H-Diplo Roundtable XXVI-27

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Introduction by Rachel K. Bright, Keele University

This book has something for everyone. The tentacles of global Britain are vast, and Stuart Ward weaves together the slow collapse of British identity and statehood with events in the Caribbean, Africa, India, and the "settler colonies" in the twentieth century. This is not simply an end-of-empire book, either. Brexit and the successes of the Scottish National Party dominate this book, although neither is the focus. Ward centers the emotional investments people had or did not have in British identity and imagined institutions, from the 1880s through to the 1980s. As he explains, this is "a world history of the end of Britain," which "means rethinking Britishness as a global category of analysis" (25). Such an approach allows him to emphasize the nuances and contradictions about how different people in different spaces and times related to the label of "British."

The book is at its best when exploring the sheer complexity and contradictory characteristics of Britishness and its demise. For instance, Ward deftly explains the complicated place of religion within ideas of Britishness: the space and flexibility of Britain and its empire allowed space and flexibility of meaning, of inclusion and exclusion depending on the location and the moment. Ward argues that "to be British was to inhabit a moving frontier comprising a patchwork of peoples who never seriously demanded or developed an integrated, transoceanic popular sovereignty" (39). This is both convincingly argued and allows him to sidestep many of the conundrums faced by other scholars of Britishness, such as Linda Colley. Her *Britons* is most often criticized for its argument that anti-Catholicism was a defining aspect of British nationhood.[1] As Ward argues, sometimes it was, and sometimes it was not, and that was typical of Britishness all along. He makes similar comments throughout about the relationship between race and Britishness, a relationship that was ultimately "never uniform" (63). Similarly, he does not weigh in on whether Ireland or Scotland were colonies. For this book, nothing in the British empire was ever really clearly defined. This is an extension in many ways, one which Ward acknowledges, of John Darwin's own argument that the British empire was never one thing, but many.[2]

This lack of unity both held Britain together, and eventually drew it apart, a well-accepted claim amongst scholars of British citizenship.[3] As the reviewers note, some of the specific details or arguments may be familiar. Ward's narrative gift is taking subjects that are usually studied separately but are here cleverly and convincingly brought together to demonstrate that, throughout the twentieth century, Britons were united increasingly only with a disillusionment with the actual British government. This disillusionment was shared by Kenyan Asians, Southern Rhodesians, Barbadians, Australians, and by people within the British Isles, for different reasons but resulting in similar feelings and reactions, ones which lead them towards political separation from London, especially after the traumas and tribulations of World War II. As the

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[1] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (Vintage, 1996, 1st ed. 1992).

[2] John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World System, 1830-1970* (Cambridge University Press, 2009); John Darwin, *Unlocking the World: Port Cities and Globalization in the Age of Steam, 1830-1930* (Allen Lane, 2020).

[3] Daniel Gorman, *Imperial Citizenship: Empire and the Question of Belonging* (Manchester University Press, 2006).

reviewers note, the chapter about whether the Commonwealth would be a *British* Commonwealth or not is masterful, drawing a highly nuanced portrayal and exemplifies this whole approach.

The book is centered around three sections: the rise of Britishness, its decline globally, and finally its decline within the British Isles, although linkages across the globe are made throughout. The chapters use a specific event or publication as a framing device for that chapter's larger discussion, an approach which, though cleverly handled, does not please all the reviewers. Global history can easily present a dizzying array of names and dates and places. Ward's focus on these snapshots brings the rest much more easily into focus, a good use of the microhistory (or what Erik Linstrum calls the "miniaturist") approach to global history. It also helps link the personal emotional experiences (the West Indian cricketer, Learie Constantine, being refused a hotel room in London, for instance), with wider emotional expressions and associations. As Ward notes in his response, all writers must juggle with the specific details of events and the "overriding imperative of thinking laterally." The craftsmanship of this writing is elegant and assured, usually ensuring that Ward gets the balance right, in a narrative that is readable to an audience beyond academia. As the reviewers agree, Ward's ability to so clearly frame even familiar episodes such as the Suez Crisis within wider local and global contexts is masterful, often moving, and occasionally funny.

James Bright and Thomas Dolan suggest in their reviews that other scholars may analyze specific topics like Northern Ireland in greater depth, and all the reviewers note that World War Two itself is strangely absent. All the reviewers agree that Ward's weaving of global histories offers new connections, new questions, new ways of seeing these topics. While the scope of knowledge, and of source material (the endnotes take up 128 pages) is truly impressive, all of the reviewers note omissions, reflective of their own research expertise. This is perhaps the inevitable critique within all book reviews, and it is still filled "with much that is marvelous" (Philip Murphy) and worth reading, especially as a companion to Bill Schwarz's cultural history of whiteness and the ends of empire, *Memories of Empire*.[4]

It also reads, as the reviews suggest, like an emotional history of Britishness. The history of emotions history, however, is only explicitly acknowledged in the chapter on the moral economy of the interwar period (228-35), and a more overt recognition throughout of the various ways historians have conceptualized the history of emotions, especially in relation to nationhood and identity, would have been of value.[5] This would have added to some of the depth of analysis, and drawn out certain distinctions, such as between individual expressions and experiences, and wider discussion of affective politics or emotional

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[4] Bill Schwarz, *Memories of Empire: The White Man's World* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

[5] Recent explorations of nationhood and emotions include: Anne-Marie Fortier, "What's the Big Deal?: Naturalisation and the Politics of Desire," *Citizenship Studies*, 17:6-7 (2013): 697-71, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2013.780761; Ute Frevert, et al., *Feeling Political : Emotions and Institutions Since 1789* (Springer International Publishing AG, 2022), Open Access: https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-89858-8; Angharad Closs Stephens, "Feeling "Brexit': Nationalism and the Affective Politics of Movement'," *GeoHumanities*, 5:2 (2019): 405–423, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/2373566X.2019.1620623.

arenas (terms never used but which permeate the book). As a note for future research, it might also help develop reflections on whether there were gendered or other distinctions within this emotional history.[6]

As some of the reviewers note, the book is also significantly vaguer outside of the 1880s to 1980s time period. Ward has little to say here about the actual events of the 2010s which clearly underpinned the book's gestation. Similarly, by omitting most events before the nineteenth century, questions about why Britishness evolved as the pre-eminent political identity across the empire are sidestepped in the narrative. The first three chapters center the rise of global Britishness, mostly through the fragmentary nature of a largely white Greater Britain idea at the turn of the century.[7] As the reviewers highlight Ward's focus so often on Britishness as a (usually defensive) emotional identity precludes other ways in which it was viewed, felt, or experienced, especially in earlier periods.

As comments in the reviews also suggest, one may read the book feeling that Britishness never really meant anything concrete, but being British was a very concrete legal category. Ward explores this during the dismantling of empire, through the plight of Indian Kenyans, Windrush, or Southern Rhodesia. Those chapters given an excellent sense of the ways "unrequited Britishness," to use James Bright's term in his review, in the mind twentieth century accompanied decolonization. Why and how Britishness had become important is simply less clear, and does add an imbalance to the story presented here. Focusing on some of the legal discussions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries about who was British might have helped develop this further. There is only passing reference to how legal 'Britishness' spread, and some of the very interesting scholarship about why, in the eighteenth century, it became an attractive political identity.[8] Drawing on this scholarship could help address both why Britishness developed at all, and the interplay of emotional, legal, and material considerations within its development and collapse.

As the reviewers here note, the coverage of events since the Falklands is equally slight, and it can be a little flat as an ending. It may also date the book, as it assumes its readers (probably correctly for now) are familiar with Brexit and related recent events. A comparison between the New Zealand flag referendum (whether to replace the Union Jack on their national flag) and the British referendum, both held in 2016, could be an ingenious metaphor, but is not fully fleshed out. In ten years' time, when memories fade, that may be a problem. For now, this offers significant potential for 'further explorations' (James Bright's term), an aim which Ward encourages in his response.

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[6] Good overviews about emotions history can be found in Katie Barclay, "State of the Field: The History of Emotions." *History: Journal of the Historical Association*, 106:371 (2021): 456–466, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229X.13171; Barbara H. Rosenwein and Riccardo Christiani, *What is the History of Emotions?* (Polity, 2017); Rob Boddice, *The History of Emotions* (Manchester University Press, 2018); Hannah Parker and Josh Doble (eds.), *Gender, Emotions and Power, 1750–2020* (University of London Press, 2023).

[7] He here offers a useful global framework to Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900* (Princeton University Press, 2007).

[8] Stephanie DeGooyer, *Before Borders: A Legal and Literary History of Naturalization* (John Hopkins University Press, 2022); Hannah Weiss Muller, *Subjects and Sovereign: Bonds of belonging in the eighteenth-century British empire* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

Ward begins and ends by reminding the reader that, since World War II there has been a constant discourse about whether Britain was in decline. Continuing to endlessly discuss it makes such a collapse inevitable, eventually. I would make a slightly different argument, drawing on much of the evidence he has already presented in the book: once any idea is uttered, it is near impossible to imagine it away. Even if the political entity that is Britain does end, this is never a one-way street. The idea of Britain, and Britishness, is in the world. It has myriad global meanings. It will continue to have a pull to some people, now and in the future, for a variety of political and emotional reasons. Britain the state may die but Britishness, however wounded, cannot.

Contributors:

Stuart Ward is Professor of Global and Imperial History at the University of Copenhagen, specializing in the historical entanglements of modern Britain and its overseas empire. In addition to *Untied Kingdom* he has recently published *Embers of Empire in Brexit Britain* (with Astrid Rasch, eds., Bloomsbury, 2019) and *The Break-Up of Greater Britain* (Manchester University Press, with Christian D. Pedersen, eds., 2021).

Rachel K. Bright is Senior Lecturer in Imperial and Global History at Keele University. Her second book, *Becoming British?: A digital history of women's migration and naturalisation in early twentieth century Australia* (Manchester University Press, forthcoming), explores Britishness as a legal category, and its gendered and wider global dimensions (the project database is available at: https://naturalisation.online/database). She just completed an ISRF grant, building a research network of Migration, Gender, and Disability Studies scholars to explore: Eugenics, the British Empire, and the creation of the global migration system; they have an article which will appear in *Migration Studies* shortly. Her article with Andrew Dilley**,** "After the British World," has become essential reading for scholars considering Britishness globally.

James Bright gained his doctorate from the University of Edinburgh in November 2022, and works at The National Archives in Kew. His thesis, titled "Loyalty in Captivity: Ideas and Identity among Ulster Loyalist paramilitary prisoners, 1976–1987," built on research from his MA and undergraduate dissertations completed at Durham University to explore the role of the loyalist prison experience in shaping ideological development and identity formation within the UVF and UDA. Formerly a co-convenor of the Modern Irish History seminar at the University of Edinburgh, James serves on the council of the British Association for Irish Studies (BAIS) and is a co-editor of the 'Writing the Troubles' website. This is an online platform allowing academics and non-academics alike to reflect critically on the contested history of the recent Northern Ireland conflict. Alongside the two other 'Writing the Troubles' editors, he is the co-writer of an article addressing the role of public history in Northern Ireland published in Dublin City University's *Studia Hibernica* journal in October 2020.

