colonies of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa as well, was inextricably bound to racialist conceptions.[98] The confident rebuttal to the utterance of such notions shows the intention of upholding more inclusive conceptions of national identity. The stance toward the new Commonwealth members, decolonisation and the domestic positions on immigration from (former) colonies were tied together, as these were related issues and viewed as such. This reprimand does not mean that anything that resembled racist discourse was condemned unanimously in political debate, but the above incident does show that such ideas were regarded as problematic and immoral and that they could be met with resistance convincingly, which implies a shared disavowal of racially exclusive conceptions of national identity. It lays bare that politicians were aware of the wider implications of their identity narratives.

On 8 November 1962 the House of Commons voted to urge a swift conclusion of the negotiations with 'the Six'. The amendment to this motion, by Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell, captured the anxiety of the House about the slow progress and the lack of results.[99] The realisation had landed that the drawn out nature of the talks foreshadowed failure. When that failure came with the announcement of the veto by French president De Gaulle, on 14 January 1963, astonishment and indignation permeated the parliament. Labour Lord the Viscount Alexander of Hillsborough put the broken national pride on display, while urging for a new policy that the British government could carry out now that it had been rejected from becoming an EEC member:

> I regard it as a challenge to our greatness here—and we are a great country—and it is about time that our Government took a step in the direction which will really appeal to the whole of the United Kingdom, and laid down a policy which can show that we are no more afraid of the future here than when France broke and we faced the world alone. That is the spirit in which we now have to tackle both the economic and the political issues that open up before us because of this contretemps which has occurred.[100]

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[97] The British Nationality Act of 1948 had provided for a universal citizenship; one motive behind this act was the intention to hold the Empire together by granting citizenship-rights (or symbolically granting equality). These Empire-wide citizenship rights became increasingly controversial (and watered down) as immigration from the Empire to the UK steadily grew in the two decades after the war. This is some of the literature used on this subject: K. Paul, “"British Subjects" and "British Stock": Labour's Postwar Imperialism”, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 34 No. 2 (1995) 233-276, and D. Heater, *Citizenship in Britain: A History* (Edinburgh 2006).
[98] Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 113-119.
[99] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 666 (8-11-1962), col. 1172.
[100] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), Vol. 246 (30-1-1963), col. 334.

Wrapped up in this defiant statement was the accusation towards the government that its policy did not represent the will and interests of the totality of British citizens. It also shows that economic and political issues were felt by the Labour Party to have been neglected during the period of the negotiations; this lack of constructive policies was reflected in the contents of the debates that had been concerned relatively little with clearly defined issues of policy. Hillsborough's argument also contained the assumption that the national destiny desired by Britons lay outside of the EEC and that Britain was ready now 'to face the world alone'. Crossbench[101] Lord Merrivale put forward a truly apocalyptic interpretation of the events: "the country is facing a challenge to-day as it did twenty-three years ago".[102] This bleak view of the situation was not widely shared though. Harold Wilson, Labour's second most important politician at the time, said in the House of Commons on 30 January 1963 that he regarded the obstructed path towards European integration as an opportunity to realise truly effective policies for Britain, which would fit its national character better:

> This should not be regarded as a disaster for the country, that we certainly do not so regard it; and that it may be of great advantage to the country if it is now regarded as bringing home clearly to everyone that the future of this country depends entirely on our own efforts and what we are prepared to do and if it brings home to the whole House that no British Minister must ever again be put in the position of waiting outside in the cold.[103]

This advocacy of an 'independent' Britain glorified in isolation and the assumption underlies it that the sovereignty of the nation (and concurrently control of economic policy) should be entirely in British hands, or otherwise the country cannot function. Labour MP Fred Blackburn once again uttered the same thought that Attlee had expressed years before: "to me it has been humiliating that this country should have been going with a begging bowl to countries which we either liberated or defeated in the last war".[104] The Labour opposition to EEC membership had now taken a very nationally oriented point of departure, glorifying British sovereignty and putting great faith in national planning efficacy. As stressed before, this opposition was not a uniform party sentiment, yet the leadership in the form of Harold Wilson and most importantly Hugh Gaitskell had positioned the party opposite the pro-European Conservative standpoint during the fall of 1962. A reliance on isolationist and exclusive conceptions of national identity culminated in the speech given by Hugh Gaitskell at the Labour Party Conference on 3 October 1962, when he equated joining the EEC with

[101] Independent member of the House of Lords. It refers to the physical position of the benches (which were put facing the speaker: thence 'cross' benches) in between the opposing benches of the different parties.
[102] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), Vol. 246 (30-1-1963), col. 339.
[103] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 670 (30-1-1963), col. 944.
[104] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 671 (11-2-1963), col. 999.

"the end of a thousand years of history".[105] This speech, prophesising the end of Britain in case of EEC membership, has become the defining moment of Labour's early response to European integration. This very narrow conception of British national identity had not defined the behaviour of Labour MPs throughout the parliamentary debates, but from 1961 on it became the increasingly dominant mood in the party. On the surface the positions of the two major parties seemed carefully circumscribed; the Conservatives were expressing a careful, but resolved open conception of national identity, fuelled by political fears of economic disaster and international isolation; the Labour Party trying to capitalise on the undecided positions of many British citizens, for whom this classic banal nationalism represented familiar conceptions of national identity in an unambiguous way and harked back to the confident Labour election victory of 1945, when a victorious Britain was felt to face a new, invigorating future.[106] Specific conceptions of national identity were thus politicized to a high degree, by both parties, during this period from 1961 to 1963. However, political power positions changed in the years that followed De Gaulle's 'non' and the situation during the second application for EEC membership, initiated by a government under leadership of Harold Wilson of all people, is hard to reconcile with the beliefs and positioning of the period of the first application, at least at first glance. In the next chapter the parliamentary debates of that period will be analysed, in order to find out whether expressed conceptions of national identity had changed along with political points of view.

[105] Young, *This blessed plot*, 162-63.
[106] This is the 'banal nationalism' mentioned earlier in the introduction, as defined by R.F. Dewey, see: Dewey, *British national identity and opposition to membership of Europe*, 17-38.

Chapter Three

Labour's turn towards Europe

In the previous chapter we have seen how the period of the first application to the EEC by the United Kingdom was characterized by an increasing divide between the Conservative and Labour parties' leaderships. The Conservative leadership under Prime Minister Macmillan had carefully positioned itself into a moderately positive stance toward EEC-membership, emphasising the necessity of applying as well as the need to secure good entry conditions. This went together with an emphasis of the essentially European nature of Britishness and the role that the 'British political genius' could fulfil in the integration process. The Labour Party leadership, in the person of Hugh Gaitskell, had supported its political opposition to membership with ideas of British exceptionalism, stating that 'a 1000 years of history' would be cast aside by joining the EEC. These views had come to hold a majority position within the two major parties, but did not represent the full range of opinion present in both parties, as a sizeable contingent remained in both parties that held opposing views. The situation had however come to define the political landscape at that time, since there had not been anything close to such a government-opposition divide before that time concerning the issue of European integration. The Conservative Party was committed to its decision to apply for membership and the Labour Party had become politically invested in opposition to that same decision, while the Liberal Party remained unequivocally pro-EEC. At the time it could have reasonably been suspected that in the years to come the two major parties would continue to hold the positions that they had taken in the course of the first application.

It turned out differently. In 1964 Labour had won the general election by a small margin, mostly ignoring European policy and focusing on domestic political issues like standards of living, education and social services.[107] They had not changed their policy concerning European integration and had not considered reapplying. However, the party changed direction when in the Labour manifesto for the 1966 general elections a provision was included stating that "Labour believes that Britain, in consultation with her EFTA partners, should be ready to enter the EEC, provided essential British and Commonwealth interests are safeguarded".[108] On 30 April 1967 the Cabinet eventually voted to make another bid to enter the EEC, by a margin of 13 for to 8 against.[109] On 27 November 1967, De Gaulle once again vetoed the application saying that "what France cannot do is to enter at present into a negotiation with the British and their associates which would lead to the destruction of the European structure of which she is a part".[110] In this chapter the period of the second application will be under consideration. It will cover the years of 1966 and 1967, from the time when

[107] Robins, *The reluctant party: Labour and the EEC, 1961-75*, 38.
[108] Ibid., 67.
[109] Denman, *Missed Chances*, 229.
[110] Ibid., 229.

the Labour government was starting to change its position until the moment when De Gaulle once again thwarted British intentions to join the European community.

This change of policy in the Labour Party has been subject to considerable speculation and contemplation in the historiography on Britain and the European integration process. One of the main lines of argument given to explain the turn-around in government policy concerns the economic situation that the Wilson-government found itself in. Another sterling crisis in the summer of 1966 would have forced the Cabinet's hand, because it endangered its domestic policies. EEC membership would bring economic relief to the government according to this interpretation.[111] However, while this might explain why the government did eventually consider applying, it does not explain why the Labour Party had opened itself up to the possibility in the first place, as the financial crisis took place months after the general election of 1966. An explanation for this might be found in the renewed campaign for membership by the Conservative Party. The Conservatives had chosen Edward Heath as their new political leader, the man who had been in charge of the negotiations during the first application and was known to be outspokenly in favour of another application. It is thought that Labour included the provision for reapplying in its election manifesto in order to prevent being pulled into a protracted discussion on the topic, both inside the party and outside, which they felt could have hurt their campaigning efforts for the 1966 general election.[112] Alternative explanations abound however and many of them revolve around the familiar narratives of British decline in industry and international diplomacy. The 'special relationship' was thought to have soured. It was thought that this was partly due to Wilson's inability to build an amicable relationship with US President Lyndon B. Johnson, who had unexpectedly secured re-election. Commonwealth considerations are also thought to have been on the decline around that time, due to political troubles in Rhodesia, strengthening the wish to reapply.[113] The characters and convictions of politicians themselves are also thought to have been a factor. The role of the new Cabinet minister George Brown, who was an unfaltering advocate of EEC-membership within the government, together with the newly chosen Labour MPs who were generally held to have been more pro-EEC, is also thought to have been an important factor in the changing Labour attitudes.[114] Lastly, the political opportunism, or pragmatism, of Harold Wilson is also put forward as an explanation. His move to reapply for membership would have been an effort to turn attention away from the dismal state of the government´s domestic record.[115] All these different explanations probably have to be merged in

[111] Gowland, Turner and Wright, *Britain and European integration since 1945*, 65.
[112] Robins, *The reluctant party*, 45.
[113] S.C. Meredith, 'A catalyst for secession? European divisions on the parliamentary right of the Labour party 1962-72 and the schism of British social democracy', *Historical Research* vol.85 no.228 (2012), 335-336.
[114] Ibid., 336.
[115] O.J. Daddow (ed.), *Harold Wilson and European integration: Britain's second application to join the EEC* (London 2002) 12-16.

order to form a more reliable interpretation of the causes of the changing attitude of Labour towards European integration. They do however give some indication as to what could have motivated this change.

