Gens secundum cognationem et collectionem ab alia distincta?

Thomas Polton, two Englands, and the challenge of medieval nationhood

VON ROBERT N. SWANSON (Birmingham)

Meeting from November 1414 to April 1418, the Council of Constance had European significance on many levels. As the participants in the Council's deliberations sought to unify the Catholic Church after nearly forty years of a divided papacy, Constance was the focus of European diplomatic attention, the hub to and from which embassies came and went. Having assumed for itself the headship of the Church which it claimed to represent, and acting in the absence of a pope, the Council was also a judicial and administrative hub, attracting petitioners and litigants from all directions, to settle court cases and secure privileges.

Contrasting with this portrayal of the Council of Constance as the focal point of a unifying Church is a second scenario, in which the Council is a centre of tension and dispute, a playground of power politics and international rivalries. National and sectional interests challenged and opposed each other and played out their conflicts, while external differences resonated to disturb and derail the search for union in a Europe – and a Church – of division rather than unity. This paper builds from one particular dispute which, played out at Constance, reflects both the tensions imported into the Council by external rivalries and those generated within the assembly by its need to validate its claims to represent the universal Church. At the same time, by starting from one specific text, it points to the emerging contemporary threat to the universality of the Church created by the consolidation of national identities and rivalries. At its core is the problem of nationhood, and the significance of national identity and sentiment in late medieval Europe, addressed through a specific focus on England.

The system of »nations« adopted at the Council of Constance represented a bold attempt to reconfigure the decision-making process for an assembly which claimed to represent the whole Church, but did so with unequal representation from its constituent parts. The allocation of its members to »national« groups which then had votes of equal weight in the decision-making process resolved some of the tensions in the gathering, but by no

means all of them. The rationales for the division into nations, and for the number of nations to be recognised, were inherently open to challenge, potentially a source of instability as inner tensions were exposed and rankled and rivalries developed between the groups. The system required consensus in order for it to work effectively; but consensus was not always achieved. The arrangements were fundamentally artificial, their greatest potential weakness being the threat that the intrusion of external political or national rivalries would upset the balance between and within these conciliar groupings[1].

The inherent tensions in the arrangements became overt with the adhesion of the Spanish kingdoms to the Council in 1416. The Spaniards claimed to form a distinct nation, and sought integration into the Council as such. Until that point the Council had consisted of four nations: English, German, French and Italian. Whether there should be a fifth became a matter of debate. Tensions on the issue developed towards the end of 1416, with the status of the English (as the least traditional unit) becoming the focus of attention for those who wished to retain a structure of only four nations. For the French, the way to achieve this was obvious: eliminate the English nation by merging it with the German, of which it was no more than a breakaway segment anyway. In a major intervention in the Council's proceedings on 3 March 1417 this was precisely what was urged by one representative of the French nation, using a range of arguments and alleged precedents to support his case[2]. The English responded vigorously, with Thomas Polton, dean of York, submitting a long counter-protest to the French arguments on 31 March. This was treated as being read into the record without actually being read out, although its text obviously did circulate within the assembly[3]. When the dust settled, the English nation kept its place in the conciliar structure, alongside a Spanish nation which the English sought firmly to keep in fifth place[4].

Polton's text (he is also usually considered its author) was as wide-ranging as the French arguments to which he responded. At its heart lay a comment now often cited as a summary

1) For the problems surrounding the nations see Hans-Joachim SCHMIDT, Kirche, Staat, Nation. Raumgliederung der Kirche im mittelalterlichen Europa (Forschungen zur mittelalterlichen Geschichte 37), Weimar 1999, p. 467–484; on the structures, Louise Ropes LOOMIS, The Organization by Nations at Constance, in: American Historical Review 1 (1932), p. 201–209; for the nations at Constance see Heinrich FINKE, Die Nation in den spätmittelalterlichen allgemeinen Konzilien, in: HJb 57 (1937), p. 323–338.