Thomas Dolan completed his PhD at the University of Edinburgh under the supervision of Prof. Alvin Jackson and Mr. Owen Dudley Edwards. He subsequently held a post-doctoral research fellowship at the University of York, working on the Leverhulme-funded project *Rethinking Civil Society: History, Theory,*

Critique. Currently, Tommy is Senior Editor at British Online Archives. He is also a co-editor (with Dr. James Bright and Dr. Roseanna Doughty) of *Writing the Troubles*. Hitherto, he has published in *The Historical Journal* (2019), the *Journal of the History of European Ideas* (2020), *Analecta Hibernica* (2020), and *Archivium Hibernicum* (2022). His essay, "John Hume and his Ideas," was published as part of *The Routledge Handbook of the Northern Ireland Conflict and Peace* (2024).

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Stuart Ward's book offers an account of the post-war deterioration of the British "world system" created by empire, evoking "Greater Britain"—a phrase coined by nineteenth-century liberal politician Charles Wentworth Dilke and developed by academic J.R. Seeley[1]—to describe the concept of the imperial world at its peak as an offshore extension of Great Britain itself. The book assesses the socio-political and cultural affinities that allowed this Greater Britain to flourish overseas, as well as the contradictions and fault lines that caused its swift diminution following the Second World War. It discusses the decolonization of the colonial world, migration from former colonies to Great Britain, and separatism in the "home nations" as its major themes: all are addressed with great clarity and insight.

As an early career researcher of Northern Ireland's "Troubles" conflict, I have written on Ulster unionism—the largely Protestant political tradition in Northern Ireland that supports continued Union with Great Britain—and specifically on loyalist political culture, which generally refers to the more militant and more working-class strand of unionism.[2] I will use this review as a way to focus on Northern Ireland and as a platform to commend Ward's book, offering limited further explorations on some of the key themes regarding this topic. Northern Ireland and the early Troubles is the focus of the book's 13th chapter, though "the Irish question" is a topic referenced throughout. Ward's contributions are timely, with ongoing constitutional strife following the United Kingdom's vote to withdraw from the European Union in 2016 having seen renewed attention on Northern Ireland. Recent books examining unionism and loyalism have come in the wake of a bitter backlash from unionist communities against the Northern Ireland Protocol, which was introduced as part of the UK government's Brexit deal with the EU and is regarded as undermining the Union by placing additional checks on certain goods entering Northern Ireland from Great Britain.[3]

In addressing the Troubles, Ward's starting point is to challenge conventional perceptions of the conflict's origins in an atavistic, cyclical eruption of embedded sectarian division between Northern Ireland's Catholic and Protestant communities. Historians, such as Simon Prince, have previously challenged solely internal explanations for the outbreak of conflict by looking at Northern Ireland with relation to global currents of protest in the late 1960s, such as the Paris student protests and the African American civil rights

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[1] Charles Wentworth Dilke, *Greater Britain: A Record of Travel in English-Speaking Countries During 1866 and 1867* (Harper and Brothers, 1869, 1st ed. 1868); J.R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England: Two Courses of Lectures* (Macmillan, 1891, 1st ed. 1883).

[2] See James Bright, "Hands Across the Sea: Paramilitary Loyalism in England and Scotland," *Writing the 'Troubles'*, April 2019, https://writingthetroublesweb.wordpress.com/2019/04/01/paramilitary-loyalism-in-england-and-scotland/; James Bright, "Ulster Unionism and the constitutional routes not taken", *Creative Centenaries*, January 2022, https://www.creativecentenaries.org/blog/ulster-unionism-and-the-constitutional-routes-not-taken

[3] See Geoffrey Bell, *The Twilight of Unionism: Ulster and the Future of Northern Ireland* (Verso, 2022); Graham Walker and James Greer, *Ties That Bind?: Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Union* (Irish Academic Press, 2023); Aaron Edwards, *A People Under Siege: The Unionists of Northern Ireland, from Partition to Brexit and Beyond* (Merrion, 2023).

movement.[4] Ward looks instead to the "wider dynamics of a declining British empire," arguing that the specific backdrop of imperial decline in the years leading up to the conflict was a key factor in igniting 30 years of vicious intercommunal violence from a period of relative calm (381). Ward acknowledges that the precarity of evoking empire and colonialism with relation to Northern Ireland has potentially discouraged many historians from exploring these themes further, as these concepts are so emotively bound up in the conflict's polemical battlefield. Instead, Ward neatly sidesteps the thorny issue of whether Northern Ireland is best described as a colony of Great Britain. He argues that spending too much time on the "finer details of historical classification" has threatened a conceptual quagmire ultimately irrelevant to the likely influence of "the cross-currents of British imperial decline" on the intercommunal dynamics that sparked the conflict (386, 393). Ward states that the realities of the late imperial context—a dwindling number of overseas territories, the military withdrawal from "East of Suez" and British Prime Minister Harold Wilson's disastrous devaluation of the pound—gave renewed urgency and militancy to Irish nationalism's anti-colonial outlook and stoked the equally long-standing insecurity of Ulster unionists that Britain could not be trusted to uphold their interests.

By foregrounding this unionist suspicion of Westminster's "fealty and fortitude" as a driving force in the conflict, Ward's analysis evokes the fundamental constitutional uncertainty that underpins and motivates so much of unionism's political behavior throughout Northern Ireland's 100-year history up to the present day (396).[5] A careful reading of Ward's book attests to how the same brand of Britishness that underpins the recent upsurge in loyalist demonstrations against the Northern Ireland Protocol—fervent in its loyalty but tempered by fear of betrayal—is consistent throughout loyalism's history. Crucially, he also discusses how unionist anxieties have specific resonances with other imperial flashpoints. For students of Northern Ireland, a major strength of Ward's book is how it places unionism and loyalism into a global, comparative focus. As historian Richard Reed has noted, too often loyalism is discussed in isolation—as "a law unto itself" that is explicable only with reference to its immediate context—or rendered by those sympathetic to republicanism merely as a residual by-product of Britain's imperialist project.[6] Ward places Ulster Protestants in a broader post-war context of anxiety among pro-British imperial communities in the face of the empire's decline (402). Feeling thwarted in their claims to Britishness by Britain itself, white settler communities in South Africa, Kenya, and Rhodesia shared with Ulster Protestants a sense that Great Britain "seemed to prevaricate in its support for its most ardent supporters" in order to favor frustrated native populations (402). A common theme—especially between Northern Ireland and Rhodesia, and also in Kenya,—was renewed vigilance in protecting their Britishness, as well as greater ambivalence: the belief that rebellion against the British was justified.

Ward looks at Northern Ireland and Rhodesia side by side, noting the strong emotional pull of these commonalities. This "wider vista of an empire cravenly squandered," was strong enough to create a sense of

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[4] See Simon Prince, *Northern Ireland's 1968: Civil Rights, Global Revolt and the Origins of the Troubles* (Irish Academic Press, 2007).

[5] Bright, "Ulster Unionism and the constitutional routes not taken".

[6] Richard Reed, *Paramilitary Loyalism: Identity and Change* (Manchester University Press, 2015), 181. The seventh chapter of Reed's book offers a rare comparative study of the major loyalist paramilitary organisations with historical "pro-state" groups in South Africa, the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere.

solidarity, especially in the minds of ardent loyalists who vacillated between ultra-loyalty and rebelliousness, transcending the huge differences in terms of demography and social structure between these countries (402-403). Another fascinating case study is that of Gibraltar, the British overseas territory which became a flashpoint of unrest on 6 April 1968 just as the Troubles were beginning to unfold in Northern Ireland. Here, the enclave's disaffected pro-British denizens, fearful of negotiations that might strengthen the territorial claims of Francoist Spain over the British connection, rioted: first with resoundingly pro-British battle cries, then with wounded hostility towards the British when the inevitable police backlash and deployment of British troops arrived (400-401). That afternoon of chaos, which is highly obscure to most scholars of Northern Ireland, yet meticulously researched and vividly told by Ward, is a microcosm of the same "underlying impulse[s]" that animated loyalist unrest throughout the Troubles (401). These are "the pervasive threat of absorption by a hostile neighbor; a restive community suspicious of Britain's intentions; the conviction that disorderly measures were justified to uphold British standards" (401).

If the movement is sometimes stereotyped as insular, Ward uses these parallels to establish how loyalism's "emotional backdrop" at the outset of the Troubles was shaped by the evident downturn faced by these overseas pro-British communities that were threatened elsewhere (402). Alongside pro-British mobilization in the Falklands in the late 1960s, another interesting example briefly deployed by Ward is that of Anguilla, the Caribbean Island to which troops were dispatched in March 1969 in response to a local revolt in favor of continued alignment with Britain rather than centralized control from St Kitts (401). Ward describes how "the broader Britannic fabric" of empire—a world of sometimes contested "imperial provinces, dominions, dependencies and domains"—provided a "plausible logic" and a sense of common purpose to the existence of a Protestant unionist enclave in an otherwise Catholic nationalist Ireland (382). This is why the British Empire mattered to unionists so much at the outset of the conflict: that some sense of "Greater Britain" existed and flourished across the globe was idealized as a pillar of certainty and as a discouragement to any British notions of withdrawal.

Ward's exploration of thwarted Britishness as a shared post-imperial experience extends beyond examples of explicitly pro-British, mostly white, "loyal" communities. Stepping further back in his timeframe, Ward draws more unexpected points of thematic comparison between the *Komagata Maru* incident—when over 300 migrants, all from British India and British subjects, were denied entry to Canada in 1914—and the mobilization of Ulster loyalists in opposition to the Third Home Rule Bill in 1912. These two groups of people may seem unlikely bedfellows, with little evidence of mutual sympathy or even awareness between them, but they are "cast […] fleetingly into the same frame" by the same fundamental challenge that they posed to the British government as "borderline" groups making ambiguous though fervent claims to Britishness (60). The motif of unrequited Britishness is seen again among the Windrush generation, with the social and legal challenges to integration faced by those who relocated from the West Indies to the heart of metropolitan post-war Britain, and those Kenyan Asian passport holders who were denied entry into the UK in 1968. The latter was the subject of commentary in Belfast's unionist *News Letter* newspaper, which voiced distrust of the government amid underlying fears that similarly exclusionary measures could be introduced against Ulster (401).

Ward acknowledges that placing disparate events such as these in "analytical proximity" may seem tendentious but argues that it is precisely their disparateness that makes the shared desire of access and belonging to Britishness as a social category so illuminating about the currency of Greater Britain (61). Core frameworks still resonate to the present day, however different the contexts may be. Both the ongoing loyalist mobilization in opposition to the Northern Ireland Protocol and responses to the 2018 "Windrush scandal'—the wrongful detention and deportation of Caribbean migrants to Britain whose arrival predated the tightening of nationality laws in the 1970s— relied on the emotional power of the familiar "British betrayal" charge to bolster their claims (478). The overall impact of Ward's work, in pulling together these post-imperial strands in their similar anxieties and overlapping frameworks of identification, is to demonstrate human commonalities in stories that—especially in the case of Ulster loyalism—are sometimes seen as "*sui generis.*"[7]

As the Troubles unfolded, it became clear to unionists and loyalists that "their belief in a deeper, organic, transoceanic Britishness" was no longer sustainable (408). As they looked across to Great Britain, the situation was hardly encouraging either: the post-war years witnessed pockets of alternative national selfhood gaining prominence as more people identified as English, Scottish, and Welsh. The latter "Celtic Departures" are the subject of a chapter which explores the electoral rise of the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru in the 1960s, as is the emblematic political spokesman of this renewed Englishness, MP Enoch Powell. It is apparent that the twilight of empire dealt a blow to the hegemonic Britishness that flowed from it. This departure from Britishness was especially unsettling for Northern Ireland's unionists, who broadly lacked the same recourse to an underlying root nationality for them to "come home" to.