We now turn to the main question of this research, namely whether the changes in the political landscape led to different expressions of national identity and, if so, how they changed and what that implied. As said, the political parties as a whole had taken relatively circumscribed positions regarding British EEC membership during the phase of the first application. This had resulted in more or less uniform conceptions of national identity becoming dominant, at least among the parties' leadership figures and a substantial contingent of agreeing MPs. The change in the political situation, as described above, promises changes in the political narratives. What could be very interesting to see is whether, or how, political discourse adapted to the new situation. Following from that it might be possible to find out more about how political discourse could harness conceptions of national identity effectively. In the course of this chapter it will become apparent that conceptions of national identity had come to play a less significant role. This might affirm that the political alignment from the previous debates on EEC membership had been reinforced by strongly formulated conceptions of national identity. Consequently, a lack of identity appeals in the debates surrounding the second application might suggest that it was not considered politically opportune to involve public passions too much in the renewed question of European integration. With these considerations in mind, we will now begin the analysis of the debates during the period of the second British application for membership of the EEC, in 1966 and 1967.

In late April 1965 Prime Minister Wilson did not even contemplate reapplying for EEC membership. He held to the Commonwealth argument, that to enter the EEC could hurt Commonwealth relations. He described the previous government's attempt to join the EEC as follows: "The point here—let us be absolutely clear about it—is that the terms on which the last Government tried to crawl their way in were quite unacceptable to the Commonwealth".[116] However, public opinion was growing increasingly favourable toward EEC membership, to the point that about 70% of the public favoured entering in early 1966. This rise of approval and the momentum that it kept for more than a year coincided with Edward Heath becoming the leader of the opposition.[117] His clear pro-EEC opinion may have helped push public opinion in the upward direction. It may also be one of the primary causes for the Wilson government to reassess its view on a possible renewed EEC membership application. As said, the Labour manifesto for the 1966 general election included a provision carefully embracing the possibility of a renewed membership application. This change of mind was not given much attention in parliament, neither by Labour itself

[116] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 711 (29-4-1965), col. 623-4.
[117] Jowell and Hoinville, *Britain into Europe: public opinion and the EEC*, 30.

nor the opposition parties. It took until November 1966 before any actual, comprehensive comment was given on the EEC by the Labour government. A statement was made in the House of Commons by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs George Brown, whose pro-EEC point of view and influence inside the Cabinet were mentioned above. It is obvious that the prominent role of George Brown marks a break from what had become the more or less dominant view on the EEC inside the Labour Party. His position in the cabinet reflected the change of Labour policy, since his position as Secretary of state for Foreign Affairs is one of the four highest offices[118] in the Cabinet. This appointment shows how priorities had changed just before the general election of 1966, because he could be said to be a representative of the sizeable minority within the party that had consistently pleaded for a membership application, ever since the creation of the community in 1958. As Foreign Secretary he became the principal government spokesman on Britain's relation to the EEC. The narrative he constructed to represent the government position differed greatly from that of Hugh Gaitskell and Harold Wilson in the 1961-1963 period. Since he represented the Labour pro-EEC minority he could effect this change of policy and narrative more convincingly than others. It would have been very difficult for Harold Wilson for example to completely change his attitude toward EEC membership without losing at least some credibility. In any case, this would not be expected of the Prime Minister, since the office itself requires a certain impartiality and a symbolic distance from issues that are too politically charged. Politically the appointment of George Brown was a safe way to gradually and convincingly change a point of view completely. The political soundness of this move is tightly bound to the possibility for a change in narrative which it provided. As we have seen the Labour Party, especially the leadership, had become deeply committed to an introspective conception of British national identity in the preceding years. It had been rather successful with that narrative, winning the 1964 general election mostly on domestic issues, focusing on domestic standards of living. The vision it had developed and propagated of Britain, as focused on the Commonwealth and national planning, had been inextricably bound with a negative view on the possibility of European integration. The pro-EEC reputation of George Brown provided a way out of this increasingly isolationist narrative. Of course the continued existence of a pro-EEC faction within the party and the esteem that they continued to hold also played a role in the strength of the narrative that supported the new pro-EEC position. It could be said that George Brown was merely the personification of this faction and his presentation was geared to him being at the same time 'a new man' as well as a loyal Labour MP. The change of narrative is clear as day in George Brown's speech to parliament in November 1966, where he managed to largely ignore the Labour message on the EEC that had been dominant for years, to formulate a new stance on European integration:

[118] The four highest offices in the Cabinet are those of the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Foreign Secretary and the Home Secretary.

> May I begin by saying that there has never been a time in the troubled history of our Continent when Britain has not been called upon to play a decisive and costly part in its affairs. But far too often these situations have arisen because Britain has not been sufficiently involved to affect the events which led up to them. The issue today is not do we join Europe—we have always been there. The issue is can we play such a rôle that from here on the Continent shall be unified and we shall be effectively a leader of it? Let us also recognise the increased prosperity and influence in the world which unity would bring to Europe. It is right that we should conduct this debate in an examining and even critical mood. It is equally important that that should not generate an air of cynicism, gloom or defeatism, which could smother the constructive idealism which we all basically feel.[119]

Brown's statement that Britain had always been a part of Europe and should therefore seek to play an active role in European politics constituted a departure from the Labour narrative of the previous years, which had emphasized Britain's insular position in relation to continental Europe. It was actually comparable to the Conservative narratives of the time. Another example of the change in narrative is his speculative remark on the subject of British leadership in Europe, which was an issue that had mostly preoccupied Conservative MPs in the preceding years. Even referring to 'our Continent' when speaking about Europe was not something that a Labour leadership figure would have done only a couple of years earlier; it actually echoed the Conservative narratives of that time. Brown's speech also mirrored those given by other pro-EEC Labour MPs before, with the difference that it now represented government opinion and had full political backing from the party leadership. In the last two sentences of the above quote he criticized cynicism, gloom and defeatism. This is likely to have been aimed at those Labour MPs who had always been negative about the possibility of EEC membership and still were. It has a definite air of an 'out with the old, in with the new'-attitude. What was politically expedient had changed and therefore the narratives concerning national interests and identity also had to be changed. There was simply no more room for the same kind of reluctance that was widely accepted within the party in the early years of the decade.

The simple political calculation behind this change of position is clear, though it is hard to see how it affected the Labour Party electorally. They did win the 1966 general election by a wide margin, but the turn towards the EEC was not widely advertised. The lack of political fanfare around the turn towards Europe, which was also a feature of the parliamentary debates generally during this period, suggests that while the Labour Party wished to change its policy, it did not want to make this part of its core public message. As mentioned before, the Conservative party had chosen Edward Heath as the new leader of the opposition, who was one of the most serious advocates of British EEC

[119] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 736 (16-11-1966), col. 446-7.

membership in politics at the time. This had coincided with a rise in approval ratings for the possibility of Britain joining the EEC. It is very likely that a fear existed in the Labour Party that a full-fledged turn towards Europe would alienate a large part of its voter base, but not reacting to the increasing popularity of European integration was not an option politically either. This ambiguity was felt by the MPs as well, as is shown in this exchange between Labour MP Renée Short and George Brown:

> The opinion polls, for what they are worth, confirm my own judgment that the majority of the people of the country are in favour.
> § Mrs. Renée Short (Wolverhampton, North-East)
> No, they are not.
> § Mr. Brown
> The exception generally proves the rule. Opinion as reflected in the newspapers is also clearly behind us. Abroad, our seriousness of purpose and our determination have been understood and welcomed. Many of the Governments of the Six have already expressed their support for our action.[120]

Short basically contested the turn towards Europe, whilst Brown was committed to advocating the new position and tried to stress the political expedience of it.[121] On the whole, this ambiguity in the Labour Party, which hindered the new pro-EEC position of the Labour government, combined with the fact that this change in policy was actually favoured by the Conservative Party, might go some way towards explaining why the parliamentary debates on European integration lacked the intensity in this period, which they did possess during the phase of the first application. The broad political consensus that had come into existence dampened the need or wish for debate. The regularity and the scope with which the topic was discussed had notably declined in comparison to the years before. This can even be seen in comparison to the late 1950's when the European integration issue really started to gain in significance in the parliamentary debates for the first time. It is tempting to ascribe this partly to the combined disillusionment in parliament and the public with European integration after the first veto by President De Gaulle. However, broad public support combined with the fact that all three major parties now supported a new membership application hardly suggests disillusionment. In fact it suggests an unprecedented positive attitude. Another term that is tempting to proffer in relation to the lack of debate is apathy; political interest and division had simply declined and spirited discussion was not necessary anymore. While it may be a too general ascription

[120] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 736 (16-11-1966), col. 447.
[121] Support for another membership application had really soared to heights not seen in years. Opposition had declined to a mere 15%, with 70% in favour and the remaining 15% undecided. These figures come from: Jowell and Hoinville, *Britain into Europe: public opinion and the EEC*, 23.

to be completely convincing, it would at least go some way to explain the lack of parliamentary debate. There were only two periods of debate on European integration in the House of Commons during this period: one on 16 and 17 November 1966 and one on 8 and 10 May 1967. The one debate on European integration in the House of Lords took place on 29 June 1966. The broad agreement that now existed between the major parties simply did not encourage debate. Perhaps another consideration that it may reflect is that it could have proved counterproductive to discuss the issue too much. The more political discussion devoted to one particular subject, the higher the chance of disagreement or public disenchantment. The historiography on this specific period does not support any one interpretation; it is in fact characterised by a plurality of interpretations.[122] For this moment we can only identify and point out the lack of vigorous debate on the issue.