2) The protest is in: Magnum Oecumenicum Constantiense Concilium de universali ecclesiae reformatione, unione et fide, vol. 5, ed. by Hermann von der HARDT, Frankfurt/Leipzig 1697–1700, cols. 56–75, translated in: The Council of Constance. The Unification of the Church, ed. by Louise Ropes LOOMIS, New York/London 1961, p. 315–324. For a useful summary, Jean-Philippe GENET, English Nationalism. Thomas Polton at the Council of Constance, in: Nottingham Medieval Studies 28 (1984),p. 60–78, p. 65–66.

3) I have used the text printed in Constantiense concilium (note 2), cols. 76–101; it is also in: MANSI, vol. 27, cols. 1058–1070. The text translated into English (with minor cuts) in Christopher M. D. CROWDER, Unity, Heresy and Reform, 1378–1460: the Conciliar Response to the Great Schism, London 1977, p. 111–126, from which all following English quotations are taken (sometimes slightly modified to clarify the argument). The translation in LOOMIS (Ed.), Council (note 2), p. 335–349 is less complete, and less satisfactory.

4) For the narrative, see note 8.

of contemporary views of nationhood, and so as a reflection of evolving awareness of national identity. In its most widely-used English translation, Polton declared that the English nation was in possession of

> »everything necessary to being a nation […] whether the nation is understood as a people, distinct from another by blood relationship and association or by difference of language, – which is the chief and surest proof of being a nation, and its very essence, either by divine or human law […] or whether nation is understood to connote equal provincial status with the French nation, as it deserves to be«[5)].

These words seem to offer a ringing endorsement of a narrow view of nationhood. However, the comment poses its own problems. It is indeed frequently cited, but usually out of context and without reference to (or possibly even awareness of) the rest of Polton's argument[6)]. Its apparent assertion of the importance of language as a distinguishing feature of nationhood, and so as a crux for wider debates of medieval nations, rests on a problematic translation: »difference of language« here translates *diversitatem linguarum*, which may have very different implications[7)]. Moreover, the comment occurs in the middle of a complex statement which in fact is not about nationhood as it might usually be now conceived – or at least, is not generally, and arguably not principally, about such nationhood. The treatment of Polton's submission in scholarly literature in terms of »English nationalism« or as a manifestation of »Nationality at the Council of Constance« arguably distorts his aim and intention[8)]. While he was obviously responding to the French challenge, his central concern

5) Crowder, Unity (note 3), p. 120. Constantiense concilium, (note 2), col. 92, reads: *Omnia enim necessaria ad esse nationis* […] *sive sumatur natio ut gens, secundùm cognationem & collectionem ab aliâ distincta, sive secundùm diversitatem lingvarum, quæ maximam & verissimam probant nationem, & ipsius essentiam, jure divino pariter & humano, ut infra dicetur: Sive etiam sumatur natio pro provinciâ æquali, etiam nationi Gallicanæ, sicut summi deberet.*

6) For example Francis R. H. du Boulay, An Age of Ambition. English Society in the Late Middle Ages, London 1970, p. 20 (the source for John W. McKenna, How God became an Englishman, in: Tudor Rule and Revolution: Essays for G.R. Elton from his American Friends, ed. by Delloyd J. Guth/John W. McKenna, Cambridge 1982, p. 24–44, p. 33); Ralph Griffiths, The Island of England in the Fifteenth Century: Perceptions of the Peoples of the British Isles, in: Journal of Medieval History 29 (2003), p.177–200, p. 182; Maurice Keen, English Society in the Late Middle Ages, 1348–1500, London 1990, p. 302–303 (the quotation wrongly ascribed to Robert Hallum); Ardis Butterfield, The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language and Nation in the Hundred Years War, Oxford 2009, p. 134–135; Lynn Staley, Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions, University Park PA 1994, p. 169–170; David Green, National Identities in the Hundred Years War, in: Fourteenth-Century England, vol. 6, ed. by Chris Given-Wilson, Woodbridge 2010, p.115–130, p. 118 (I am grateful to Dr Green for supplying a copy of this article); Anthony D. Smith, The Cultural Foundations of Nations. Hierarchy, Covenant, and Republic, Oxford 2008, p. 115–116.