It was partly in response to these insecurities that radical loyalist political figures started to envisage alternative constitutional arrangements for Northern Ireland. Ward discusses the proposal of independence for Northern Ireland, which was intended to maintain the separateness of a six-county Ulster from a "green" all-Ireland state and as a bulwark against British perfidy. It is a concept rooted in the awareness of Ulster Protestants that Westminster fundamentally held the strings of their Britishness, and of wanting to have the final say as to their own identity before Britain could decide otherwise. Different versions of an independent Ulster competed under the umbrella of the Ulster nationalist movement: a fringe but nonetheless diverse and active movement during the conflict. I will briefly elaborate on these for what they reveal about where different loyalist factions positioned themselves in relation to the legacy of empire as it deteriorated.

The Vanguard party—an example addressed by Ward—held out for independence as a last resort, with its founder William Craig making positive gestures towards Rhodesia's UDI when Home Minister in Terence O'Neill's government as early as 1966 (396, 404). Canadian-born academic Kennedy Lindsay was a key theorist of Ulster independence for Vanguard. His pamphlet *Dominion of Ulster?*, which was published through the party in 1972, envisioned Northern Ireland as a dominion, a self-governing nation that maintained British links through the Crown and by joining what were then 32 independent states in the Commonwealth. More radical yet was 1979's *Beyond the Religious Divide* proposal, which was developed by

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[7] Reed, *Paramilitary Loyalism*, 181.

the New Ulster Political Research Group (NUPRG) then published and endorsed by the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), Northern Ireland's largest paramilitary organization. The document's vision of independence for Northern Ireland's six counties was neutral on Commonwealth membership and the monarchy, and was premised on a neutral shared "Ulster" identity to build consensus between Protestants and Catholics away from the polarized camps of Britishness and Irishness.

These competing versions of an independent Ulster reveal how loyalists remained conditioned by the historic scripts of empire even at the point of its decline: Lindsay imagined Ulster as a loyal dominion, while the UPRG envisioned a revolutionary breakaway state that explicitly evoked the United States of America. Lindsay's attachment to what was by-then largely obsolete terminology of dominion status—seen in the *Dominion of Ulster?* pamphlet, and his British Ulster Dominion Party founded in 1977—was arguably indicative of its desired emotional power to confer an enhanced sense of kinship, dignity, and security between settler societies as it had once done to elevate them "a notch higher […] on the imperial ledger" than other usually non-white colonies at the highpoint of empire (77).[8] In contrast, *Beyond the Religious Divide* looked to the American revolutionary republic with its promises of a written constitution, a Bill of Rights, and the separation of legislative, executive, and judicial powers. As Reed has argued, by constructing an Ulster nationalist position, the UDA cast themselves "as protagonists in an anti-imperialist struggle for independence" similar to the struggle of American colonists.[9] Republicans were not alone in their "use and abuse" of history to draw an imaginary continuum of struggle,[10] made even more explicit in subsequent UDA publications, which draw upon and reference US "Founding Fathers" Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson.[11] Both camps activated historical narratives in their search for a new logic to give their identity plausibility as the seemingly unbreakable bonds of offshore Britishness came undone, looking to other stages of the imperial story elsewhere in the past. This topic, I would suggest, makes for an interesting addendum to Ward's work, in what it suggests about the varied political imaginations within those "vulnerable British enclaves cut adrift at empire's end" (406).

Just as Lindsay and the UDA adopted imperial-era narratives to support their versions of independence, empire remained a touchstone for "progressive" loyalists also. Reformists linked to Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) prisoners, with the UVF being the UDA's main loyalist paramilitary rival, promoted power sharing and pluralism within a reformed Northern Ireland state. UVF commander Gusty Spence's description from a 1970s prison letter of his native Shankill Road as "the heart of the empire that lies torn and bleeding" echoed the canonical loyalist complaint of unrewarded loyalty while laying claim to a new kind of Protestant victimhood in which the visible decline of loyalism's cherished Greater Britain expedited their acknowledgement of shared "squalor," "deprivation," and "misrule" between marginalized Protestants and

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[8] In the pamphlet itself, Lindsay notes that of the other independent nations in the Commonwealth, "many are poorer than Ulster": an indication of the importance of "dominion status" as a phrase to distinguish a prospective independent Northern Ireland with its implications of exceptionalism and loyalty.

[9] Richard Reed, "Blood, Thunder and Rosettes: The Multiple Personalities of Paramilitary Loyalism between 1971 and 1988", *Irish Political Studies* 26:1 (February 2011): 45-71, at 61.

[10] Reed, "Blood, Thunder and Rosettes", 60.

[11] Reed, "Blood, Thunder and Rosettes," 61.

Catholics.[12] It is therefore evident also that recognition of changing realities in the post-imperial world opened up new vistas of intercommunal solidarity, ideas of pluralism that would eventually lay the groundwork at the grassroots level for more civic models of unionism and the 1998 Good Friday Agreement.[13]

Ward concludes that the disaggregation of the Greater British world and its grand narratives has fostered a pluralistic, often contradictory multitude of identities within the post-colonial world and within the boundaries of the modern United Kingdom (476-477). The fragmentation of any top-down "uniform national story" now that the British world system has retreated in many ways suits unionist and loyalist communities in Northern Ireland, owing to the uncertainty that defines their relationship with Britain (477). Highly aware of the precariousness of Northern Ireland's subordinate status to the exigencies of Westminster strategy, having experienced the Troubles conflict as a sequence of constitutional traumas,[14] unionists are also well accustomed to patterns of mutual misrecognition with Great Britain. A recent example is then-Home Secretary Suella Braverman seeming to compare pro-Palestine protest marches with the Orange Order parading tradition in a *Times* newspaper article.[15] Once perceiving itself as a key link in Greater Britain, the newer world of "limited identities" arguably better suits unionism's idiosyncratic expressions and symbols of Britishness—in murals, music, and parades—to persist for a local audience regardless of "mainstream" British sensibilities (477). Ward's book is extremely useful in getting to grips with these ambiguities. By placing Ulster unionism within a global framework, the book is a welcome addition to comparative literature on Northern Ireland, and with its thought-provoking nuance and scope, it is a highly welcome addition to the literature on the end of empire and empire's still unresolved present-day resonances more broadly.

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[12] Roy Garland, *Gusty Spence* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2001), 145; see also Reed, "Blood, Thunder and Rosettes," 56-57.

[13] See Tony Novosel, *Northern Ireland's Lost Opportunity: The Frustrated Promise of Political Loyalism* (Pluto, 2013).

[14] For example: the proroguing of Stormont in 1972, the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973, and the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985.

[15] Suella Braverman, "Police Must Be Even-Handed with Protests," *The Times*, November 2023, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/pro-palestine-protest-london-met-police-cbqnxbtv3

Stuart Ward's *Untied Kingdom* is not, as is flagged early on, "principally a study of political thought" (15). It is, however, strong—in its own way—when treating with ideas and imagination. After all, the book is essentially a survey of the gestation, morphology, and, most importantly, capabilities of the very idea of 'Greater Britain.' The early parts of the text plot the growth of Britain's "global coordinates" and, with that, the expansion of its "imaginative frontiers" (35). Ward suggests, for example, that "experimentation with transatlantic modes of British selfhood in the eighteenth century" served as "a dress rehearsal for the more complex spread of British sensibilities that emerged in its long aftermath" (38). A genealogy of the concept of 'Greater Britain' is supplied in this opening stretch: J. A. Froude's mooting of "Oceana" to convey a sense that "the people at home and the people in the colonies are one" (39); Lord Rosebery's suggestion of a British "Commonwealth" in the 1880s (39); Charles Dilke's preference for "Greater Britain" (39-40); J.R. Seeley's embrace of this term as a means of conveying the "ethnological unity" of the world system that had sprouted from his native shores (41).[1]

Having outlined the "material and ideological conditions" that facilitated the "imagining of Britishness on a global scale" (13), Ward sets about his primary task: charting the disorientating, frequently unpredictable and painful consequences of the contraction of these geographical and cognitive boundaries—of the reconfiguring "of the mental geography of the British people" (293), as he describes this process—throughout the mid-twentieth century, a period during which Britain found itself "being pared back" to its "own island fortress" (310) and the "verities of offshore Britishness quickly unraveled" (258). Via examination of a series of "discrete crunch moments" (16) played out across the United Kingdom and the wider world, in (for example) Australia, Canada, Gibraltar, India, Kenya, New Zealand, Rhodesia, Singapore, South Africa, and the Falkland Islands, certain of which have tended to be viewed (understandably) as largely self-contained affairs by their respective scholarly troupes, with Northern Ireland's descent into civil strife being a case in point (see 385), Ward charts the implosion of "the frontiers of Greater Britain" (211). The aim is to evidence and account for the increasingly "diminishing returns" (3), on several fronts, that have been provided by a once so successful, seemingly immutable "global civic idea" (480). Ward's narrative thus constructs a compelling, and certainly not unconvincing, image of an empire, and, in turn, a United Kingdom, "slowly fraying at the seams" (467).

Throughout, Ward demonstrates an enviable ability to mothball narrow, stodgy hypotheses, or to bypass historiographical battles that, for all their dynamism and hypothetical importance, and seemingly unbeknownst to the protagonists involved, have nevertheless descended into a stalemate. The adoption of a determinedly broad, global vantage point affords this analytical clout and maneuverability. So too does Ward's (admirable) determination to consider the subtler, psychological ramifications of a British world-system, with its complex, hard to pin down "moral imagination" and "moral economy" (see chapter eight),

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[1] See James Anthony Froude, *The English in the West Indies* (Longmans, Green and Co., 1888); Charles W. Dilke, *Greater Britain: A Record of Travel in English-Speaking Countries during 1866 and 1867* (Harper and Brothers, 1869, 1st ed. 1868); Charles Dilke, *Problems of Greater Britain*, vol. I (Macmillan, 1890); J. R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England: Two Courses of Lectures* (Macmillan, 1891, 1st ed. 1883).

finding itself in decline (258). Almost straight away, David Marquand's "pithy formula" that shorn "of Empire Britain had no meaning…[thus] it is by definition impossible for Britain as such to be post-imperial," is taken to task (3).[2] Such hypotheses, Ward decries, usually have recourse to a "crude logic of subtraction (take out the empire and the edifice crumbles)," when the whole issue of the viability of "Britishness," post-empire, yearns, quite rightly, as this monograph demonstrates, for "fine-grained analysis" (3).

Consideration, in chapter ten, of the less-conspicuous origins of the pivotal and so much picked-over Suez crisis of 1956 likewise results in the dismissal of the '"deranged man' view of history" that has been customarily advanced by historians of modern Britain in relation to the former British Prime Minister, Anthony Eden (307-308).[3] "More revealing is the deeper culture of entitlement, prestige and worldly expectations that produced Eden's personal phantoms," as Ward rather persuasively contends (308). At the beginning of his treatment of the eclipse of British influence in South Africa, Ward tactfully disengages from the heated and fairly complex debate as to the precise time of arrival and intellectual provenance of "human rights as a force for social and political change in the mid-twentieth century" (205).[4] The "question of *when* human rights secured their mythical 'breakthrough' has," Ward posits, "tended to overshadow the more pertinent issue of *where*, and to what ends" (205).