Of course debate on the issue was not entirely absent during this period. Before we turn to that however, it is necessary to explore how a lessening intensity of debate could reflect upon conceptions of national identity in this context. This generally more subdued treatment of the subject might be a sign of a disengagement from the use and construction of narratives on national identity. The success that Labour had with what could be called its '1000 years of history'-approach was no coincidence and the fact that domestic issues had brought Labour into government after more than a decade in the opposition was telling. The Conservative alternative to '1000 years of history', with its focus on the inherently European character of British identity, had been equally sufficient in supporting a political stance. Thus a disengagement seems to have been a logical choice. However, a complete shift in British politics towards that formerly exclusively Conservative narrative, bound as it was to specific conceptions of national identity, could not attenuate the broad presence of sentiments that made up a, at least partly, contrary narrative. Naturally these two alternative views on identity were fluid and could be intertwined by individuals in intricate ways. Thus they were not the only two possible narratives; they were in fact proposals for a narrative, as all identity politics are. Many varying concepts and definitions could be combined to form any kind of shared identity. However, at this time in history, these two proposals were the most circumscribed and proven options for political use. Nonetheless, the Labour shift away from its previous pet-narrative was something potentially damaging, in a political or electoral sense, to both of the two major parties. For the Conservatives it threatened to make one of their most distinctive policy proposals irrelevant, namely its broad and continuous support for EEC membership. At the same time, Labour risked alienating a large part of its voter-base, which had helped them into power in the first place. In that sense it became beneficial for both parties to play down their appeals to and proposals for shared identity. The banal nationalism which had been so very effective in the earlier phases of European

[122] Daddow (ed.), *Harold Wilson and European integration*, 1-36.

integration had come to be potentially counterproductive. Hence, behind the less conflicted nature of the debates there was perhaps a political calculation, rather than virtues of political fair play. These political calculations precluded any vigorous debate involving national identity narratives.

The changes in the debates and the concurrent altering of identity narratives directly affected MPs. The tone of the Conservative Party was highly conciliatory, mostly expressing satisfaction or even relief in reaction to the government's turn towards Europe. However, some Conservative MPs were inclined to be less excited about the turn towards Europe by Labour, remembering the fierce opposition the Conservative government had received only a few months before:

> What we should be condoning were we to allow the Prime Minister to get away with this is one of the most outrageous pieces of deceit ever perpetrated on the British electorate. What happened at the General Election this year was that the Prime Minister was condemning my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition throughout the campaign for approaching Europe in the way that the Government are now proclaiming they wish to approach Europe. This is a tergiversation unparalleled since 1846 and it is worthy of the condemnation that that tergiversation received.[123]

Note that Sir Henry Legge-Bourke, who made the above remark, delved deep into British parliamentary history to find a betrayal serious enough to resemble what Labour had done. The indignation expressed by this MP, however, did not represent the wider relieved acceptance of the new government policy by Conservative MPs. Legge-Bourke's accusatory remarks were an exception rather than the rule in these debates. It does show that Conservative politicians were well aware that their own political agenda was being copied or even overtaken by their main political rivals. It entails more than just the duplication of a political point of view however, as the turn towards Europe also implied the imitation of specific conceptions of shared identity, which over the previous years had become widely associated with the Conservative Party. The remarks made by George Brown, which were shown above and were made during the same debate on 16 November 1966, are an example of this imitation. The Conservative party's 'own' narrative was thus to some degree undermined.

Party uniformity was not the rule however and in that sense the situation mirrored that of the first application, with the difference that all the major parties were now officially pro-EEC. Manny Shinwell, for example, was a Labour MP who remained fervently opposed to joining in European integration efforts. In the following quote he links his opposition to his personal conceptions of national identity. These remarks show how fleeting political fortunes can be:

[123] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 736 (16-11-1966), col. 533-4.

> Having made those few observations, I should like to remind the House of the criticism to which some of us have been subjected. We have been called all sorts of names. I have been accustomed to that for many years, and have survived, but some of the things that have been said about some of my hon. Friends and, in particular, about myself, deserve a reply. We have been described as "Little Englanders", as anti-Europeans, as being obtuse, obdurate, obstinate, perverse— and, worst of all, as ancient Britons. I am proud to be a Briton—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—and I mean what I say. As for being ancient, it is not my fault. It just happened.[124]

His personal convictions had been refuted by the political leadership of his party. It also shows how quickly the anti-EEC narratives of British identity were cast aside. Shinwell made this sudden irrelevance of a once leading narrative more tangible by going on to say he would gladly become the president of the 'Ancient Britons Party'.[125] These two examples, of Manny Shinwell and Henry Legge-Bourke, illustrate how deeply intertwined politics and national identity narratives are. Both politicians were convinced that the notions of shared identity that they had expounded would prove to be lasting. When the political tides turned, their carefully constructed and closely held beliefs about what it meant to be British became, if not irrelevant, at least (much) less powerful.

One Conservative MP, Sir Derek Walker Smith, revealed that the anti-EEC vein still retained some force within the Conservative Party as well, even though the Party had been advocating to submit an application for half a decade. In his remarks he conjured up the topic of sovereignty. Retaining British sovereignty had been an argument for the anti-EEC politicians throughout the parliamentary debates; in the anti-EEC Labour camp it became especially pronounced in connection to the policy of national planning that was held in high regard by the party at the time of the first application. By now, however, it came to be pulled into the confines of banal nationalism. It was associated less and less to practical political points and became rather a kind of instinctive emotional response. It may be interesting to see whether this development continued into the period under consideration in the next chapter, which runs from 1971 to 1975, the period of the admission to the EEC and the subsequent British referendum. Of course, sovereignty is always considered key in nationalist discourse; however the degree to which it becomes connected to feelings of pride and consequently perhaps of fear for deprivation of sovereignty could indicate the nature of a debate. When its use is practical and rational, as it mostly was for the national planning argument referred to above, it retains a rational character and an openness for reasoned discussion. However, at the moment when it becomes part of a more emotional argument it tends to be internalised and closed off from, or made impervious to any debate. For Walker Smith's remarks, although not yet

[124] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 746 (10-5-1967), col. 1533.
[125] Ibid., col. 1534.

exemplifying an exclusively emotional response, the lack of clarification in his expressions and the hyperbolic language which he built up towards suggest the direction in which his argument was going:

> There is one economic argument which I hope the House, whatever its feelings about the rest, will reject. It is an argument not so much shouted from the housetops as whispered in the corridors, but none the less potent for that. It is that only by joining the Community can the British people and British industry take the steps that they should take of their own volition and spontaneous action—the elimination of restrictive practices in industry, and so on. Of course there are many things to sharpen competition that this country must do to survive, but it would be an intolerable humiliation for a country with great industrial traditions, and for the British people, if it were believed that these things could be done only under the compulsive influence of joining the Community and accepting its disciplines.[126]

The phrasing 'intolerable humiliation' can only refer to a sense of national pride, constructed from various conceptions national identity. Such language is very useful to politicians trying to appeal to ideas of shared identity, as we have seen in the previous chapters. As such, the use of the term and concept of sovereignty is something that might function as a measuring tool for the state of public discourse. And as said, it might be very interesting to see this return in the next chapter on the referendum, because it may show how use of language changes when the (sought after) audience changes. Because as we have seen in the analysis of the parliamentary debates for this period, there was far less attention paid to whom the 'broader consumers' of language were and if, or how, they were reached. Or in other words: the general public was not kept in mind during this phase of the debate on European integration to the degree that it had been before; nor to the degree it may be expected to have had in the period of the referendum, naturally a period when politicians actually would want to address (and consider) a wider audience.

Walker Smith had perceived this change of political discourse in relation to the public. He felt that the public had not been given as much attention as before, or had not been appealed to in the same way, through the use of language. He made quite clear that he thought that this was not desirable or wise at all:

> It is a mistake to assume that [the public is] not interested in these great political and constitutional matters. I know, of course, that terms like "sovereignty" are not part of the everyday idiom of the British people; but they represent things which are long-established and deeply cherished. They are

[126] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 736 (16-11-1966), col. 472.

> like the air we breathe—little noticed in its presence but valued beyond price in the event of deprivation.[127]

This romantic view of independence was in fact what his earlier remarks had built up towards. In this specific debate on 16 November 1966, one of the very few lengthier debates on European integration during this period, sovereignty was referred to by several MPs; some dealt with it at greater length than others. Most dealt with it in technical terms, stating what kind of consequences joining the EEC could have. Some ascribed a careful positive or negative connotation to it. Yet none of them linked it to conceptions of national identity in the way that Walker Smith did, conveying an outspoken anti-EEC message. These charged appeals to a sense of national identity were left for what they were, except for the reaction of one Labour MP, Frederick Bellenger, whom we have seen before in this study. As we have seen his debating style was quite confrontational. He lived up to that reputation with his reaction to Walker Smith's remarks:

> [The British public] might be persuaded for a moment by the right hon. and learned Member for Hertfordshire, East, especially when he uses the phrase "British sovereignty", because the British people are still insular. They think that here in this small country, protected by the seas, we are still as invincible as we were in the days when my forefathers sang "Britannia Rules the Waves". We no longer do, and that fact relates to the question of defence, which will arise later on in the negotiations. We certainly do not rule the waves economically, and something must be done.[128]

Bellenger once again satirized conventional conceptions of national identity, making them sound absurd to emphasize his own point of view. By referring to the very well known 'Britannia Rules the Waves' anthem, which captured the British pride and confidence from the days of Empire, Bellenger pointed out that he believed that the ideas of British international strength and absolute British sovereignty were out of touch with their contemporary reality and were in fact intertwined with forms of banal nationalism. Bellenger's contemporaries would have been capable to understand that his referencing the 'Britannia Rules the Waves' anthem was an allusion to banal nationalism and nostalgic sentiments. It is telling that in this debate only the idiosyncratic Bellenger chose to make a reply to the words of Walker Smith, which were transparently suffused by conceptions of national identity, linked to the consistently mercurial subject of (the perceived nature of) sovereignty. Expressions of that type were nearly always met in kind in the earlier debates, often provoking comment from several MPs instead of just the one. Perhaps the significance of this altercation between the two MPs, however peripheral it might have been in the context of the debates at this

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[127] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 736 (16-11-1966), col. 478.
[128] Ibid., col. 482.

time, lies in the fact that such ideas and expressions were still 'alive' in political discourse, yet pushed to the outer margins of the debates.

The road to another rejection by De Gaulle was seen to be, if not inevitable, then at least highly likely. British politicians were well aware that De Gaulle's dislike of the Anglo-Saxon world had not dissipated. On 27 November 1967 the MPs were not caught off-guard as they were the first time and consequently the indignation in the debates on the veto was much more subdued. The lack of surprise was also reflected by the fact that there was very little debate in anticipation of the veto or afterwards and on top of that this also tended to be briefer than the debates in reaction to the first veto. There was a general atmosphere of resignation, to the point of meriting the designation of being a rather laconic reply. Even Foreign Secretary Brown joined in the general mood of acquiescence, though he did not fail to point out where the fault for this failed application lay according to the government:

> Do not overdo it. I would seriously beg every hon. Member in the House not to treat this as a day of gloom. This was a decision which was predictable, but which we had to have in order to plan ahead. If there is any gloom it will be over the Elysée and not over Britain.[129]

This tone of reply might be revealing what had been the reason for the almost tame nature of the debates surrounding the second application to the EEC: from the beginning the chances of success were low. Therefore it was not advisable politically to rile up and excite the public with either fierce pro or contra narrative. Political needs doused the flames of passion that had come to characterize much of what had been said in the period of the previous negotiations. The broad use of expressions relating to conceptions of British national identity, which had been the rule rather than the exception in the previous period, had for the most part disappeared. Especially the pronounced anti-EEC rhetoric had lessened and the '1000 years of history' narrative had all but vanished. It is not so that the debates were completely devoid of discourse revolving around conceptions of national identity, but it had markedly declined and its use was almost tangibly supressed or refrained from at times. The next chapter will revolve around the debates that related to the third application, which was successful, and the debates after that, which led up to and concerned the referendum of 1975 on whether the UK should remain a member of the European Economic Community. One would expect the tone of those debates to differ significantly from the ones of this period. Especially the debates surrounding the referendum are likely to be much more polarised and therefore more involved in narratives referring to specific conceptions of national identity.