7) »Difference of language« is used in Crowder, Unity (note 3), p. 120, and in Loomis (Ed.), Council (note 2), p. 344. »Peculiarities of language« appears in Louise Ropes Loomis, Nationality at the Council of Constance, in: American Historical Review 44 (1939), p. 508–527, p. 525, n. 55. For comment see n. 20.

8) Loomis, Nationality (note 7), deals with the dispute at p. 516–527, with Polton's text discussed (incompletely) at 523–526. For other treatment in terms of nationalism, Genet, Nationalism (note 2), p. 64–77.

was much more with the structure of the Council, with conciliarism and the question of how – mechanically and theoretically – the Council could and should be considered an effective representative body for the universal Church.

It must be said immediately that for Polton the universal Church was by definition the papal Church, so that representation of Orthodox and non-European Christian traditions was not at issue. Yet, within the Catholic structure, and in the extraordinary circumstances which had arisen at Constance, questions of representation did matter, whether of the Council as representative of the complete Church, or of the Nations as components of it. The features which have encouraged readings of Polton's text in terms of national and »nationalist« rivalries – notably in the context of Anglo-French hostilities and Henry V's invasion of France – necessarily appear because Polton was responding to the French proposal to eliminate the English nation at Constance: he was on the defensive, no matter how aggressive his tone. Yet the extracted definition of nationhood, if used to justify the existence of nations in a separatist sense, fundamentally misrepresents Polton's argument. There is an ellipsis, omitted words which change the thrust of what he is saying. He does indeed assert that the English Nation (the capitalisation serves to clarify that this is the conciliar *natio*) possesses »Everything necessary to being a Nation«; but this Nation is specifically qualified as one »with an authentic voice as a fourth or fifth part of the papal obedience, just like the French Nation«[9]. With that insertion, we move from the restricted Englishness of England as kingdom and regnally-restricted nation (what I shall often refer to as »Little England«), to the very different, larger, and much more complex unit of the conciliar *natio* (which will be identified in what follows as »Big England«). In the formal terminology used elsewhere in the Council, Polton was asserting the rights of both the limited and specific *natio particularis* of the realm of England (Little England), and the more extensive conciliar unit of a *natio principalis* which consolidated several different polities and (in modern terms) ethnic or national groups (Big England); but doing so in ways which confuse and conflate the two different types of *natio*[10]. Ambiguity is inherent in Polton's text, which only adds to the complexity of his argument.

One thing which soon becomes obvious from his words is that, while himself English and validating the English Nation, Polton was not talking only about England, and was to

The narrative also in Aubrey GWYNN, Ireland and the English Nation at the Council of Constance, in: Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, Section C 45 (1939–40), p. 183–233, 191–200, 217–221.

9) CROWDER, Unity (note 3), p. 120; Constantiense concilium (note 2), col. 92: *auctorisabilis quartam aut quintam partem obedientiæ Papalis, sicut natio Gallicana.*

10) On *natio principalis* and *natio particularis*, see Caspar HIRSCHI, The Origins of Nationalism. An Alternative History from Ancient Rome to Early Modern Germany, Cambridge 2012, p. 85–87; Caspar HIRSCHI, Wettkampf der Nationen: Konstruktionen einer deutschen Ehrgemeinschaft an der Wende vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit, Göttingen 2005, p. 136–137; SCHMIDT, Kirche (note 1), p. 475; See also discussion in Margaret W. FERGUSON, Dido's Daughters. Literacy, Gender and Empire in Early Modern England and France, Chicago/London 2003, p. 148–150.