There is a pleasing—if no doubt controversial—efficiency, moreover, about the way in which Ward's narrative "sidesteps that conceptual logjam" as to whether Ireland should be considered a British colony (383). This allows him to get on with the more immediately productive task of airing his conviction that there was a "deeper emotional backdrop" to the 'Troubles': that the early stages of the conflict can be situated within a "wider arc of offshore British disquiet" (402, 401). This broader context of imperial disintegration—the unravelling of Britain's empire, as well as the collapse of the USSR—has long been appreciated, I think, by the more perceptive of the scholars who have considered the destabilization of Northern Ireland.[5] Ward deserves credit, however, for evidencing the local ramifications of this overarching

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[2] See David Marquand, "How United is the Modern United Kingdom?," in *Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History*, ed. Alexander Grant and Keith J. Stringer (Routledge, 1995), 287-288.

[3] Ward targets works such as the following: (in order of publication) Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Declining Empire: The Road to Decolonisation, 1918–1968* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); David Edgerton, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation: A Twentieth Century History* (Allen and Lane, 2018).

[4] Ward surveys the theses advanced in monographs such as (in order of publication) Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (Norton, 2007); Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Harvard University Press, 2010); L. B. Jensen, *The Making of International Human Rights: The 1960s, Decolonization and the Reconstruction of Global Values* (Cambridge University Press, 2016); Samuel Moyn, *Human Rights and the Use of History* (Verso, 2017).

[5] Richard English has contended that "some of the better recent books on the era [the 'Troubles] would fail to command interest beyond those who are already intrigued by Northern Ireland…partly because they do not sufficiently engage with those world-historical forces to which their Northern Irish attention has been drawing them." See Richard English, "Writing the Troubles," *Writing the Troubles* (blog), 31 January 2018, available at https://writingthetroublesweb.wordpress.com/2018/01/31/writing-the-northern-ireland-troubles/. Also see Simon Prince, "Decolonization and the Start of the Troubles," *Writing the Troubles* (blog), 10 August 2020, available at https://writingthetroublesweb.wordpress.com/2020/08/10/decolonization/.

process in a way that perhaps historians of Ireland, who tend to be inward looking and whose scholarship is currently trapped in the snare of transnationalism, may never have been capable of doing.

Yet Ward's treatment of the initial phases of the conflict is not the most radically innovative affair. There is much recourse to Richard Bourke's scholarship, which is fair enough because it is typically brilliant. But this induces an urge to put down *Untied Kingdom* and to pick up Bourke's *Peace in Ireland: the War of Ideas* (it also leads me to ponder, probably unjustifiably, just how fresh and progressive are the analyses offered by Ward in the accompanying chapters).[6] That said, Ward's sweeping survey of the "global end of Britain" has generated one or two welcome factual additions to the existing literature on Ulster. Take his fleshing-out of the political backdrop to the bollocking (this seems to be an appropriate adjective going by the account of the incident that Ward supplies us with on page 393) that the Prime Minster of Northern Ireland, Captain Terence O'Neill, and his delegation received in Downing Street from the British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, following the pivotal civil rights march in Derry/Londonderry on 5 October 1968. It is "commonly overlooked," as Ward explains, that Wilson's severity stemmed in part from the fact that he had just emerged from difficult negotiations with the Prime Minster of rebel Rhodesia, Ian Smith, and so was "in no mood for a second serving of loyalist stonewalling" (393).

I would go so far as to say that *Untied Kingdom* is mandatory reading for any committed student of the history of Northern Ireland, and perhaps even of the history of Ireland more generally. When it comes to the actual chapter on Ulster, however, with the caveat that close attention should be paid to the segment on Gibraltar (399-407), a quick skim may suffice. If one is looking for meaningful insights into Irish history, far more can be gleaned, arguably, from engagement with the surrounding chapters, by way of inference and joining up the dots. My instinct is that this statement should hold with respect to those hunting for original, comparative insights into the histories of other regions that have come under British influence. For instance, anyone well briefed on the sagas of the Sunningdale Agreement of December 1973, which generated a short-lived, devolved power-sharing executive in Northern Ireland throughout the spring of the following year, and of the subsequent Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement of April 1998, which ultimately restored devolution, will surely read with interest of the heavy reliance upon "semantic innovations" and "constructive ambiguity" that has been characteristic of dealings with the colonies and Dominions on the part of UK governments (110, 128).

It is also evident that the emergence of what has been dubbed as "new nationalism" or "revisionist nationalism" in Ireland during the late 1950s can be situated within the wider phenomenon of "declinism" surveyed by Ward in chapter eleven.[7] If a Canadian such as Frank Underhill sought to offload the burden "of old attitudes of mind, habits of action, maxims of conduct, traditions, slogans, cliches and myths," the same can be said of, say, John Hume, the longstanding leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party,

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[6] Richard Bourke, *Peace in Ireland: the War of Ideas* (London: Pimlico, 2012, 1st ed. 2003).

[7] On these terms see P. J. McLoughlin, *John Hume and the Revision of Irish Nationalism* (Manchester University Press, 2011); Sarah Campbell, "New Nationalism? The S.D.L.P. and the Creation of a Socialist and Labour Party in Northern Ireland, 1969–75," *Irish Historical Studies* 38 (2013): 422-438. Also see my "Maynooth, History, and the Intellectual Origins of John Hume's Political Thinking," *Historical Journal* 62:4 (2019): 1045-1068.

and key architect of the Northern Ireland peace process (339-340). One thinks of Hume's influential, two-part article, "The Northern Catholic," which was published in the *Irish Times* in May 1964. Like others within the Catholic nationalist community, he demanded a more active, civic form of patriotism, lambasting, as he would throughout his career, the island's Unionist *and* nationalist traditions for being bogged down in the politics of the past, and for engaging in the "comfortable leadership of flags and slogans" to the detriment of tangible progress on the social and economic planes.[8]

A key strength of *Untied Kingdom* is that it generates some rather more profound insights, again by way of implication. Most historians of modern Ireland, and no doubt a good few outside of this clique, are familiar with that veritable tradition whereby British commentators and statesmen have latched on to, and bemoaned, those apparently distinctive, pathological characteristics of the Irish mind.[9] Repeatedly, it has been claimed that this exhibits an obsessive, unhealthy relationship with the island's history, and that it has remained curiously out of sync, by about three hundred years, with Western political modernity. The latter cognitive phenomenon was targeted in the much quoted, puerile spiel delivered by Winston Churchill in the House of Commons in February 1922. Speaking in his capacity as Secretary of State for the Colonies, Churchill asserted that the "integrity of their quarrel" in Ulster had somehow remained "unaltered" in the wake of the "cataclysm" that was the First World War.[10] One also thinks of the outlandish observation advanced by another former British Prime Minister, Edward Heath, that the "tribal loathing in Northern Ireland" sprang from "an atavism which most of Europe discarded long ago."[11] But Ward's study further affirms Bourke's perceptive thesis: far from stemming from ancient antagonisms or atavism, the Northern Ireland conflict was, rather, a quintessentially modern one.[12]

Just as importantly, *Untied Kingdom* also evidences, albeit inadvertently, how cognitive traits that are supposedly unique to the Irish are as conspicuous within the British psyche. What about "Churchill's pronounced time-lag in coming to terms with Indian independence" (298)? It is also worth highlighting that in chapter ten, Ward once again chastises historians of post-war Britain for having been "remarkably forgiving in their assessment of a crisis [Suez] stoked by the ardour of an anachronistic, even delusional element within the political class of the 1950s" (303). These were individuals who were running around fantasizing about a "Second Elizabethan Age," much as the controversial British politician, Enoch Powell, dreamed, according to Ward, of "rewinding the clock to Tudor England, [thereby] expunging the effects of three centuries of imaginative engagement with the wider world" (297, 375).

Oliver MacDonagh theorized that the so-called 'Irish problem' persisted because of "the power of geographical images over men's minds."[13] He suggested that the image of the island, "with the surrounding

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[8] *Irish Times*, 18 and 19 May 1964.

[9] See Oliver MacDonagh, *States of Mind: Two Centuries of Anglo-Irish Conflict* (Pimlico, 1992, 1st ed. 1983), 1-14; Richard Bourke, "Languages of Conflict and the Northern Ireland Troubles," *Journal of Modern History* 83 (2011): 544-578.

[10] "Winston Churchill – 1922 Speech on the Ireland Situation," available at https://www.ukpol.co.uk/winston-churchill-1922-speech-on-the-ireland-situation/.

[11] See Edward Heath, *The Course of My Life* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1998), 421.

[12] See Bourke, *Peace in Ireland*, xvii; Bourke, "Languages of Conflict," 559-560.

[13] MacDonagh, *States of Mind*, 15.

water carving out a territorial identity," has proved particularly influential.[14] *Untied Kingdom* definitely evidences the profound influence exerted by this image upon the British imagination, particularly when the demographic repercussions of imperial expansion began to be felt in the form of large scale immigration of Kenyan Asians. This, as we learn from Ward's narrative, prompted the "nation's true dimensions to be cautiously surveyed," precipitating a proverbial avalanche of commentary postulating that Britain was too small to accommodate the inhabitants of the empire: that the "poor little island" was in danger of "sinking" under the weight of colonial immigrants (368, 371, 371). Incidentally, it was not shocking to learn (on page 362) that the much vaunted, ridiculously self-obsessed, and always mouthy 'liberal', Roy Jenkins, who was Chancellor of the Exchequer within Harold Wilson's Labour government at the time, remained conspicuously silent during the frantic Cabinet deliberations that yielded the 1968 Commonwealth Immigration Act (362). Suffice it to say that Ward's study has strengthened my conviction that Jenkins wished to quarantine his beloved island from what he perceived as polluting influences. "It was shoveling back the terrorists on to his [the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Merlyn Rees'] plate," as Jenkins wrote in his memoirs with regard to the exclusion order provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Bill that was passed in the wake of the Birmingham bombings by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) in November 1974.[15] But "that was where they came from," as Jenkins saw things, "both in origin and motive, and it was hard-headed sense to try and protect the trunk against the gangrene in one limb."[16]

If *Untied Kingdom* showcases the efficacy of global history done well, and, what is more, the merits of engaging in conceptually-driven accounts of the past, there are also intellectual dividends to be reaped, in my view, by approaching the text from an equally broad, if markedly different, vantage point: with an eye to the development of humanity's salient political concepts. Again, this is not to imply that Ward's monograph should be approached as though it were a typical exercise in the history of ideas. Rather, it could be argued that on one level he has tracked the checkered and, it would appear, increasingly uncertain career of the concept of 'Greater Britain.' On another, Ward documents a distinct and significant phase in the morphology of what J. B. Bury, one of Seeley's successors as Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge University (only Lord Acton's tenure separated the two), described as the "ecumenical ideal": "the conception of the whole inhabited world as a unity and totality, the idea of the whole human race as one."[17] Distinct from "that of the *polis* or city," as Bury explained in *The Idea of Progress*, and promoted "by the vast extension of the Greek world resulting from Alexander's conquests," it was a concept that Christianity absorbed.[18] It thus took the form of a "universal State and a universal Church" throughout the Middle Ages, as it had during the Roman period, passing "afterwards into the conception of the intercohesion of peoples as contributors to a common pool of civilization."[19] Another of Bury's hypotheses—advanced somewhat implicitly throughout his *Life of St. Patrick and his Place in History*—can be

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[14] MacDonagh, *States of Mind*, 15.