[129] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 756 (20-12-1967), col. 1274.

Chapter Four

Accession and reconsideration

The second application had not aroused the virulent debates that had characterised the first one. The reaction to its eventual failure did not spark much controversy either. Even though De Gaulle had frustrated British government policy for a second time, most parliamentarians seemed to take his veto in their stride. The intransigence of De Gaulle had been expected to some extent. After the veto was cast once again the Wilson government negotiators had not withdrawn the application, which enabled an immediate restart to the negotiations in the event that De Gaulle would leave office. The Wilson government also facilitated immediate recommencement of the negotiations by the acceptance of the principle of an unconditional application for membership. This unconditionality had not only been an attempt to appease 'the Six' in the context of the second application, when the conditional nature of the first application and its failure were still fresh in mind. It had also been accepted precisely to facilitate a quick resumption of the negotiations at a later date in the case of another veto.[130] This restart of the negotiations happened after the Conservatives won the 1970 general election and Edward Heath, the ardent EEC membership advocate and negotiator for the first application, became Prime Minister. The period under consideration in this chapter starts on the day that the Heath government decided to renew the EEC negotiations on 30 June 1970, only twelve days after it came to power.[131] The end date for this chapter will roughly be the summer of 1975, which encompasses the referendum on whether or not Britain would stay a member and the aftermath. After the referendum British EEC membership would be upheld, though it would not remain uncontested. This is a longer period than was covered in any of the previous chapters, yet the intention is to focus on the more relevant and unique aspects of these debates. As per the general outlay of the chapters, before we begin with the analysis of the parliamentary debates, we will first consider the historiography on and general character of the period.

In an undated study by the Foreign Office, which was most likely written in the early period of the Heath Government, the government was advised that the arguments for EEC membership were 'overwhelming', yet it stated that public opinion was still largely opposed to entry. The report considered other options, but all of them were found to be either undesirable or impracticable.[132] The Heath government did not need much convincing however and was backed by quite a large majority in the Conservative parliamentary party as well as in the broader organisation. Around thirty (mostly right-wing) Conservative MPs out of a total of 330 were outspokenly anti-EEC, whereas at an

[130] Gowland, Turner and Wright, *Britain and European integration since 1945*, 70.
[131] Greenwood, *Britain and European integration since the Second World War*, 151.
[132] Gowland, Turner and Wright, *Britain and European integration since 1945*, 70-71.

October 1971 Party Conference a majority of eight to one favoured British EEC membership.[133] This situation of near unanimous consensus was not matched in the Labour Party, where those who opposed EEC membership had reverted into their original critical positions after De Gaulle's veto and were once again beginning to get the upper hand. The party was split roughly in three camps. The pro-EEC Labour politicians were now a minority within their party, opposite to those who wanted a withdrawal of the application in any case and those who wanted to change its unconditionality. At the Labour Party Conference, also in October 1971, a proposal to support a withdrawal of the application was defeated on a margin of circa 20%. A proposal to oppose the entry on the current terms was accepted however, by a large majority of 5.073.000 to 1.032.000.[134] The hesitant majority support of 1966 and 1967 was thus abandoned with some force, to the point of questioning the terms of the application, which had been set by a Labour government. This turn back to a more critical stance on the EEC membership issue was tied to developments in public opinion, as the Foreign Office was right in observing a wide public aversion to EEC membership by 1970. In fact, over the years public opinion had reversed in an almost perfect mirror image. On the eve of the 1966 general election around 70% of those questioned gave a positive answer to the question in the Gallup polls: "If the British government were to decide that Britain's interests would best be served by joining the European Common Market, would you approve or disapprove?".[135] Just before the general election of 1970 about 60% of the respondents said that they would disapprove of Britain joining the Common Market.[136] Knowledge of EEC related matters was slim as it had been since the beginning and membership was regarded as 'low-priority' for government action. One study by the Social and Community Planning Research (SCPR), an independent institute for social survey research, contained the following observation: "[There exists a] feeling that there is a conspiracy on the part of politicians, media owners and big business to commit Britain to joining the Common Market before the public has had a chance to appraise the pros and cons to know precisely what is happening…".[137] Where the upswing in popularity of British EEC membership had accompanied Labour's turn towards Europe after the 1966 general election, now the steep decline in popularity coincided with a pronounced Labour antagonism towards renewed negotiations. The Conservative Party attitude to European integration had hardly changed since Macmillan's first application, with only a small but loud minority being opposed. That small minority did threaten to put a stop to the whole negotiation process, since the government had a majority of only twenty-seven in the House of Commons, whereas Conservative MPs opposed to membership numbered at least thirty. However, it was

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[133] Denman, *Missed Chances*, 239.
[134] Denman, *Missed Chances*, 239. The high number of votes can be explained by the fact that union members aligned with the Trade Unions Congress (TUC) could also cast their vote at Labour Party Conferences.
[135] Jowell and Hoinville, *Britain into Europe: public opinion and the EEC*, 28-31.
[136] Ibid., 28-31.
[137] Ibid., 28.

expected that pro-EEC Labour MPs would vote with a Conservative majority in significant numbers.[138] In late October 1971 the vote was finally called: "that this House approves Her Majesty's Government's decision of principle to join the European Communities on the basis of the arrangements which have been negotiated".[139] The motion was carried by 356 votes to 244, with 69 Labour MPs voting for the motion and 39 Conservative MPs against.[140] The situation was still roughly the same as it had been for over a decade; the parties had a general position on the issue of EEC membership, but in fact the parties were internally divided to a comparatively high degree.

The parliamentary vote had been preceded by an agreement on all the main issues between Britain and 'the Six' in the early summer of 1971. The approval of parliament cleared the way for the signing of the Treaty of Accession, which took place in January 1972 in Brussels. In the course of 1972 both houses of parliament passed the European Communities Act and by 1 January 1973 the United Kingdom became a full member of the Community.[141] Finally, twelve years after their first application, Britain became a member of the Common Market. Nonetheless the general disapproval amongst the public did not fade away. In 1974 two general elections were held, both resulting in a slim Labour victory. The second general election was actually called on the government's initiative in an attempt to try to gain a larger majority, but the second Wilson government had to rely on a very small majority in the House throughout its existence. The economic conditions in Britain had worsened considerably due to the collapse of the Bretton Woods fixed monetary exchange system in 1971 and the 1973-1974 oil crisis.[142] This were the circumstances in which Harold Wilson came to power again. The Labour government was in a tight corner from the start, since after the February 1974 elections they could only form a minority government and had become dependent upon several minor parties in the House in order to pass legislation. Meanwhile the party was still deeply divided over British EEC membership. The party's commitment to alter the conditions of membership forced the leadership to consider a renegotiation of the terms of EEC membership. Furthermore, this was a means through which the government might gain support, possibly enough to gain a majority in a new general election. Thus in March 1974 the government decided it would seek to renegotiate the terms and put the results to the electorate.[143] Anthony King, the American author of an extensive study of the referendum published in 1977 as a public policy research ascribes this decision solely to the intricacies of Labour's internal functioning in this period, saying:

[138] Denman, *Missed Chances*, 239.
[139] P. Norton, *Conservative dissidents: dissent within the Parliamentary Conservative Party, 1970-74* (London 1978) 395.
[140] Ibid., 397-398. Of the six Liberal Party MPs 5 had voted for the motion and one against.
[141] A. King, *Britain says yes: the 1975 referendum on the Common Market* (Washington DC 1977) 17-18.
[142] Gowland, Turner and Wright, *Britain and European integration since 1945*, 79.
[143] Denman, *Missed Chances*, 246.

> From the spring of 1972 onwards, the question of the referendum and the question of Labour's policy towards Europe were intertwined like the two strands of a double helix…The decision to hold a referendum was a direct outcome of Labour's internal struggle over Europe. The Conservatives played almost no part in the decision.[144]

It is justified to say that without the political backing of the Labour government it was unlikely, probably even close to impossible, that a referendum would be held. However, the referendum was welcomed by 'anti-Marketeers' on the right wing of the Conservative party, for whom sovereignty was the foremost concern. Enoch Powell, a controversial Conservative MP due to his anti-immigration stance, also was a fervent opponent of EEC membership and campaigned actively for the referendum. For instance, he wrote two long opinion pieces in the conservative weekly magazine *Spectator*, which ran a weekly column called 'Sovereign state' in the two months preceding the referendum in which noted or interested anti-Marketeers from all professions could make their arguments against membership. He was truly a staunch opponent of British EEC membership, which the following citation from one of his pieces clearly illustrates: "By a cruel irony the people of one of the oldest nation states in the world, who themselves have played the liberators to so many other nations, are berated for the anachronism of desiring to retain their parliamentary self-governing independence".[145] Clearly the Labour anti-Marketeers were not the only ones embracing the referendum; the Conservative opposition was quite outspoken considering their relatively small numbers. However, opposition to the referendum itself had existed in the Labour Party as well and had been led by the MP Roy Jenkins, who resigned from the Shadow Cabinet during the Heath government due to his dissatisfaction with Labour's European policy. In the Wilson government, Jenkins was a member of the Cabinet and one of a minority who opposed the referendum entirely.[146]

When the date for the referendum was set for 5 June 1975 campaigns were launched and public discussion was quite intense in the two months before 5 June. The language used by Powell and others[147] mirrored that of the pro EEC campaigns. The 'Britain in Europe'-campaign[148] stated that "traditions were safe" in Europe and that by voting for membership people could express their hope

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[144] King, *Britain says yes*, 55.
[145] *The Spectator*, 29-4-1975, no.7657, page 368-9 (Collected issues vol.1 1975).
[146] Greenwood, *Britain and European integration since the Second World War*, 164-165.
[147] The 'Sovereign state' opinion pieces in *The Spectator* had been accompanied throughout by poems by the hand of Basil Charles. One sample will show that the poetry was at the same time facetious and serious: "Let this message go to all; If united, we should fall, but divided stand. Workers of the world unite, In a common market fight, For the promised land". The complete poem can be found in: *The Spectator*, 29-4-1975, no.7657, page 368 (Collected issues vol.1 1975).
[148] The 'Britain in Europe' campaign had collected £1.481.583 by the 5th June, referendum day, which was the largest sum ever amassed in Britain for the purposes of a political campaign; five of the largest British companies, including Shell and Marks & Spencer for example had made a contribution. See: King, *Britain says yes*, 105.