some extent struggling to reconcile the demands of a dual defence of *natio* and nation. From the first specific reference to the French attack on »the famous and undoubted English nation« (which might be either Big or Little) its Englishness is qualified, for the English nation is »also known as the British nation« (*alias Britanniæ*[11]), and this dual identification – English and British as equivalents – is frequently repeated. It might be argued that this was just typical English hubris, the arrogant, unthinking, assumption that »Britain« is really »England« which is often expressed in medieval documents, and still infuriates the non-English nationalities in Britain – but that was clearly not the case[12]. While Polton did sometimes explicitly refer to England, the post-1066 realm of Little England, his general vision appears as much more extensive, with Britishness vital for his analysis. This is most obvious when asserting continuity with the ancient past, and an implicit tie back to the Roman and Celtic eras. In asserting the continuity of the royal line, he cited the birth of Constantine the Great and his British mother, Helena. England's Christian tradition was also traced back to the British past, to the missionary activities of Joseph of Arimathea around Glastonbury. As Polton invoked Joseph against French claims to a Christian tradition more enduring than England's, his tactics here may be predictable, but are also in some ways surprising. Joseph, with his immediate contacts with Christ, clearly trumped St Denys in France – who was a disciple only of St Paul, and therefore something of a late-comer. Most strikingly, however, Polton here simply glossed over England's post-Roman paganism and the impact of the Anglo-Saxon invasions. Christian continuity was maintained »despite the fact that for periods a great wave of unbelieving savages stormed into the kingdom in a partial attempt [note its failure!] to eradicate the Christian faith there«[13].

This blurring of the distinction between England and Britain is disconcerting, and makes it hard to test how Polton actually perceived England as a kingdom and a nation. While he referred to the kingdom, it was not really the focus of his attention when responding to the French challenges. His chief concern was with the capitalised English Nation, Big England, the *natio principalis* which was envisaged as much larger, and challenging in different ways. Here Polton adopted an approach which might now be called multiculturalist, advocating diversity in ways which contradict and subvert the simplistic definitional statement of national identity. This Big England was multiple in many ways. Geographically, it comprised not just England, but the rest of the British Isles (including Ireland), and even Gascony. Its multiple territories contained no fewer than eight kingdoms – England, Scotland, Wales (here elevating the principality to regnal status), the Isle of Man, and the four kingdoms in Ireland whose existence was recorded in papal curial directories. In addition there

11) Constantiense concilium (note 2), col. 76; Crowder, Unity (note 3), p. 111.

12) For the blurring of the England/Britain distinction, Rees R. Davies, The First English Empire. Power and Identities in the British Isles, 1093–1343, Oxford 2000, p. 48–53; Alan MacColl, The meaning of »Britain« in Medieval and Early Modern England, in: Journal of British Studies 45 (2006), p. 248–269, p. 253–264.

13) Crowder, Unity (note 3), p. 118–120; Constantiense concilium (note 2), cols. 88, 90–91.

was the »principality« of the Orkneys (or more likely the Lordship of the Isles)[14], »and about sixty other islands«[15]. There was obviously some sleight of hand here, especially in the inclusion of the Irish kingdoms (which may actually, in the papal records, have numbered five)[16], and in the status conceded to the Lord (or King) of Man and the Lord of the Isles[17]. There was equally exaggeration in some of the comparisons between the territories and the Kingdom of France. Yet neither of those points can obscure the fact that Polton was actually rejecting an exclusive approach to membership of the English Nation. He firmly denied the need for such membership to require political subjection to the king of England, just as not all the territories represented in the French and Spanish Nations were subject to the kings respectively of France or Castile[18]. The most astonishing insistence on diversity, and of subversion of the quoted definition of the nation – at least as usually translated – actually related to language, the very factor which was, supposedly, »the chief and surest proof of being a nation«[19]. Here Polton's invocation of a *diversitatem linguarum* which asserted diversity based on a multiplicity of mutually incomprehensible languages, and not a simple distinction between tongues to insist on their singularity, was a trump card to identify a *natio principalis*[20]. The multilingualism of England was therefore a surer support for claims to such status than the monolingualism of France. Accordingly, France »has one vernacular which is wholly or in part understandable in every part of the nation«, whereas within the territories of the »English or British nation [again, note the overlap] […] there are five languages, you might say, not one of which understands another«[21]. These Polton identified as English (shared by the English and Scots), Welsh, Irish, Gascon, and Cornish. The emphasis on the Celtic languages is intriguing (although the failure to acknowledge the Gaelic of Scotland, after having asserted the political autonomy of the Lord of the Isles, is slightly odd); the inclusion of Gascon presumably separates it from the alleged single vernacular of France (which also silently discounted the differences be-