[15] Roy Jenkins, *A Life at the Centre* (Macmillan, 1991), 396.

[16] Jenkins, *A Life at the Centre*, 396.

[17] J. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress: an Inquiry into its Origin and Growth* (Macmillan and Co., 1920), 23.

[18] Bury, *The Idea of Progress*, 23.

[19] Bury, *The Idea of Progress* 24.

introduced to the mix here: the construction of "universal Christendom" in the twilight of the Roman world had much to do with the interplay of chance and individual initiative, rather than any deliberate design or concerted effort on the part of the papacy.[20]

Whilst the formation of Britain's empire owed much to weighty structural factors, naval predominance following the Napoleonic Wars prime amongst them, there was also, as Ward observes, that informal, "parallel wave of aggressive human enterprise [which] buttressed and broadened older settlements and founded new ones," generating a "scattering of isolated enclaves that mushroomed in quick succession" (33). We learn, too, how British governments were inclined to adopt a hands-off approach to this "settler revolution," "recognizing that imperial rule would have to tread lightly in the shadow of the American revolution" (33). As Ward explains at the outset of his examination, in chapter nine, of the near total inversion of the constitutional *status quo* that occurred in Rhodesia, all this ensured that "one of the core tenets of Britain's "global reach" was the belief in a shared tradition of British justice inherited from the Common Law" (258). He adds that "the imperative of legal certainty was inseparable from settler incursions, bringing a stabilizing element to an otherwise disorderly and hazardous enterprise" (258).

So perhaps here is as good a place as any in this review to point out how the entire thesis of *Untied Kingdom* more or less pivots on a historiographical concept associated with Bury: his belief, which he aired throughout his article "Cleopatra's Nose," in the play of contingency, of "chapters of accidents," as the key determining force in history.[21] Ward tells us, for instance, that "multiple actors, divergent interests, and conflicting assumptions all contributed to the steady erosion of shared affinities" (12). He urges his readers to be mindful of the "unintended consequences arising out of…[the] key formative contexts" of 'Greater Britain' (61). Within the story of Britain's imperial decline he likewise perceives "global currents…channeled through localized encounters, each unfolding according to their own internal logic, but nevertheless intersecting with wider scales and contexts in direct and indirect ways" (13). Towards the end of the text, he envisages a destructive, largely uncontrollable "chain of consequence arising from the serial ruptures of empire's end" (444).

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[20] J. B. Bury, *Life of St. Patrick and his Place in History* (Macmillan and Co., 1905), 7-15: the "extension of that faith [Christianity]…was not due to direct or deliberate design on the part of the Church, but to chapters of accidents, which arose through the relations, hostile and pacific, of the Empire and its neighbours…In the conversion of this island [Ireland], as elsewhere, captives played the part of missionaries." Bury employs the term "universal Christendom" on page 213.

[21] "Cleopatra's Nose", Bury's sole focused discussion of historical contingency, was reproduced in Harold Temperley, ed. *Selected Essays of J. B. Bury* (Cambridge University Press, 1930), 60-69. On Bury's philosophy of history and its reception see J. P. Whitney, "The Late Professor J. B. Bury," *Cambridge Historical Journal* 2:2 (1927): 191-197; Harold Temperley, "Introduction: the Historical Ideas of J. B. Bury," in *Selected Essays of J. B. Bury*, ed. Harold Temperley (Cambridge University Press, 1930); R. H. Murray "Memoir" for J. B. Bury, *History of the Papacy in the 19th Century*, ed. R. H. Murray (Macmillan, 1930); Doris Goldstein, "J. B. Bury's Philosophy of History: a Reappraisal," *American Historical Review* 82:4 (1977): 896-919. Consideration of Bury's thought recurs in my ''Islands, Imprisonment, Imperialism: Patrician Dimensions of the Irish Imagination," *History of European Ideas Special Edition: Religion and Irish Political Imagination*, ed. Thomas Dolan and Andrew Phemister 46:7 (2020): 1027-1046.

The broader point here, however, is that throughout Ward's monograph one observes an initially somewhat unconscious and rather chaotic, but increasingly ambitious, deliberate, and, at its zenith, arguably near-utopian—if in practice frequently ruthless and repugnant—drive to establish and, all the more challengingly, as interwar and postwar British governments were to learn, to maintain some form of universal community. For example, Thomas Babington Macaulay, the prophet of the idea of progress, conceived of imperial expansion as "the recipe for 'the universalization of English liberty'" (450). "Being 'British'," as Ward contends in the opening stages of the book, "was the answer to the question of unity in diversity for a heterogeneous patchwork," one of the key selling points of this nebulous concept the fact that it could serve as "a pleasing idiom for addressing the plural in the singular" (29, 62). Yet he hammers home, via a number of well-chosen and frequently poignant examples, how "the discrepancies between the theory and practice of universal subjecthood were as old as the empire itself" (166). Ward makes it very clear, for example, that the architects and overseers of 'Greater Britain' never reconciled "universal aspirations with the persistent hold of the British race (with an unmistakably upper case 'B')" (99).

Indeed, the way in which the precedent of the Roman experiment in universal community has loomed within "British historical imagination," simultaneously a source of inspiration and trepidation, exists as a minor, if intriguing, theme in *Untied Kingdom* (447). "In this conception, Rhodesia was Byzantium to Britain's Rome", as Ward postulates whilst surveying the Rhodesian Front's projection of itself as an embattled watchman in Sion, as the custodian of the essence of Britishness, in the face of perceived British government treachery (270). This was a self-image that Ulster Vanguard, founded in early 1972 by William Craig, a former, high-ranking member of the Unionist government, would likewise peddle, quite successfully, for a time.[22] At the beginning of chapter fifteen, particular attention is also paid to the imaginative fall-out of Macaulay's dissemination of the dreaded vision—one based, interestingly, upon a pessimistic, cyclical view of time, the like of which remained hegemonic, according to Bury, throughout antiquity[23]—of the "New Zealander", gazing upon the ruins of London in some distant future (447-451). This supplies Ward with yet another vantage point from which to assess the insecurities that vied with the brazen self-confidence of the British psyche during the heyday of empire.

It also provides him with a neat segue (structurally, the text is a polished affair) into his treatment of the intellectual agenda pursued by another influential New Zealander: J.G.A. Pocock.[24] It was, moreover, interesting, if unsurprising, to learn that many Britons have derived comfort from the belief that the 'British empire' was *not* an empire at all, but, rather, a "unique social experiment," not bound to the rise and fall model depicted so vividly in Edward Gibbon's scholarship (65).[25] Such thinking was, it would seem, symptomatic of a deep-rooted delusion or coping mechanism within the British mindset: belief in an innate immunity, stemming from a predisposition towards liberalism and Protestantism, to the "corrosive

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[22] On Ulster Vanguard see, for example, G. Watson, ""Meticulously crafted ambiguities": the confused political vision of Ulster Vanguard," *Irish Political Studies* 28 (2013): 536-562.

[23] Bury, *The Idea of Progress*, 7-20.

[24] See, for example, J.G.A. Pocock, "British History: A Plea for a New Subject," *New Zealand Journal of History* 8 (1974): 3-21.

[25] See Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. J. B. Bury, with an Introduction by W. E. H. Lecky (Fred de Fau and Co., 1906), in 12 vols.

potential" of empire and, for that matter, of decolonization (22). This latter frame of mind is identifiable, as Ward points out, in John Strachey's scholarship.[26]

There are further grounds for positing that *Untied Kingdom* tracks a significant phase in the morphology of Bury's so-called "ecumenical ideal." A notable dimension of the study is Ward's examination, commencing in chapter three, of the ways in which the British pursuit of universal community nourished and, ultimately, was challenged and superseded by competing enterprises, not least the League of Nations. These trialed slightly more advanced political technology and, crucially, were wrapped up in far more appealing and intelligible packaging. "Interwar internationalism emphasized wider human commonalities and an incipient global civil society," as Ward phrases it, "but it also enhanced the significance of the nation state as a 'defining, order creating unit'" (74). The "elegant simplicity of the League Covenant," as he goes on to highlight, differed markedly from the document of "near theological intricacy" on the nature of the Commonwealth that was precipitated by the "Committee on Inter-Imperial Relations" in late 1926 (81). One of the many interesting paradoxes that Ward teases out throughout this monograph is the way in which repeated attempts to modernize and standardize the clunky political machinery of the British empire resulted, ironically, in it gradually falling apart. Here, one again perceives his recourse to the unruly play of contingency as a key factor in the process of imperial decline. It is certainly hard to disagree with Ward's hypothesis that the simpler, slicker, tighter concept of the League furnished a "powerful counterpoint" (92) to "the unstructured informality of an ill-defined congregation of British peoples," just as in the wake of the Second World War the development of "new international fora, new legal instruments and above all a new political language [of "universal rights" and "norms"]" (205) undermined the efficacy of traditional, colonial appeals to the "moral world of British rights" (211).

This review has been a mostly positive affair. Permit me to use the few remaining words at my disposal to advance a few minor gripes (plus a major one). I found Ward's determined use of the adjective "Northern Irish" vexing. I remain unconvinced by this term, not least because a substantial cross-section of Ulster's loyalist community would not be inclined to describe themselves as such (and especially not during the early 1970s); neither, moreover, would those of a republican or strongly nationalist persuasion. On another point, I agree wholeheartedly with him: it is not fair to criticize a study such as *Untied Kingdom* for overlooking this or that historical event or episode (16). I did find it somewhat odd, however, that Ward did not extend his analysis of Ulster chronologically so as to include the debacles of Sunningdale and the subsequent Constitutional Convention, the unhappy fate of which Craig and his lieutenant, David Trimble (who became First Minister of Northern Ireland following the Good Friday Agreement), were so bound-up with, despite the fact that the whole issue of devolution is of such centrality in the following chapter on Scotland and Wales.

Furthermore, whilst effective, the repeated deployment of the round the houses approach throughout this text, whereby Ward charts the fallout of a development in Australia, then Canada, then New Zealand, typically through surveys of national newspapers, became a tad predictable and ever so slightly tiresome. I found it wearying at different stages of the text on different reads through it. I would also point out that the

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[26] See John Strachey, *The End of Empire* (Victor Gollancz, 1959).

initial framing of the book provides a cautionary lesson in the perils of engaging in the production of contemporary history. Understandably, Ward flags the "remarkable upswing in the recent fortunes of the Scottish Nationalist Party, Sinn Féin and Plaid Cymru" (2). This statement may hold with respect to the Irish and Welsh groupings. Yet it would appear that the pendulum has begun to swing back in the case of the SNP.

Finally, I have had this book on my desk for many months, positioned in such a way that the spine faces me whilst I engage, in the evenings, with that other great saga about the pursuit of universal community: *Star Trek*. Glancing at this book has always induced the same thought: *Untied Kingdom* is a silly title, a pun unbecoming of a work of intelligent and industrious scholarship. The soberer option of *A Global History of the End of Britain* would have, I feel, done just fine, even if it does not, admittedly, fit on a spine as neatly as *Untied Kingdom* does. Someone needed to take themselves aside on this front.