"for the new greatness of Britain".[149] For a brief period British membership of the EEC had equal importance in public discussion as in parliamentary debate. The press and the campaigners flooded public life with information and (mostly) opinion. However, in 1975 58% of respondents in a poll stated that they were either not very knowledgeable or not at all knowledgeable about the advantages and disadvantages of EEC membership. There had been a change for the better in comparison with previous years, which was ascribed to the campaigns, but still a majority remained largely ignorant of the real issues at hand.[150] This would explain why the greater part of the public discussion revolved around opinion rather than factual economic or political arguments. This should be kept in mind when considering the parliamentary debates of this period, since it is likely that they would try to appeal to the general mood, especially when a public vote was in the offing. Perhaps this polarised language was reflected in the debates, to which we will turn our attention in a moment. Opinion polls in August and October 1974 and January 1975 showed that a majority would vote to stay in on successfully renegotiated terms.[151] This is exactly what happened on 5 June when 67.2% voted 'yes' and 32.8% 'no', with a turnout of 64.5%. The results were comparable across England, Scotland and Wales; Northern Ireland had a turnout of slightly less than 50% and voted 'yes' by 52.1% to 47.9% 'no'.[152] The renegotiation of the terms, the campaigns, the backing of the government and the endorsement by the Prime Minister of a 'yes'-vote had succeeded in convincing the public of the need to stay in.[153] In all, the results were a triumph for the Labour government. They had renegotiated in Europe, but most importantly they had gotten the recognition from the voters for doing this and had finally gotten tangible approval for British EEC membership. Despite this final approval it had been far from straightforward that a referendum would endorse staying in the EEC. The public and political discontent had not been in the background during the whole process and the arguments on either side had been based mostly on opinion and language, rather than facts and numbers. Conceptions of national identity had been used both in arguments for and against membership. Very little research has been carried out on how this situation impacted on parliament or how the MPs judged and made sense of the events. That is why we now turn to an analysis of the discourse on national identity in the parliamentary debates in the period of 1971 to 1975.

One development immediately stands out: the political situation had changed and this had affected how MPs expressed themselves. The critical stance within the Labour Party re-established itself when the Conservative government decided to reopen negotiations, making the future path of Britain contested once more. Thus, it became very important again what Britain was supposed to be

[149] Robbins, *Great Britain: identities, institutions and the Idea of Britishness*, 316.
[150] Jowell and Hoinville, *Britain into Europe: public opinion and the EEC*, 69.
[151] King, *Britain says yes*, 92.
[152] Ibid., 145.
[153] Greenwood, *Britain and European integration since the Second World War*, 169.

and concurrently why it had to change or remain the same. One way to discuss this was through accessible and relatable constructed notions of what British national identity had been or should become. In this way, the context wherein the debates took place was different to what it had been in the period of the second application. It was once more necessary and expedient to formulate different narratives, that had to be suited to the political message behind it. The return of disagreement in the political landscape caused the stakes to rise and therefore the language became more powerful, with the construction of narratives driving politicians to refer to specific conceptions of the British national character. To give an example of how the changed political situation generally changed the use of language, here is the argument that Labour MP Michael Stewart made in a debate on 26 October 1971, which was part of a series of debates in both houses of parliament from 25 October to 28 October, when the motion to support the government's renewal of the negotiations was being discussed:

> [A] very great opportunity, not only economic but political, not only for Britain but for Europe and for mankind, would be lost if we turned down entry now. I cannot think that anyone would kid himself with the idea that if we turned down entry now we would only have to wait until it suits the convenience of Great Britain, and never mind about anybody else, and that we should be offered entry on more agreeable terms. Everyone knows that that is a puerile proposition.[154]

Stewart used strong language to state his position, expressing his belief that there was a momentous decision to be made and going on to discredit the thinking of those who were of another opinion; people who were for the most part fellow Labour members. What is interesting about this statement is more the form and force it signifies, rather than its specific contents. It portrays a more engaged tone than had been prevalent in the years before. The issue of European integration and the British relation to it had so far been marked by ambiguity; it did not necessitate a clear definitive position or the provision of one definitive solution. This context of ambiguity, combined with the volatility of public opinion on the issue, engendered an uncertainty and vagueness in political expression which had characterised the earlier periods as well. The ambivalence of public opinion and the nature of the issue forced politicians to express themselves in a confident tone, yet even more important was a careful construction of narrative. It is impossible now to establish to what degree the European policy of the major parties had decided their overall electoral fate, but it was felt or understood to be a subject which knew only winners or losers, politically. However, there had been no clear winners or losers as yet (in domestic politics in any case) and thus the issue was still unresolved. So for politicians it made sense to perceive this as a domestic political struggle, besides seeing it purely as a

[154] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 823 (26-10-1971), col. 1518.

question of international relations. Of course, this had been the case throughout, but it needs to be stressed that after the relative quiet of the previous years the Houses of Parliament again became an arena for polarisation. Tied as the issue was to conceptions of national identity, the members of parliament found themselves (consciously or not) pulled again into the practice of trying to provide generally acceptable narratives on national identity.

This renewed attention for identity narratives was carried out in a sometimes very direct manner. During the series of debate in late October 1971 Labour MP Jim Sillars saw the European integration debate as inherently revolving around questions of identity even suggesting that it was inescapable that national identity would fade over time:

> Once the Community is enlarged and sets Great Power status as its goal inexorable pressures will be unleashed to Europeanise every member of the Community and to set afoot ideas of European nationalism to ensure that when a clash of interests takes place, say, between our past and our future we will in future distinguish as Europeans.[155]

In this way, Sillars posited identity as a crucial matter to be contemplated before decisions were made. Where such considerations had been mostly absent in the debates surrounding the Wilson application, a reinvigorated sceptical or anti-EEC Labour faction reasserted itself and put them back on the agenda. Another Labour MP, Clinton Davis, claiming to speak for the entire population (polls had indeed shown broad disapproval for renegotiation), channelled the Labour scepticism:

> The British people have not been permitted to speak on this issue, but they know, and are saying, that this is a bad deal and they will have none of it. I believe that it is our duty to speak on behalf of the British people, and this will strengthen our resolve to fight and fight again, even if the Government get their majority on 28th October.[156]

This is one of the first signs in the debates of an argument for a referendum on EEC membership. The reasoning that lay behind this was that parliament could not represent the British people adequately on an issue which touched the lives of people directly. This assumption makes more sense when one understands that these politicians saw EEC membership for a large part as an identity issue, much like Sillars did. Thus it would affect the citizenry as a whole, but also on a more personal level. National identity was said to be at stake. This rousing rhetoric to some degree really represented what lived in the 'hearts and minds' of the public; it is certainly hard to say whether this was true for politicians as well, but it cannot be taken for granted that they simply and opportunistically raised

[155] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 823 (26-10-1971), col. 1576.
[156] Ibid., col. 1484.

the national banner as an empty gesture. Some may have felt the same urgency on a personal level, believing their identity narratives to actually be at stake. Ulterior motives were of course of a political nature, but the narrative against EEC membership was focused greatly on conceptions of national identity. In order to make a political point an appeal was made to a shared identity, which the direction of public opinion at that time was suggesting was held in high regard by the general population. Sillars' contention that British national identity would have to be cast aside in favour of a 'European nationalism' was designed to strike a cord with popular unease, which seemed to be at a highpoint. It was supposed to inspire a fervent opposition to the whole idea of European integration; the means were obviously conceptions of national identity. Davis' notion that the people had not been consulted in an honest and comprehensive way served to stress that the people would never allow their shared and personal identities to be squandered by politicians without their consent. Thus by appealing to national identity, it was intended to incentivise the public into taking a specific political point of view, or to legitimise a certain course of political action, perhaps even to generate political action, which a referendum could facilitate.

One recurring reference in the debates became the infamous Munich agreement of 1938, made by Neville Chamberlain with Adolf Hitler, which represented what was called 'appeasement'[157], which in practice came to represent surrendering to demands from European continental (or other) powers. Britain was portrayed as surrendering to EEC demands in its willingness to join, which was felt to be exemplified by the unconditional nature of the application. Referencing what was generally understood to be one of the most shameful chapters in British national history added force to the condemnation of the negotiations. A large part of the British public would have understood what such accusations meant. Furthermore, it was something that could hardly be countered or evaded in a debate without becoming more vulnerable to further ire. The fairness or comprehensiveness of the comparison was not something that worried those who made it. Harold Lever, a Labour MP, took it upon himself to challenge that narrative, by changing its meaning. In response to the many Munich-references he said:

> To those who think that what we are doing is in some way comparable with Munich, I should point out that Munich ought to remind us of what happens when we are foolish enough to believe that our fate

[157] Appeasement politics in the context of the Interbellum were carried out by the British governments until Nazi-Germany invaded Poland and the United Kingdom declared war on Germany. It became contrasted mostly with Churchill's more warlike policies and governing style after 1940. After the war it was widely labelled as a defeatist policy, which, in the public history narrative, was luckily cast aside by the Churchill administration. It thus became a dark page in a victory narrative, in which Britain had proven its resilience and heroism. For an elaborate discussion of appeasement discourse, see: R.G. Hughes, *The postwar legacy of appeasement: British foreign policy since 1945* (London 2014).

> can be kept isolated from the evils of the fate of other people. That is the lesson that ought to be learned.[158]

By making an attempt to re-contextualise he chose to stay within the parameters of national identity narratives. He could have chosen to dismiss the comparison by pointing out its flawed and facile nature. Instead he wished to reformulate the narrative in order for it to fit his political position. Drawing lessons from history is common in collective memory practices and in this case it showcases national history as an active constituent of shared identity, based on specific conceptions of national identity (connected to the 'victory narrative' in this case; see footnote 157). The course of history was understood to contain and reveal the essential qualities of the British people, portraying the eventual resistance to the Hitler regime as an active and collective choice, confirming the virtuousness of the national community and all those involved in it. In this particular case, the underlying assumptions are thus linked to specific conceptions of British national identity, as democratic, stable, resilient and inherently 'good' and widely known national identity narratives.