14) Polton's reference is ambiguous: the territory is identified as the Orkneys, but the ruler is named as John. The name suggests the Lordship of the Isles (see note 35). The Orkney Islands were equally autonomous, under their earls, but were at this point still formally and legally attached to the kingdom of Norway. The earl in 1417 was Henry Sinclair, for whom see Barbara E. CRAWFORD, Sinclair Family (*per.* 1280–*c.* 1500), in: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, vol. 50, ed. by H. Colin G. MATTHEW/Brian HARRISON, Oxford 2004, p. 736.

15) Constantiense concilium (note 2), cols. 85–86; CROWDER, Unity (note 3), p. 116 (but giving the figure as 40 islands; the figure is correct in LOOMIS (Ed.), Council (note 2), p. 340).

16) GWYNN, Ireland (note 8), p. 281, n. 112.

17) See note 35.

18) Constantiense concilium (note 2), col. 87; CROWDER, Unity (note 3), p. 117.

19) See note 5.

20) FERGUSON, Daughters (note 10), p. 149–150, 401, n. 42.

21) CROWDER, Unity (note 3), p. 121; Constantiense concilium (note 2), col. 93: *quarum una aliam non intelligit.*

tween Languedoc and Languedoil, and ignored Breton, even though the Duke of Brittany was an English ally).

At this point in his text Polton seems to be changing tack, and perhaps changing tactics. Thus far his aim had been to demolish the French challenge to the status of the English Nation at Constance, in a somewhat tit-for-tat checklist of features of the English and French nations which at times was also a comparison of the kingdoms as political and ecclesiastical units. His tactic had been to assert the *natio principalis* rather than the *natio particularis*, and to emphasise and magnify those features which made the English Nation more than just England and the English. Now his attention turned to what might be called the »constitutional« aspects of Constance: how the universal (or papal) Church should actually be represented in a council, and how the national system should work in such an assembly. Here the words omitted in the quotation defining nations, the English Nation's claim to status as »a fourth or fifth part of the papal obedience«, come to the fore. The French argument against the English Nation had rested on an allegation of tradition: they claimed that two documents issued by Pope Benedict XII in 1336 – the bull ›Vas electionis‹ and the chapter ›Statuimus‹ (ch. 2) of his Constitutions for the Benedictine Order – established a division of the European church into four segments (French, Italian, German, and Spanish) and thirty-six provinces[22]. The alleged precedent of ›Vas electionis‹ in particular meant that with the arrival of the Spaniards in 1416 the English Nation became superfluous and should be reincorporated into the German Nation. To this Polton responded forthrightly:

> »The English Nation is under no obligation to cease to exist on the arrival of the Spanish Nation; since it is not part of the German Nation […] Hitherto the English Nation has not been divided from the German Nation, because they never were one Nation. For just as deprivation presupposes an order, so separation in such matters presupposes an earlier unity. Nor was there any special situation permitting the English to count for a Nation, for the sake of appearances, until the Spanish came, at least no permission from any Nation […] The English, just like any other Nation in the Council, was permitted to be a Nation by the same divine permission which allows the others to be Nations«[23].

22) Genet, Nationalism (note 2), p. 65–66. For ›Vas electionis‹ see Extravagantes communes III, tit. X.1, Corpus iuris canonici, vol. 2, ed. by Aemilius Ludovicus Richter/Aemilius Friedberg, Leipzig 1879–1881, cols. 1280–1284. This was of doubtful relevance for the French case, being actually about arrangements for visitation procurations. It does divide Europe into four segments for that purpose, but without identifying them as »nations« (despite Genet, Nationalism (note 2), p. 65), and it says nothing to suggest that that division should also apply to general councils. ›Statuimus‹ is printed in Concilia Magna Britanniæ et Hiberniæ, vol. 2, ed. by David Wilkins, London 1737, p. 589–591 (I count 37 provinces).