Review by Erik Linstrum, University of Virginia

If it had not already been taken by literary scholar Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island* might be an even better title for Stuart Ward's book.[1] *Untied Kingdom* is a history of the downsizing of British identity. Beginning with the Jacobean plantations of Ulster and Virginia, Ward argues that "Britannia" and its etymological variants acquired expansionary, capacious, and essentially imperial connotations that deepened as English-speaking settlers overspread the world in the nineteenth century. To a greater degree than most national identities, Britishness was tied to a particular territory but never bound by it. "Freighted with the imagined propensities of global reach," it allowed far-flung populations to share a sense of kinship while investing the collective self-image of metropolitan Britons with world-spanning grandeur (44).

Because narrower, racially exclusive definitions of British identity always lurked within the promise of universality, its boundaries were inherently unstable and susceptible to conflict, not the least when non-white subjects of empire tried to claim its privileges for themselves. But Ward is ultimately less interested in the hypocrisies or contradictions of Britishness than in its precipitous decline in the decades after the Second World War. How and why did the once substantial ranks of self-styled "Britons overseas" retract into a scattered handful of enclaves—Gibraltar, the Falklands, Ulster—which clung to an outmoded affiliation with almost parodic intensity? And what did the provincialization of British identity mean for the inhabitants of the United Kingdom and its four constituent nations?

In posing these questions, Ward offers a new angle on the significance of decolonization in British history. While historians focused on high politics have typically seen little evidence of upheaval in the domestic impact of empire's end, cultural historians like Ward have led the way in casting doubt on the placidity of this process.[2] A notable feature of *Untied Kingdom* is the methodological ecumenicism it brings to bear, bridging the gap between the geopolitical and the cultural as it makes the case for the profoundly

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[1] Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and Culture in England* (Princeton University Press, 2003).

[2] This historiographical divide has been described well by Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* (University of California Press, 2012), 11-12. For political histories that minimize the impact of decolonization, see John Darwin, "Fear of Falling: British Politics and Imperial Decline since 1900," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 36* (1986): 27-43; John Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation: The Retreat from Empire in the Post-War World* (Macmillan, 1988); D. George Boyce, *Decolonisation and the British Empire, 1775-1997* (Macmillan, 1999); Paul Addison, *No Turning Back: The Peacetime Revolutions of Post-War Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2010); Stephen Howe, "Internal Decolonization? British Politics since Thatcher as Postcolonial Trauma," *Twentieth-Century British History* 14 (2003): 286-304; David Cannadine, "Apocalypse When? British Politicians and 'Decline' in the Twentieth Century," in *Understanding Decline: Perceptions and Realities of British Economic Performance*, ed. Peter Clarke and Clive Trebilcock (Cambridge University Press, 1997), at 261-262. For the cultural riposte, see especially Stuart Ward, ed., *British Culture and the End of Empire* (Manchester University Press, 2001); Bill Schwarz, "'The Only White Man in There': The Re-Racialisation of England," *Race and Class* 38 (1996): 65-78; Bill Schwarz, "Reveries of Race: The Closing of the Imperial Moment," in Becky Conekin, et al., eds., *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain, 1945-1964* (Rivers Oram Press, 1999); Bill Schwarz, *The White Man's World* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

destabilizing effects of decolonization both in Britain and in British-identifying communities across the world.

This is, in many ways, an epic history: leaping across oceans and continents, juxtaposing the actions of monarchs and prime ministers with flows of people, goods, and currency. Yet it is an epic told largely through miniaturist set-pieces (the 1943 ejection of Trinidadian cricketer Learie Constantine from the Imperial Hotel in Bloomsbury, the 1968 executions of James Dhalmini and Victor Mlambo in Rhodesia) and metaphorically freighted microcosms (the ship *Komagata Maru* carrying Indian Sikhs to Vancouver in 1914, the royal retreat known as Sagana Lodge in Kenya). While the Suez crisis, entry to the European Economic Community, and the Troubles get chapters of their own, other historiographical landmarks—the Second World War and the welfare state—are treated more glancingly. Ward's culturalism is evident in his flexible understanding of which events belong to the meta-event of decolonization and which ought to be counted as significant. It also shapes his approach to sources, including the attention he pays to sometimes-obscure memoirs, manifestos, and novels as well as the undercurrents and juxtapositions of meaning he extracts from official documents.

Repeatedly in *Untied Kingdom*, this approach pays dividends. Ward shows that Indian independence in 1947 set off a surprisingly anguished controversy, both in government circles and in the Anglophone press across the world, about dropping the "British" prefix from the Commonwealth of Nations. Wide swaths of Australian, New Zealander, and South African opinion bristled at what they saw as the dilution of foundational values of "kingship and kinship" as a predominantly non-white nation took its place alongside the "old Dominions," then moved to adopt a republican constitution (117). The 1968 devaluation of the pound sterling, Ward observes, coincided with the imposition of immigration restrictions on Kenyan Asians with UK citizenship and thus triggered parallel anxieties about the "devaluation" of the British passport (367). Another unexpected connection informs Ward's original reading of the Troubles. He interprets Unionist intransigence as a reaction to the British government's "betrayal" of other Anglo-dominated polities, especially Rhodesia, which extremist Protestants adopted as a *cause célèbre* (399).

The New Imperial History, a quintessential outgrowth of the cultural turn, is no longer very new.[3] But *Untied Kingdom* can be seen as an unusually ambitious attempt to pay off its central promise: to chart the mutual constitution of metropole and colony, or more precisely, to map their manifold interconnections without reinscribing the boundaries between them. As Ward has pointed out elsewhere, the familiar language of colonial "influence" or "impact" runs the risk of doing just that: "Even those arguing for a more porous conception of the metropolitan-colonial divide [tend] to buy into the fundamental distinction."[4] Taking Britishness seriously as a global category requires a different kind of spatial imagination, which in

[3] Antoinette Burton, "Who Needs the Nation?" *Journal of Historical Sociology* 10, no. 3 (1997): 227-248; Mrinalini Sinha, "Britain and the Empire: Toward a New Agenda for Imperial History," *Radical History Review*, no. 72 (1998): 163-174; Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (University of California Press, 1997); Kathleen Wilson, ed., *The New Imperial History: Culture, Modernity, and Identity, 1660-1836* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); Stephen Howe, ed., *The New Imperial Histories Reader* (Routledge, 2009).

[4] Erik Linstrum, Stuart Ward, Vanessa Ogle, Stuart Ward, and Priyamvada Gopal, "Decolonizing Britain: An Exchange," *Twentieth Century British History* 33:2 (2022): 274-303, at 278.

the case of this book shifts back and forth through concentric circles of racial proximity. At the outermost edge are the precarious minority communities and imperiled outposts (Kenya, Rhodesia, Suez); then the historically secure yet geographically distant heartlands of overseas Britain (Canada, Australia, New Zealand); and finally, closest to home, the definitionally British-yet-not-British nations of Scotland, Wales, and England. Some important locations, such as South Africa and Northern Ireland, occupy liminal spaces between categories.

By sustaining these distinctions over the course of the book, Ward's book demonstrates as well as any New Imperial history how to disaggregate the categories of "metropole" and "colony." Agency is diffuse and polycentric; causality flows along multiple paths and in different directions. So, for instance, the Suez chapter maps the divergent responses of Australia and Canada amid rising doubts about the sustainability of the imperial project. The Kenyan Asian crisis, in Ward's telling, provoked an upsurge of Englishness rather than Britishness as xenophobes envisioned an ultra-constricted national space with minimal room for newcomers. In an especially incisive chapter on Scottish and Welsh nationalism, Ward demonstrates that the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru achieved their 1960s breakthrough in part by riding the global wave of anticolonial triumph. This allowed them to seize the mantle of modernity from an increasingly decrepit-looking British state while blaming expensive but unrealistic imperial pretensions for depriving their constituencies of resources. Taken together, these and other cases reveal the breakdown of Britishness as a dynamic and self-perpetuating process: fractures originating in one part of the Anglo-world created openings for centrifugal forces elsewhere.

Complaining about omissions, especially in a work as lengthy as this, is among the least attractive of the reviewer's vices. Yet it is difficult not to wonder how Ward would have handled the case of Hong Kong given his supple treatment of other cross-pressured populations under British rule. A more fundamental critique concerns the miniaturist or microcosmic strategy, which another reviewer has aptly described as foregrounding the "little deaths" of Britishness.[5] For the most part, the Second World War remains offstage, functioning implicitly as an illusory moment of Britannic unity that would be shattered soon afterward. But Ward's relative inattention to the dynamics of nationalism between 1939 and 1945 lends an abrupt quality to some elements of his postwar story. If Ward's attribution of English nationalism to anti-immigrant backlash is unobjectionable as far as it goes, we are left with little sense of whether and how this movement drew on the imagery of Englishness mobilized in wartime propaganda, and how far it marked a new departure.[6] Another absence is arguably more conspicuous. By neglecting the postwar expansion of the welfare state, Ward's book leaves questions hanging about the potential for social democracy to supplant

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[5] Wendy Webster, "Unravelling Britishness," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (2023), advance access.

[6] Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965* (Oxford University Press, 2005); Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature, and Conservatism between the Wars* (Routledge, 1991); Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: Pimlico, 1991). While these interpretations disagree on the extent to which domestic and bucolic visions of Englishness shaped propaganda in the Second World War, they agree on its conservative, exclusionary potential.

empire as a locus of identification—or, alternately, for the post-1979 decline of social democracy to boost separatist movements in Scotland and Wales.[7]

Untied Kingdom can be read as a counterpoint to another significant recent interpretive history, David Edgerton's *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation*, which finds national institutions strengthening at the same midcentury moment in which Ward sees imperial identity coming apart.[8] But *Untied Kingdom* is also a major achievement on its own terms. Packed with creative interpretations, archival finds, and meticulous engagement with the scholarly literature, it will become an indispensable reference as well as a historiographical landmark. Employing comparative and connective methods with equal conviction, it demonstrates that British history can—and perhaps should—be written from Cape Town and Cardiff, Bulawayo and Belfast, Port Said and Perth, all at once.

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[7] Bailkin, *Afterlife of Empire*; Ben Jackson, "Celtic Nationalism and the Global Break-Up of Britain," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (2023), advance access.

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

Review by Philip Murphy, University of London and the Institute of Historical Research

When one of Oscar Wilde's fictional characters claimed that it was "only shallow people who do not judge by appearances"[1] he might have been thinking of the current literature on British decolonization. There was a time when the opening up of departmental files in the National Archives seemed likely to uncover the hidden motives behind this process. Yet although the mining of this vast seam of documentary evidence has enhanced our knowledge,[2] the insights it has provided have arguably been somewhat underwhelming. It has resulted in no really satisfying master narrative, and certainly not one that explains why roughly similar things happened at similar times across the European colonial empires despite their differing administrative practices and traditions. The revelation in 2011 that the British authorities had secretly removed and then hidden thousands of files that had been generated in its former colonies—the so called "Migrated Archives" or Hanslope Park files—led to accusations that archival historians had based their work on heavily curated collections which concealed as much as they revealed.[3]

It is hardly surprising, then, that some of the most able scholars in the field have turned back to materials that have always been in the public domain, making use of contemporary techniques of discourse analysis to breathe fresh life into them. Perhaps the most influential example of this in recent years is Bill Schwarz's *Memories of Empire: The White Man's World*,[4] which, like Stuart Ward's book, describes an imperial imaginary that embraces both British domestic politics and the colonial "frontier." Ward's own work has long been the focus of a cottage industry of studies of "Britishness," its language and its symbols, and *Untied Kingdom* is the culmination of decades of work. Although its sources are impressively eclectic and include archival materials, they again tend to rely upon publicly available and secondary sources rather than classified documents.