During this period from 1971 to 1975, some politicians began to actively reflect on the whole public and political nature of these debates. In the debate on 26 October 1971 William Ross, a Labour MP, expressed his concerns about the public campaigns which the government organised to promote the idea of British EEC membership. His argument was that they did no justice to the seriousness of the EEC membership issue:

> I hand it to the Prime Minister [Edward Heath] that he has been a consistent European, despite the rebuff he got from President de Gaulle when he negotiated. He has carried on and has shown leadership, but he has not persuaded the British people to follow him. This is one of the fundamental points about the way the debate has been carried on in the country. It does no credit to the great issues involved. We have had leaflets by the million and pamphlets galore, glossy magazines, and even mini-skirted dolly girls handing out pamphlets giving a partisan point of view—and all unsuccessfully…Every gimmickry of the ad-man has been put to use—every slogan. I do not think that the Prime Minister or anyone else in the Government would agree with one slogan I saw, to the effect that "Europe is fun". We are talking about a serious business. We should accept it in that way…I think that it was Winston Churchill who once asked certain people, "What kind of people do you think we are?". That is why the British people reject the Government's proposals, for the Government have not made their case to them clearly, bluntly and candidly.[159]

[158] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 840 (13-7-1972), col. 1901.
[159] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 823 (26-10-1971), col. 1486-9.

The government campaign revealed how important public opinion had become in relation to British involvement in European integration. The government's efforts to influence public opinion directly had never been this obvious and ambitious. William Ross' complaint about the superficial nature of these campaigns was rooted partly in his opposition to entering the EEC under the contemporary conditions. However, his concern addressed a wider superficiality in the debates and the public discussion. The effects of this were perceived to influence the quality and the nature of the debate by another MP as well, Russell Johnston of the Liberal Party, during a debate on the entry to the EEC (which had been debated extensively throughout the first half of 1972) on 13 July 1972:

> The trouble with politicians expressing truths as they see them is that they always sound like platitudes. The greatest truths are probably always platitudes. But I now say what I believe, and this is a simple affirmation in conclusion. Yesterday morning I was very lucky. My wife gave me a son. I really want not only that child of mine to grow up in a Europe where we have no more wars—and I do not believe that we shall have any more wars now in Europe—I shall not use the old argument that Europeans used in the early days, that the Community was a method of overcoming the divisions, because we are past that stage—but I should like to go further beyond that stage and look forward to a Europe where the barriers of language and traditions are broken down and the people in the Community work together to build a Europe which is fair and will go out and offer that fairness to the world.[160]

Johnston pointed out in his remarks that in his opinion political expression was being hindered by the structural repetitiveness and abstraction of the debates, which stemmed partly from the underlying considerations driven by identity politics and normative narratives revolving around conceptions of national identity and character. It became difficult to express oneself in plain language when the entire debate and the language involved was loaded with implicit value judgments and complicated references to certain accepted narratives of shared identity. The polemical and politicised nature of the debates, linked to the use of normative identity narratives, had started to constrain language. It was nearly impossible to escape from the dominant use of language as a tool to formulate narratives on identity, which were in turn constructed in order to legitimise and propagate certain political positions. It cannot be inferred directly from the above reflections that they were concerned exclusively with the characteristics of this specific debate on European integration or the length of the period of debate, which by now exceeded a decade, but it did suggest a sensitivity to the rigid frames of reference for language which the debates now imposed to a certain degree. Johnston's observation that political truths always sound like platitudes exemplified this. It became increasingly

[160] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 840 (13-7-1972), col. 1912.

impracticable to address the issue in new and innovative ways; perhaps political opinion had become too entrenched and unlikely to shift to be novel. The fact that the political debates on European integration in 1972, which were frequent especially in the first half of the year, were concerned mostly with preparing the necessary legislation for entry, and were thus very technical and politically one-directional (i.e. working towards joining the EEC), made it even more difficult to deal with polemical arguments, since at both sides of the pro vs contra debate few new arguments could be made. Yet opposition to joining the EEC was significant enough to resurface throughout the debates, interrupting debates that were held mostly to discuss technical legislative issues. As Johnston's remarks show, the existing majority for EEC membership and the continuing resistance, mostly in the Labour Party, to join on the principle of unconditionality had the effect of deepening the entrenched polemics. The identity narratives used on both sides had in this way become entrenched as well.

A new interest group appeared on the foreground during these debates however: Scottish MP's. By the end of the 1960's Scottish nationalism was on the rise in society, but also politically. The Scottish National Party achieved its first modest political victory and calls for devolution of government became stronger after the Northern Irish example of the devolved parliament at Stormont was abolished in 1972. This event spurred on those pleading for devolution, as they came to interpret this as a signifier that theirs was an ongoing political struggle which required consistent and continuous advocacy. It was not until later in the 1970's that they would come to play a significant role in Westminster however.[161] But Scottish MPs in the two major parties, although largely opposed to Scottish nationalism, did acquire a more distinctive voice during the period under consideration in this chapter. One of the most outspoken examples is the lieutenant-colonel Colin Mitchell of the Conservative Party; he was one of a loose group, who identified themselves explicitly as Scottish representatives, looking after Scottish special interests. He devoted attention to the issue of Scottish nationalism in the debate on European integration, because he believed that these two developments were linked. He foresaw an erosion of the nation states as a result of EEC membership and pointed to developing nationalism in Northern Ireland and Wales, but most importantly in Scotland:

> If the hon. Member for the Western Isles (Mr. Donald Stewart) were here I am sure he would get up and say that the national independence movement is flourishing in Scotland, too. It would doubtless flourish better if it had more supporters… It is because people are becoming frustrated, and, with the larger groupings, they turn to the concept of nationalism…To deal with something which has not been touched upon in this House I also sense that there is a suspicion in Scotland that the running over

[161] G. Walker, 'John P. Mackintosh, Devolution and the Union', *Parliamentary Affairs* vol.66 no.3 (2013) 557-578.

> E.E.C. entry is being made by what people describe as the "Metropolitan élite", quality journalism, high finance, intellectual circles—you name them, those are the chaps, it is not being made by the Jocks on the ground… It could and might lead to a break-up of the United Kingdom. If Great Britain joined Europe the long-term interests of Scotland might best be served by restoring our national independence. By that means we could obtain direct representation in a federal Europe or the option of an alternative alignment in our own self-interest. In the final analysis that is in our own self-interest if it ceases to be in Great Britain's interest. It must then become a Scottish problem and the Scottish people have a great tradition of knowing how to deal with that sort of problem. I plead with the House—there is plenty of time for all to change their minds after hearing what I have said: Think it over, do not be frightened to change your minds. Hon. Members could change their minds and keep us out of Europe, because that is what we must do.[162]

To Mitchell, frustration with the efforts to join the EEC directly affected the new nationalist sentiment in Scotland. He even expressed sympathy for Scottish independence himself, in the case of British EEC membership. If only the government would decide to drop the matter entirely, Mitchell said, such thoughts would be unnecessary, because Mitchell would rather see a strong Britain, than an independent Scotland, if it were possible:

> My own political philosophy is that it is better to die on your feet than to live on your knees. That is basically why I do not want to go into Europe…I do believe in that national spirit, and I also believe in free enterprise, and they are things which are viable alternatives to Communism. The strength of national spirit will go on, and it will go on during this speech to the end…[I]n Europe we shall eventually and surely lose our identity and become a mere province of a European supra-national State.[163]

As an anti-EEC Conservative MP he was in a minority position; as a Conservative MP who was anti-EEC and entertained thoughts of Scottish independence he was in an even smaller minority. Where other Scottish MPs tended to look after very specific Scottish interests, concerning employment and industry for example, Mitchell managed to weave a narrative around conceptions of national identity and sovereignty that was very likely to excite, if not enrage, fellow Conservative MPs. In this way he added a whole new dimension to anti-EEC methods in parliament, although his specific brand of Scottish nationalism was ultimately unique. As we saw, it was even built upon British national sentiment in an elusive way. As such, Scottish interests and national feeling did not make up a really significant part of the debates; it did stand apart from the overall entrenched nature of the debates

[162] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 823 (26-10-1971), col. 1546-1551.
[163] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 823 (26-10-1971), 1546-1551.

at this point in time, revealing the fact that identity narratives were not entrenched by necessity, but due to the contemporary political landscape.

As the referendum approached in the spring of 1975 and the campaigns had gotten fully underway, tension mounted in parliament. Especially in April the debates were vigorous; during the month of May the debates slowly died down, dealing mostly with technical and legal issues surrounding the organisation of the referendum. On 8 April the pro-EEC Labour MP Maurice Edelman directly addressed concerns about British sovereignty and identity, which had come to define the anti-EEC campaign:

> I have touched on sovereignty, and I add to what I have already said by pointing out that sovereignty is never absolute. Sovereignty lies in the power to exercise, influence and to affect decisions. To that extent I feel that within the greater authority of the European Communities our sovereignty, far from being weakened, will be extended… There has never been any question of France losing its glory, prestige or self-dedication because it has become a member of the Common Market. What is true of France is true of Germany, Italy, Belgium and Holland. All of those countries have maintained their national personality. I say to my hon. Friends who are nationalists that their fear of losing their national personality and of being smothered by this greater entity is false. On the contrary, I believe that they will have a greater opportunity than they have anticipated of defining and expressing their national personality, even as nation States, within the wider framework of the Community… I believe that sovereignty and national identity can and will be preserved within the Community and that ultimately we shall see not only the strengthening of Europe as an entity but the flowering of the individuality of regions, nations and smaller groups.[164]

As the issue of European integration was thought to be nearing something like a final resolution, the perceived stakes were high. As the matter was now out of the parliaments' scope, MPs focused on the campaign, which was highly politicised. Maurice Edelman and the Labour leadership itself had to contend with a large number of anti-EEC Labour MPs, whose outspoken anti-Market opinion now directly endangered Britain's continued membership of the European Community.[165] These debates in April were a last chance to try to persuade these MPs of the merits of EEC-membership. Doing this would not have any direct effect necessarily, but it could weaken the anti-EEC campaign efforts at a crucial moment. This could explain why Edelman chose the abstract issues of sovereignty and identity to make a persuasive argument. He could have referred to the results of the government's

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[164] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 889 (8-4-1975), col. 1104-5.

[165] Research contemporary to the referendum suggested however that the opposition to European integration amongst a large number of Labour MPs was rather ineffective, as the majority of voters associated the standpoint of the Labour leadership (which was pro-Common Market) with the standpoint of the whole parliamentary Labour Party. The opinions of Labour (and government) leaders like Harold Wilson and James Callaghan were thought to represent those of the entire party on the referendum issue. See: King, *Britain says yes*, 96.

renegotiations, which were widely held to have been successful. However, the anti-EEC campaign had paid very little attention to the results of the negotiations and all the more attention to the issues of sovereignty and identity, both of which had defined the public debates on European integration since the beginning. It was more politically expedient now to delve into the narratives concerning these two issues and trying to alter these, than to make a complicated but balanced argument based on legal, economic and political facts. Edelman's recurring use of phrases such as 'I believe', 'I feel' or 'I say' indicate how these arguments were more concerned with emotional or personal convictions and acceptable narrative than logical argument. As such, language superseded fact, making it all the more likely that a broader audience would understand his political position (and possibly agree with it). This suggests that on the whole narratives involving certain conceptions of national identity were still very effective in political discourse in relation to the issue of European integration. Many more pro-EEC Labour MPs chose this course in trying to convince their colleagues and the public on that day. For example, Labour MP David Marquand said the following, in the same debate as Maurice Edelman on 8 April 1975:

> Whatever happens on the continent of Europe is bound to affect this country most profoundly. Throughout our history—even in the greatest days of the Empire on which the sun never set—we were always profoundly affected by developments on the continent of Europe. British Governments in the 1920s and 1930s thought that they could stand aside from developments on the continent of Europe. They and the British people learned their lesson in 1940. British Governments before the First World War thought that they could maintain a policy of glorious isolation and remain unaffected by developments on the continent of Europe. The British people learned their lesson between 1914 and 1918. Whether we like it or not, we are affected by what happens across the Channel. We are more affected now than ever before in our history because this is a smaller world and because we are a weaker Power… I believe that it would be an act of national folly to give up the opportunity to influence those developments from within.[166]

Marquand basically made the same argument on sovereignty as Maurice Edelman, moulding it into a narrative of lessons learned through (British) history. In this way Marquand put forward his interpretation of British history, making the argument that the EEC-membership was a logical consequence of British history, not a recent development threatening to undo centuries of British historical progress. Considering the arguments of Enoch Powell on sovereignty mentioned earlier, as well as the broader argument that this represented, it is not surprising that on the pro-EEC side of the argument politicians were attempting to create an alternative narrative with equal or greater

[166] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 889 (8-4-1975), col. 1069-70.

persuasive power. These arguments were made also in the House of Lords, which had always been more drawn to more abstract discussions in the debates on European integration. Baroness Stedman, a Labour politician as well, was no less direct than her colleagues in the House of Commons: "Only by staying in Europe can we safeguard our freedom and our national identity… We share a common heritage with Europe; we have an affinity with the peoples of Europe. We have a lot to offer to Europe. Let us please not pull out now".[167] The Baroness turned the argument in the opposite direction, concluding that national identity could only be maintained within the European Community. In her eyes, Britain would not hold enough political clout to maintain its sovereignty and identity in the global international theatre. What this shows is that given the right intentions and skills one could turn a concept like sovereignty to any preferred use: context, intention, discourse and available narratives thus had a great influence on political and public debate, also given the general gravitation towards such abstract concepts and narratives. It also shows how provisional, multi-interpretable and changeable conceptions of shared identity are; something which has been demonstrated throughout the parliamentary debates on European integration. It is all the more significant that after over fifteen years of debate on the issue, the political discourse kept being pulled into (and sometimes constrained by) the need to keep addressing and redefining shared identity narratives, making use of a wide array of conceptions of national identity.

Overall, this period from 1971 to 1975 was a return to the polemicist nature of the debates before 1966. The subdued language of 1966 and 1967 was cast aside in favour of increasingly divisive rhetoric. It is even a fair deduction to say that the polemicist tone characterising the debates in the months before the referendum was one of the fiercest and most committed in the entire period under scrutiny in this study, both politically as well as in an identity sense. One instance of the most unabashedly pompous language in the whole study comes from this period, from a debate in the period of the referendum campaigns on 29 April 1975, in the person of The Earl of Kimberley (godson of Winston Churchill and proud of it). His speech was permeated with banal nationalism of a kind which would rival the language of even the most dedicated patriots in all of Britain:

> We must beware of those who are anti-Market flocking to the polls, while the pro-Marketeers and many others, who are perhaps not so firmly convinced, may more readily abstain from voting. As my godfather, the late Sir Winston Churchill said: "We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight in the fields; we shall fight in the streets and we shall fight in the hills." Therefore, my Lords, we must—as we did in our Chamber last week by showing an enormous majority in favour of the EEC —get out into the towns and the country-side and show the flag. I repeat: we must carry this message to our people to turn out in strength and vote in favour of remaining in the Market. In this way, and in this way only,

[167] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), Vol. 359 (21-4-1975), col. 671-2.

> will the referendum not be a disaster of unparalleled magnitude; once more Britain will be justified in calling herself "Great".[168]

Such unparalleled demagoguery serves to illustrate the full register of language that was still available to politicians, even though the Earl's speech stretched it to its very limits in this instance. It also underlines the fact that the entire subject of European integration had an unbroken capacity for evoking intense and abstract language. This quote of Conservative MP Geoffrey Rippon from 10 November 1975, several months after the referendum, reveals that the issue had not come to a permanent resolution yet (if one accepts that there could ever be something such as a definitive personal or shared identity): "In moving towards a true European unity, the new European patriotism we ought to be trying to develop is a new dimension of, and not a substitute for, our national identity".[169] The decades following this long sought for British accession to the European Community would only confirm the importance of the question of European integration for British post-war national identity.

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[168] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), Vol. 359 (29-4-1975), col. 1200-1.
[169] *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), Vol. 899 (10-11-1975), col. 980.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to analyse the occurrence of narratives on and conceptions of British national identity in the parliamentary debates in Westminster concerning European integration during the years from 1957 until 1975. This time period was chosen in order to be able to track developments over a longer time period; the chronological approach this implied has served to facilitate an understanding of the place and influence of identity narratives in the debates over time. Because no such research had been done before, related to parliamentary debates on European integration or the place of identity narratives therein, this chronological approach was necessary in order to be able to come to conclusions about the developments that took place during this period. A second important feature of this study was to analyse the role of identity narratives in broader political debates. The subject of European integration provided an especially useful basis of research. It was a choice to focus on this particular aspect of the debates, which was made mostly because of the nature of the historiography on the United Kingdom´s part in the historical process of European integration, which lacked any serious and consistent research in this direction. The parliamentary debates have so far been largely ignored as a central source of information and the place and influence of identity narratives in European politics have not yet gotten the full attention they deserve either. Throughout the post war period and to this day, identity narratives, especially those linked to national identity, have been a constant subject of discussion in relation to the process of European integration. These things considered, this study can hopefully add to the knowledge and understanding of the subject of the functioning of national identity narratives in politics, specifically in relation to the European integration process and especially in the British context. Perhaps this approach can become relevant enough in historical research to become a part of future comprehensive studies on the process of European integration and shared or national identity.

In order to be able to focus on a subset of these debates, which in this case was the occurrence, development, form and influence of identity narratives, it was necessary to select the most relevant periods and debates. The chosen period, running from 1957 to 1975, is quite long. However, the focus made possible by the subject matter and research method made this a workable timeframe. Firstly, debates on the topic of European integration were not held with regular intervals and the frequency of the most important and lengthy of these debates was relatively low. Knowledge of the important developments in the British relation to the process of European integration helped to find the relevant debates. Secondly, the chosen methodology of discourse analysis helped to take on the large quantities of text in a comprehensive and consistent manner. This helped in order to recognize and categorize repetitive speeches, arguments and concepts and distinguish them from unique, more innovative arguments or remarks, whilst keeping track of the overall character of the debates. The method of discourse analysis has proven to be especially suited to the study of

conceptions and narratives related to (shared) identity, due to the complexity of speech and the fluid structures of identity.

The larger period from 1957 to 1975 has been divided into four separate periods for this research. These four periods were chosen because they represented the periods of most intense debate on the relevant subject. The findings from these four periods will now be discussed and will be followed by an overall conclusion.

The period of the initial British opt-out from full EEC membership had been characterised for a long time by an unclear policy of the government; it was quite clear soon enough that Britain was not likely to join the EEC and that some alternative, which would become the EFTA, was sought after. However, the exact nature of the alternative and the means through which it would be achieved remained unclear; in fact the EFTA would not be established until after the EEC was formed. The relative speed at which events were unfolding and the often slow reaction by the government affected the nature of the debates on this issue in both houses of parliament. Politicians were quite free to comment on the situation and to elaborate their own views. Practical matters, like Commonwealth trade preferences or British international leadership, became enmeshed to some extent in narratives of national identity. Many were of the opinion either that EEC membership would hurt Britain economically and financially, while others were certain that Britain would need to either join in order to remain competitive or come up with a solid alternative. Some thought that British strength in international politics would be enhanced by joining the EEC; others thought that it would be diminished. However, these points of view were not debated solely in economic or political terms. Throughout the debates conceptions of national character were appropriated by politicians from diverse backgrounds to back up, rationalise or explain their positions. Members of parliament who favoured EEC membership emphasized the inherent European character of British national identity. Those who upheld Commonwealth preferences claimed that the separated nature of Britain from the main continent was a crucial part of British national character and even that ´the Continentals´ were so foreign to the British that to enter into an intergovernmental association with them would necessarily be fraught with difficulty, misunderstanding and clashing priorities. The necessity of British political leadership in Europe, either from within the EEC or from without, was often linked directly to conceptions of the ´British political genius´, the existence of which was understood to be self-evident and the effects and outcomes thereof were considered beneficial for all. Such expressions were present throughout the debates, to varying degrees. The fact that they were used to strengthen political argumentation and were a constant feature suggests that identity narratives had at least some degree of influence on the formation of political opinion. It would seem that it does not suffice to label them simply as embellishment or vain rhetoric. These opinions were informed by means of many different sources of thought and in turn were meant to inform the

opinions of others, not necessarily only those of political colleagues; wider audiences were considered and addressed as well. All in all, during this first time that Britain was confronted with a new kind of European politics, the British parliament was unable to shape policy and the part played by identity narratives in the debates had been concerned more with reaction than with definition. However, the developments had already been understood as having ramifications for conceptions of British national identity and consequently argumentation along the lines of identity narratives had been employed to a considerable extent. Thus the role of identity narratives and conceptions of national identity in these debates had been relatively modest when compared to the other periods, but already distinctly present among all other political considerations and in the formation of political arguments.