For Ward, the notion of "Britishness" was, in part, a highly effective rhetorical device able "to structure and mediate relations between diverse and highly variegated communities" offering "the answer to the question of unity in diversity for a heterogenous patchwork, each owing an uncompromising fealty to a particular place but nevertheless sharing material interests and wider cultural sympathies that imposed real obligations of practical assistance and mutual regard" (29-30). This functioned both in the context of the "British Isles" and in relation to the territories colonized by its inhabitants, a process that could be rationalized in terms of the creation of a "Greater Britain." The idea was still being promoted in a 1941

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[1] The aphorism appears in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Ward, Lock and Company, 1891).

[2] See for example, the monumental series of volumes in the British Documents on the End of Empire series, published by the Stationery Office from 1992 to 2006. The volumes can be downloaded via https://bdeep.org/.

[3] For the most elaborate exposition of this argument see Ian Cobain, *The History Thieves: Secrets, Lies and the Shaping of a Modern Nation* (Granta, 2016). I have argued elsewhere that much of this criticism is unfair. See Philip Murphy, "It Makes a Good Story – but the Cover-up of Britain's Savage Treatment of the Mau Mau was Exaggerated," *The Conversation* 17 Oct. 2016: https://theconversation.com/it-makes-a-good-story-but-the-cover-up-of-britains-savage-treatment-of-the-mau-mau-was-exaggerated-65583. Yet it continues to cast a shadow over the archivally based research on decolonization.

[4] Bill Schwarz, *Memories of Empire: The White Man's World* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

propaganda film "From the Four Corners" produced by the wartime Ministry of Information in which Leslie Howard mused on the supposedly unifying ideals of Britishness.

Yet as early as the eighteenth century, the American War of Independence, which was characterized by P J Marshall as "the war of Britishness," demonstrated that the notion could itself become highly contested, invoked to justify not loyalty but defiance towards ministers in London, just as it would also be in the twentieth century by Ulster Protestants and Rhodesian settlers. Furthermore, as India assumed its position at the imaginative heart of the British Empire, the tensions between it and a "Greater Britain" became ever more difficult to reconcile. The great popularizer of the idea of "The Expansion of England," J R Seeley,[5] was unable to incorporate within this notion a subcontinent populated by people "of alien race and religion...bound to us only by the tie of conquest" (41). Nevertheless, in his campaign in Natal in the 1890s, Indian lawyer and fledgling anti-colonial activist, Mohandas K Gandhi used the argument that the forms of racial discrimination he opposed were incompatible with "the best British traditions," further evidence that the language of Britishness could be a tool of resistance as well as an appeal to unity (66).

Ultimately, Ward demonstrates that the idea of Britishness was simply one of a series of framing devices for debates on the UK's global reach. Others, like empire itself, the idea of a post-imperial Commonwealth, and appeals to white racial solidarity, were interlocking but also sometimes in tension with the concept of Greater Britain. Ward notes how notions of whiteness fed into Celtic nationalist challenges to the political project of Britishness. This was explicitly the case during Irish nationalist Eamon de Valera's tour of the US in 1919, when he complained that Ireland "was the only white nation on earth still in the bonds of political slavery," and was implicit when the resurgent Scottish nationalist movement of the 1960s and 1970s pointed to the granting of independence to Asian and African countries as proof that this was "*the least*" that Scotland could expect (387, 439). The soothing myth of a global British subjecthood and nationality was exposed as empty rhetoric by racially exclusionary immigration policies, first in the "White Dominions" and then in post-war Britain itself. It was, as Ward notes, only really sustainable in an era when contact was limited amongst the various "self-styled British communities." Increased mobility led to "tighter patterns of proximity, producing serial ruptures as rival British sensibilities squared off against each other in the decades after 1945" (484).

There are great riches here, both in terms of sources and of analysis. While Ward does not rely on recently declassified documents to provide novelty to the book, his magpie instincts fill it with much that is marvelously unfamiliar (to this reader at least). Who, for example, now remembers popular novelist Nevil Shute's book *In the Wet*,[6] published in 1953 to coincide with the Coronation, which imagines a world in which the royal family is forced by the ravages of Socialism at home to seek refuge in Australia "where the true essence of Britishness lived on" (156)? It is therefore slightly disappointing that the narrative ends in the 1970s. It is difficult to see a particularly good rationale for this, unless a follow-up volume is planned,

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[5] Imperial propagandist and historian, Sir John Robert Seeley (1834-1895). His highly influential book, *The Expansion of England* was published in 1883 by Macmillan and Co.
[6] Nevil Shute Norway (1899-1960) who wrote under the name of Nevil Shute moved his own family to Australia in 1950 to escape what he regarded as punitive British rates of taxation. See Nevil Shute, *In the Wet* (William Heinemann, 1953).

especially since Ward's focus on publicly available sources means that his research is not restricted by official closure periods. So much of what he describes echoes very loudly in recent events. The desperate attempts of British policy-makers in the late 1940s to exploit ambiguities in Commonwealth nomenclature to suggest consensus where none existed will be immediately familiar to those of us who have observed recent attempts to pretend that countries like Brunei, Lesotho, New Zealand, and Rwanda are united by "shared Commonwealth values."[7] In a much more obvious sense, of course, the closely interlinked issues of peace in Northern Ireland, the Scottish independence referendum of 2014 and landslide Scottish National Party result in the following year's general election, and the 2016 "Brexit" referendum all resonate powerfully with Ward's arguments about the contested meanings of Britishness. Perhaps a leaner and longer narrative, with a less exhaustive theme-and-variation treatment of the immediate post-war decades and at least some discussion of the last fifty years, would have enhanced the impact of the book. As it stands, however, this is still a tremendous achievement and an essential work on modern British history.

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[7] See for example this speech from 3 September 2019 by the British High Commissioner to New Zealand, Laura Clarke: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/a-commonwealth-of-common-values [accessed 11 April 2024].

Response by Stuart Ward, University of Copenhagen

It is a rare privilege to see one's work refracted through multiple readings, and indeed to have the opportunity to respond. My sincere thanks are due to Lindsay Aqui for putting this distinguished panel together, to Diane Labrosse for her skillful editorial work, and to Rachel Bright for writing the introduction. I am especially indebted to James Bright, Thomas Dolan, Erik Linstrum, and Philip Murphy for the fresh eyes they bring to the subject.

The subject itself is by no means unfamiliar. For decades now, political pundits and pollsters have dissected the "British problem" in a seemingly endless round of speculation about the UK's brittle constitutional architecture. This has furnished rich pickings for historians, with scholars of every stripe exploring ways of reconstituting British history in light of the shaky foundations of Britain itself.[1] Though no real consensus has ever emerged, the sheer persistence of the problem is the surest sign of nagging doubts about the long-term viability of a unitary British state–and the enduring challenges this poses for British history.

My own addition to the genre made its appearance at the tail-end of another intense wave of conjecture (dating roughly from the 2014 Scottish independence referendum), with its own steady stream of books and op-eds.[2] My choice of title—*Untied Kingdom: A Global History of the End of Britain*—sought to meet the challenge of a crowded market by flagging two principal claims: that the affective category to which "Britain" lends its name has long-since past peak circulation; and that this only emerges clearly into view when the affective geography of Britishness is surveyed on a global scale.

Neither claim is tied to the electoral fortunes of any political party or separatist agenda. Rather, the book takes a wider view, couching the subject squarely in the past tense and relocating its historical dynamics

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[1] J. G. A. Pocock set the pace in the 1970s with his plea for a "new British history", see Pocock, "British History: A Plea for a New Subject," *Journal of Modern History*, 47:4 (December 1975): 601-28, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1086/241367. Rather than reconstitute the subject, Tom Nairn was more inclined to bid it farewell in *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism* (Verso, 1977). Meanwhile Hugh Kearney proposed his highly influential "four nations" model in *The British Isles: A History of Four Nations* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), alongside other influential works such as Alexander Grant and Keith J. Stringer, eds., *Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History* (Routledge, 1995); Raphael Samuel, *Island Stories*, Vol. 2 (London: Verso, 1998) and Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 2003). Linda Colley's seminal *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (Vintage, 1996 [1992]) was to large extent predicated on the way a unitary Britishness had come "under immense pressure" at the time of writing, 6-7.

[2] For an indicative sample see Linda Colley, *Acts of Union and Disunion: What has Held the UK Together–and What is Dividing it?* (Profile Books, 2014); Iain Macwhirter, *Disunited Kingdom: How Westminster Won a Referendum but Lost Scotland* (Cargo Publishing, 2014); Pat Thane, *Divided Kingdom: A History of Britain, 1900 to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2018); Gavin Esler, *How Britain Ends: English Nationalism and the Rebirth of Four Nations* (Head of Zeus, 2021); James Foley and Ben Wray with Neil Davidson, *Scotland After Britain: The Two Souls of Scottish Independence* (Verso, 2022); Brendan O'Leary, *Making Sense of a United Ireland: Should it Happen? How Might it Happen?* (Sandycove, 2022); Michael Kenny, **Fractured Union: Politics, Sovereignty and the Fight to Save the UK** (*Hurst*, 2024).

"offshore." It marks an attempt to render the British problem as global history,[3] tracing a wider arc of historical actors and agencies that, over time, punctured confidence in the shared certainties of being British. It aims, not to predict constitutional outcomes in the present, but to explore the deeper fault lines that put the United Kingdom on notice as the frontiers of British sentiment receded world-wide.

As these highly engaging essays all readily attest, this was easier said than done. The contributors are scrupulously generous in acknowledging the book's "determinedly broad, global vantage point" (Dolan); bringing "a different kind of spatial imagination" to bear (Linstrum); which illuminates the "human commonalities in stories that … are sometimes seen as '*sui generis*'" (Bright); ultimately furnishing "great riches … with much that is marvelously unfamiliar" (Murphy).

But more interesting for the purposes of this exchange are the various lines of critique, which also raise more general questions about the cost-benefit of "worlding" Britain.[4] Any new historical paradigm will always involve a risk of ejecting babies with the proverbial bathwater. But taking a global view of the British problem raises the additional problem of the unforeseen distortions of the wide-angle lens. Thinking through these four commentaries, I am struck by how the various reservations and misgivings all constitute a kind of flipside to the interpretative dividends. How to dispel the former without diminishing the latter?

A case in point is Linstrum's astute observation about my "miniaturist or microcosmic strategy"—in which fine-grained analyses of select interactions furnish much of the hard evidence. Leaving aside the issue of empirical "gaps," he makes a valid point about the way this lends "an abrupt quality" to certain aspects of the presentation. If "causality flows along multiple paths and in different directions," it becomes that much harder to convey the temporal depth of field in any given setting.

He offers the example of English nationalism, the focal point of Chapter Twelve, which starts out at a distant remove—in Nairobi, on the eve of the Kenyan Asians' "crisis" of 1967. Such outside-in framing, he acknowledges, can unearth hitherto hidden linkages between Britain, East Africa, and South Asia. But it also brings a tendency to screen out much of what went on *in England* long before those crucial decades of decolonization. To respond that this was entirely unintentional (or that I fully recognize the many subtle prior deployments of English national sentiment–both during World War II and indeed far earlier) offers no real resolution.

This was by no means a problem affecting only that particular chapter. At virtually every turn, historical antecedents and precursor events presented themselves, which in some instances necessitated deeper dives

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[3] There is of course no claim to novelty in pursuing such a strategy; global history has been with us for decades, and these days tends to elicit "as much scepticism as enthusiasm"–as Francesca Trivellato observes in her recently published, "The Paradoxes of Global History," *Cyber Review of Modern Historiography*, 2024: 1-16, 1 DOI: https://doi.org/10.36253/cromohs-15297. Trivellato addresses many unresolved questions about global history's ideological investments, its elusive methodological foundations, and indeed the sheer difficulty of spelling out what it is—without in any way dismissing the fresh perspectives and new departures it has brought to light.

[4] The term is borrowed from James Vernon's contribution to Tehila Sasson, James Vernon, Miles Ogborn, Priya Satia, and Catherine Hall, "Britain and the World: A New Field?," *Journal of British Studies*, 57 (October 2018): 677-708.

(for example, into early critiques of racial double standards in the nineteenth-century West Indies, or the even earlier "empire of goods" that inaugurated a culture of empire-wide consumerism in the eighteenth century). But this could not always be reconciled with structural or narrative coherence. To the extent that temporal detours are taken, they tend to be highly compressed due to the overriding imperative of thinking laterally.

Nevertheless, I think the book does present a deeper chronology (or "genealogy" as Dolan terms it), even as it zig-zags across continents—from the earliest "offshore" projections of 17th and 18th-century British identities, through the 19th-century "settler revolution" and the idea of "Greater Britain", the crucible of two world wars followed by the main act—the implosion of empire, also presented in broadly cumulative, if not always strictly linear terms. But for any given context (such as England) the lateral alignments with waning British sensibilities elsewhere in the world tends to limit the scope for longitudinal detail. Such are the pitfalls of tracing historical interactions across multiple instalments unfolding in real time.

Murphy raises similar problems, only here it is the *forward* temporal projections that strike him as a missed opportunity. He queries the book's focus on the roughly four decades after 1945—specifically, the decision to tie off the argument in the 1980s for which he sees "no particularly good rationale." Indeed, he wonders whether "a leaner and longer narrative, with a less exhaustive theme-and-variation" concentration around the post-World War II era, might not have allowed greater scope to trace the argument right down to the present day.

Perhaps, but it would not have been the book I set out to write. *Untied Kingdom* proceeds from the relatively straightforward observation that the first major political cracks in the unity of the UK appeared at the very moment when British identities the world over were in steep decline. Persuading readers that this was more than a mere coincidence called for the kind of compelling evidence, convincing framework, contextual range, and attention to detail that a more sweeping survey could never have provided.

It also needed firm grounding in specific locales and the individuals who inhabited them—as a foil to global history's tendency to accentuate structural, impersonal forces that can be hard to relate to anywhere in particular. This is because there was no single instrumentality that impacted everywhere equally, reduceable to a catch-all accounting or unifying theory. Local contingencies frequently determined the precise manner in which British allegiances came unstuck. Hence the elaboration of multiple "registers" of British belonging that provide texture and traction to the otherwise slippery realm of "identity."

More to the point, the period when these interlocking processes mattered most was precisely the decades traversed in *Untied Kingdom*. By the mid-1980s, overt, unqualified, full-throated British affinities had become thin on the ground in every other part of the world except Britain (by which time the "British problem" had securely taken hold even there). Extending the analysis into the 1990s and beyond—notwithstanding the potential avenues Murphy proposes—would have diverted the book into more familiar terrain, whether that be a "Commonwealth history" of the last three decades or the fluctuating fortunes of constitutional devolution since the inauguration of the Scottish and Welsh Assemblies.

Quite apart from these histories being readily available elsewhere, sustaining the multidirectional framing (and a plausible degree of interconnectivity) would have pushed the envelope too far.[5] As I argue in the final chapter of *Untied Kingdom*, "enduring dilemmas and loose ends abound" in virtually every part of the world that once subscribed to some version of British selfhood (488). But these persist as serial offshoots, each with their own inner dynamics and trajectories, of prior entanglements that have largely unraveled, no longer possessing the *systemic* global dynamism of old.

The remaining two contributors, Bright and Dolan, are both Northern Ireland specialists, each of whom raises questions about the value (or otherwise) of *Untied Kingdom's* global optics for understanding one particularly divisive episode—the outbreak of the devastating Troubles era. There is enough material here for a separate Roundtable dealing exclusively with Northern Ireland, but space permits only a few brief observations by way of response.

The first thing that springs to mind is the way both authors have resisted the temptation to skip ahead to those parts of the book dealing with their own subject area. Though Ulster remains their chief frame of reference, there is genuine engagement with the wider architecture that aligns Northern Ireland with disparate events in other parts of the world. This allows for some intriguing parallels, such as the one Dolan draws between the Canadian historian, Frank Underhill and the founder of Northern Ireland's Social Democratic and Labour Party, John Hume, or Bright's reflections on the revolutionary deployment of the "largely obsolete terminology of dominion status" in unionist political thought.

By far the greatest challenge in writing this book was the staggering range of scholarship in each area of specialization—and Northern Ireland was no exception. Here, the depth of historical context, the complex range of emotions and the sheer diversity of institutional and political actors left ample room for egregious error on my part. By and large, however, I have been encouraged by the reactions of specialist historians, who, like Dolan and Bright, have tended to see an opportunity for new departures (embarking on "further explorations" as Bright terms it) rather than to close ranks against a presumptuous interloper.

Which is why I was struck by one passing remark in Dolan's piece that warrants closer scrutiny. Having made the case for *Untied Kingdom* as "mandatory reading for any committed student of the history of Northern Ireland," he singles out "the actual chapter on Ulster" as one where "a quick skim may suffice" for readers already versed in the specialist literature. Indeed, he found himself suppressing "the urge to put down *Untied Kingdom* and pick up *Peace in Ireland,*" Richard Bourke's compelling account first published in 2003.[6]

To suggest that the two books are somehow interchangeable fails to do either of them justice. To be sure, I have drawn freely on Bourke's critique of the ancient "tribal atavisms" that are routinely depicted as the root cause of the Troubles, a critique levelled, not just by Bourke but also several other historians who have

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[5] The devolution literature is too vast to cite here, but the recent travails of the Commonwealth have been deftly unpacked in Murphy's own *The Empire's New Clothes: The Myth of the Commonwealth* (Hurst, 2018).

[6] Richard Bourke, *Peace in Ireland: the War of Ideas* (Pimlico, 2012, 1st ed. 2003).

stressed the explosive *contemporary* quality of the resort to violence.[7] But that is merely the point of departure, which in no way determines the direction of travel.

The comparison does, however, present a useful opportunity to spell out precisely where my own perspective diverges from *Peace in Ireland*. Nowhere in Bourke's account, for example, will readers encounter the "specific backdrop of imperial decline in the years leading up to the conflict"; or indeed anything that "places Ulster Protestants in a broader post-war context of anxiety among pro-British imperial communities" (both key takeaways from my Troubles chapter, according to Bright's reading).

Bourke's overriding inclination was in fact the very opposite—to *minimize* the long shadow of British imperialism as a plausible characterization of the Troubles, which he ultimately puts down to a Republican affectation. As he explained in the preface of the Second Edition: "The argument presented here is that the Republican perspective [is] unsustainable, much like the political theory on which it was founded." And by that he meant the "Republican tradition [that] took the conflict to be a product of British imperialism."[8] He ventured forcefully that the dispute was no belated anti-colonial muster but "a product of modern democracy" with its "fractious, and elusive aspiration" of political equality. Any attempt to manage conflict between unequal rivals in a majoritarian system was, he argued, "sooner or later, bound to fail."[9]

If Bourke looms large in my account, it is because the broad polemical thrust of much of what he says runs implicitly counter to my thesis in fundamental ways. I was therefore obliged to carve out a space for my own perspective, which boiled down to meeting him halfway on the "abstract speculations of neo-Marxist theory" (391) that fuelled the rhetoric of, say, People's Democracy (which was indeed strangely detached from colonialism as a "field of reality"), while casting the net wider to explore the far from merely theoretical disruptions of the actually ending British empire.[10] Chapter thirteen explores at length how these real-world intrusions impacted variously on the outlook and aspirations, not just of nationalists, but also loyalists, the British government and indeed the British public more generally.

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[7] Simon Prince, *Northern Ireland's 1968: Civil Rights, Global Revolt and the Origins of the Troubles* (Irish Academic Press, 2007); Niall Ó Dochartaigh, *From Civil Rights to Armalites: Derry and the Birth of the Troubles* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Mary Daly, *Sixties Ireland: Reshaping the Economy, State and Society, 1957–1973* (Cambridge University Press, 2016); Chris Reynolds, *Sous les pavés…The Troubles: Northern Ireland, France and the European Collective Memory of 1968* (Peter Lang, 2014); Richard English, in *Irish Freedom: The History of Nationalism in Ireland* (Macmillan, 2006).

[8] Bourke, *Peace in Ireland*, xii.

[9] Bourke, *Peace in Ireland*: xvii, xx.

[10] Bourke's emphasis is on the ideological and rhetorical deployments of imperialism, wrenched clean from any "definite plan of action associated with a specific set of agents", 33. Its political value lay precisely in its "formless features" that could be cast in a "plurality of moulds," 35. Though his point is well made, it remains unclear whether he viewed this in terms of nationalist misrepresentations (or misapplications) of an imperial "field of reality" persisting in other parts of the world (but of dubious relevance to Ireland), or whether he believed that British imperialism "as a specific set of agents" really was wholly defunct by 1968. Only in a single sentence does he refer to a more tangible empirical field, when he notes fleetingly: "But the real occasion for the recrudescence of anti-imperialist rumination was the experience of European decolonisation among former African and Asian colonies," 31. The question is never really pursued, however.

All of which serves, not so much as a corrective to Bourke (whose work remains indispensable), as a matter of nuancing the possibilities for weaving post-imperial causation into the deeper structural dynamics of the Troubles outbreak. Specialist readers might be left unconvinced. But only by engaging seriously with my chapter on Ulster will they be able to make an informed judgement.

These are just some of the challenges of writing global history that this roundtable has usefully brought to light: the competing priorities of latitude versus longitude; of micro versus macro perspectives; of generalist versus specialist knowledge. I can only reiterate my appreciation to all four contributors for taking the time to engage so constructively with *Untied Kingdom*, inviting me to reflect back on how I went about my task.

Which, fundamentally, was an exercise in drawing connections and parallels across widely dispersed contexts normally assumed to be self-contained. Viewed in these terms, to be British was to lay claim to something sprawling and imprecise; a civic idea that aspired to unprecedented reach and a remarkably diverse spectrum of popular resonances.

It also, as Dolan rightly intuits in his concluding remarks, offered a flawed variant of the "ecumenical ideal" of universal community, straining to uphold an overarching sense of shared aspirations and common weal in a highly fragmented social reality. The circumstances of its protracted demise thus speak to the enduring dilemma of classical republicanism: how "to realize a universality of values within a particular, and therefore finite and mortal, political structure," as J. G. A. Pocock once memorably termed it.[11]

This is what global history, for all its inevitable pitfalls and overly hyped promise, brings to the table, enlivening a "British problem" that for too long has been trapped in a "four nations" mindset. When the paradigm is revealed as symptomatic of the historical problem, new interpretative possibilities abound.

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[11] J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 1975): 84.