When the first application to enter the EEC was made under the Macmillan government in 1961 and negotiations began, emphasis was put on ´securing good terms for entry´. These good terms of entry were portrayed as a necessary condition for the United Kingdom to become an EEC member state. However, as the negotiations dragged on, no clarity could be achieved as to what these terms would be precisely. The debates on the issue commenced immediately after the application had been announced and were interspersed with appeals to conceptions of national identity from the beginning. Thus, early on, the debates were influenced by identity narratives, which did not subside with the passing of time and remained a fixed constituent part of the debates. At the beginning of this period the political positions of the two major parties were not yet fully circumscribed. However, just before the House of Commons would officially urge the government to conclude the negotiations, the Labour leadership represented by Hugh Gaitskell, cast their opposition to EEC membership, which had come to define their political position during the debates, in terms unequivocally linked to a national identity narrative. A thousand years of history would be undone by joining the EEC. It is clear that this narrative was meant to underwrite a political position, that consisted of the wish to keep full control of national economic and trade policies. Nevertheless, it is telling that the backbone of this argument consisted of an appeal to specific conceptions of shared identity, which recurred in the reply of the Labour leadership in parliament to De Gaulle's veto. By doing this, the Labour leadership consciously chose to frame the issue for an important part in terms of national identity, putting it on a par with their policy related arguments. This political manoeuvre to some extent underlines the power which identity narratives could have and illustrates the more that appeals to conceptions of shared identity could be an effective part of a political argument, alongside more factual and concrete policy-oriented arguments. To be sure, the debates themselves had not been characterized as much by identity narratives, as the eventual Labour position and identity narratives did not have a monopoly on shaping political opinion. It is hard to assess with any certainty the power of identity narratives in political arguments throughout the

debates, but, if well placed, well thought out and combined to a convincing political and economic argument, they could be very effective themselves or add to the power of a more elaborate argument. The Conservative narrative emphasising the European nature of British national identity which was an important part of their overall pro-EEC argument, combined with the overall relative popularity of the membership application that showed in public opinion polls, is an example of how identity narratives could effectively support a political argument. Labour's election victory in 1964, which was connected to its focus on national economic policy and a disengagement from European integration, would suggest the same effect, although naturally it is problematic to ascribe their victory solely to their political narrative (for example, the economic and financial difficulties that had marked the previous governments' term would have had its effect on electoral movements as well).

After De Gaulle´s veto, Labour´s return to government and the government's turn away from Europe there were no necessary reasons and little indication for the re-emergence of the issue of British EEC membership. It is of little use to speculate as to what could have become of the British relation to European integration if things would have turned out differently, but on the other hand it would be an instance of teleological reasoning to assume that another application for EEC membership was bound to come. Of course, one could discuss the political and economic pressures, both domestically and internationally, that drove Britain to a renewed application. In any case, in 1966 another application to join the EEC was put forward and this time the initiative would come from a Labour government. Obviously, government priorities had changed. The changed position towards European integration initiated a change in the role of identity narratives in the debates. Explicably, the narrative from Hugh Gaitskell's 1962 speech was left behind by the Labour government in favour of a narrative that was more pronounced on the European character of British national identity; it was based on the narratives that the minority of pro-EEC Labour politicians had proclaimed in the previous years and mirrored the Conservatives' pro-European discourse. This was however an obvious and unsurprising development, considering the necessity for the narrative to be consistent with the new policy. A more general development in the use of identity discourse in the parliamentary debates was that they largely disappeared to the background. This change in the nature of the debates in comparison to the period of the first application was even remarked on by several members of parliament during the debates, mostly in a normative way. This changed nature of the debates was linked to the changed political landscape on the issue of British EEC membership, because there now existed a consensus among the major parties that Britain should become a member. It would seem to be a fair and sensible deduction to make that both major parties were now able to profit politically from a less charged atmosphere in the debates on this issue; lessening the amount of discussion in terms of conceptions of national identity was a means to achieve this. One might conclude from this development that both parties were very much aware of their

audience(s) and the effect that their politically charged identity narratives could have on their political base. The Labour Party was keen to minimize the anti-EEC commitments present in the party and could clearly benefit from a decreased propagation of that now potentially harmful message, which had been related to an identity narrative as strongly as it had been to policy related issues. In fact, less discussion of the bid for membership in general was beneficial to the Labour government, as this would prevent any hesitations from (re)surfacing; perhaps the decline in the expressions related to identity was part of this general decrease in debate on the issue of British involvement in European integration. For the Conservative Party, the need to debate the issue, either in identity related discourse or in other terms, was less relevant, since the Labour government was now actually carrying out a policy which had been on the forefront of the Conservative agenda for years. The consideration of the possibly aggravating potential of renewed political debate made sense for them as well. These developments suggest that politicians were aware of the power and influence of public debate in general and the use of identity narratives therein; they seemed to know that at times it could be wise to deliberately downplay controversy. The marked difference with the debates surrounding the first application must have originated from political calculations. The lessened attention for identity narratives coincided with a general decrease in debate on the issue and as such was not a unique development, but the remarks made by politicians from both sides of the political spectrum on the changed nature of the debates suggest an awareness of identity narratives being deliberately kept down, even where they were genuinely heartfelt. In comparison to the debates surrounding the referendum and even compared to the debates during the first application, this situation seems to have been characterized by calculated restraint.

The last period under consideration is to some extent two sided, since the debates surrounding the referendum were different in tone before and after the entry into the EEC and the return of Labour into government. During the years of Conservative government, the political positions concerning EEC membership had become entrenched. The rigidity of the polemical political situation had also fixed identity narratives into place, which reduced the force of identity narratives in political argument, since these could no longer be used to effectively change the political situation, which was on course for entry into the Common Market. When the Wilson government organised the referendum identity narratives became more forceful again, as the power to decide Britain's future in relation to Europe now came to rest with the British people. But, importantly, there is also continuity in the period under consideration in this chapter since it was characterized by a resurgence of scepticism on European integration in the Labour Party, which ultimately resulted in the Wilson government renegotiating the terms of entry and subsequently getting approval for that by means of a referendum. This resurfaced scepticism after the initial success of the Conservative government in securing entry was complex and related mostly to concerns over national sovereignty,

which were practical by being related to the British policy-making capacities, but also related to ideas of national identity as being bound to national sovereignty. The anti-EEC campaign, in the run-up to the referendum, had been focused intently on the issue of sovereignty from an identity perspective, resembling the narrative put forward by Gaitskell in 1962 and relying on many similar conceptions of national identity, although the anti-EEC campaign was actually carried out mostly by Conservative minded people; the Labour leadership had invested itself in its renegotiation bid and officially supported a 'yes'-vote in the referendum (which obscured critical Labour voices from the public eye, as studies showed that the electorate overwhelmingly believed that the leadership position was representative for the whole party). The return of political division among the major parties and the concurrent polemics gave the debates during this period a distinct character opposite to the period of the second application; identity narratives assumed a more prominent role again, although over the whole period from 1971 to 1975 it was not comparable to the years of the first application. Remarks by MPs throughout the period also suggest that a definite outreach to the public was undertaken during the whole of this period; not only the few weeks of the referendum campaign were marked by slogans, flyer campaigns and the like, as, for example, one Labour MP in 1971 complained that the British people were misinformed on the European issues by campaigns with slogans along the line of "Europe is fun". The fact that the issue of British EEC membership was eventually decided by a referendum was in fact the culmination of this gradual increasing emphasis on public opinion. MPs, who were essentially side-lined on the issue as legislators and representatives of the people, did not stop pleading for their respective stances on European integration, in political and economic terms, but also in terms of conceptions of national identity. The creativity, or at times the lack thereof, displayed in the formation political arguments linked to identity narratives or identity appeals remained a distinctive feature of the debates. Although the influence of identity narratives in the eventual outcome of the referendum is difficult to ascertain with any certainty, along with the influence of parliament on these issues, it is clear that along the line conceptions of national identity were a point (and a means) of discussion (in parliament as well as in the wider public sphere) and a way of communicating political points of view to the public. The fact that identity narratives became more prominent and forceful again when the political situation changed, with the assumption of power by the Labour government and the organisation of the referendum, shows how identity narratives and conceptions of national identity were a crucial part in the making of political arguments. When the political future became contested again, identity narratives began to feature more prominently in political discourse. This also holds true considering the difference in tone of the debates in this period and those surrounding the second application.

The occurrence and influence of identity narratives has marked the entire period under scrutiny in this study, from 1957 to 1975, yet it remains hard to ascertain what this influence entailed

precisely and what the effect of identity narratives was. Firstly, it is reasonable to conclude that identity narratives were hardly ever convincing in isolation from other types of arguments. In the period of the signing of the Treaty of Rome, conceptions of a British political genius went together with arguments on the economic necessity to join the EEC, or at least to create an alternative, which was to become the EFTA. In the years of the first application, Labour eventually constructed a narrative of British history which was linked to conceptions of a continuity in British national character that would be disrupted by joining the EEC, but this narrative was constructed on a foundation of policy preferences, related to the wish to be in full control of economic policy to achieve goals of national planning. From this follows a second conclusion, namely that often, when debate stretched out over a longer period of time (as these irregular sequences of debates did), parliamentary debates on European integration and the British stance towards it could not fail to include identity narratives, appeals to shared identity and identity discourse intertwined into political arguments. Thus an irrational (or less rational) strand of reasoning was repeatedly introduced into strictly rational political and policy arguments. As such rational and irrational reasoning were not two separate but necessary fixtures of debate and discussion, but were wilfully intertwined in the hope of generating a sought after effect.

Thus it seems fair to deduce from these parliamentary debates on European integration that, due to the fact that identity narratives were part of political argumentation and demonstrably occupied political thought, these were formative in opinionative processes, even if *possibly* only to a low degree (but also possibly to an unexpectedly high degree) and in concurrence with many other factors (the political, the material etcetera). The fact that through parliament several audiences were addressed - politicians, press and the public - legitimizes the thought that politicians were well aware of these audiences, as well as that what they said would be judged and absorbed according to its contents. The findings of this study also endorse this proposition, as the political arguments were often carefully tailored to appeal to the public's conceptions of national identity. It is significant to note that periods of political contestation on the subject of European integration were generally characterised by an increase in the use of identity narratives. The fact that identity narratives almost disappeared from political discourse during the period of the second application, when political consensus existed and the major parties stood to benefit from the absence of heated debate, seems to confirm that politicians understood the power that identity narratives could have in these debates on European integration. The return of identity narratives in the debates during the last period under consideration further corroborates the theory that identity narratives were useful in political argumentation and always a factor in the political discourse during these debates. Politicians were aware that addressing concerns that were likely to reflect those of the audience would help to build a convincing argument and that on the issue of European integration these concerns included,

among other things, personal and shared identities. Politicians had to take this into account and were either personally convinced that identity mattered or they reacted to the concerns of the public or of political colleagues, much as they would do when it came to other issues. Thus, national identity narratives were an integral and vital part of the parliamentary debates on European integration in the period of 1957 to 1975.

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