23) Crowder, Unity (note 3), p. 123; Constantiense concilium (note 2), cols. 97–98: *natio Anglicana adveniente natione Hispanica cessare non debet. Cum non sit pars nationis Alemaniæ, ut superius dicitur. Nec dicta natio Anglicana hucusque divisa fuit à natione Alemaniæ. Quia nunquam una natio fuerunt. Nam sicut omnis privatio habitum, sic divisio unitatem præviam in talibus præsupponit. Nec permissum fuit ex certa causa, dissimulative, ut prætendunt sic scribentes, quod natio Anglicana esset natio usque in adventum Hispanorum, saltem permissione nationis alicujus.* […] *Sed eadem permissione divina, qua aliæ permittuntur fieri & esse nationes, permissum fuit ut natio esset Anglicana, sicut & alia quæcunque existens in Concilio.*

Yet, despite this bold statement, Polton was seemingly prepared to sacrifice the English Nation – or at least its identification as being English – for a greater good. Having justified the independent representation of an »English« Nation, he subsequently almost denied his own conclusion. The final sections of his submission considered the constitutional and organisational issues within the Council which arose from it being structured as an amalgam of Nations. He was determined to validate *nationes*, but without denying the rights of either the French (to whom his tone became decidedly deferential) or the Spaniards. Yet this validation came with a twist. Because a conciliar *natio* as *natio principalis* contained more than one nation as *nationes particulares* (although he does not actually make the point in this way), Polton opposed the retention of regnally-based nomenclature for the Nations, expressly because it led to odious comparisons between kingdoms precisely of the kind earlier made by the French against the English, and to which Polton had already responded[24). The use of regnal names also gave a misleading impression, and could stir resentments, since

> »to call *nationes* by the names of a certain kingdom is discriminating against other kingdoms; since it might be thought prejudicial to their dignity that they have to be called French or Gallican when they are not French, and not subject to them. The same with other Nations«[25)

Here, possibly, is a further reason for Polton's constant refrain of the »English or British« nation: the identification as »British« avoided and eliminated the regnal limitation; it automatically reconfigured Little England into Big England without undermining and blurring the latter's status as a *natio principalis* – although this would admittedly have been done more effectively by totally avoiding the sense that »English or British« provided alternative designations applicable to the same unit.

With such views on the naming of nations, and his earlier assertions of the multinationality of the English Nation, it is perhaps not surprising that Polton proposed a reconstitution of the Nations at Constance. (In fact this element in his proposal probably was not his idea: it drew heavily on a scheme which had already surfaced at the Council)[26). He called for a simple geographical division of Europe, into northern, southern, eastern, and western groupings of realms, a division which he suggested would be straightforward, and which could be retained without difficulty in future councils – presumably because it would eliminate the kinds of debates in which he was himself currently embroiled. England would fall into the northern church, alongside Wales, Scotland, and Ireland with their adjacent islands, and in combination with Denmark, Norway, and Sweden – but (perhaps pointedly) not Germany, which was placed in the eastern region. However, Polton was not rigidly pre-

24) Constantiense concilium (note 2), cols. 87–88, 95; Crowder, Unity (note 3), p. 117–118, 122.

25) Crowder, Unity, p. 122; Constantiense concilium (note 2), col. 95: *Quia etiam denominatio nationum a certis regnis est odiosa aliis regnis. Quia præjudicialis & ambitiosa, ut puta, quod illi debeant denominari à Francis seu Gallicis, qui nec Franci nec Gallici sunt, neque sub illis existunt. Et sic de aliis nationibus.*

26) See text printed in Constantiense concilium (note 2), col.102–103; comment in Gwynn, Ireland (note 8), p. 197, suggesting that it was written for presentation to Sigismund in January 1417.

scriptive in his proposal, being prepared to accept groupings based on the wealth and power of kingdoms, and envisaging the possibility of future change in such status, and even the extinction of a realm[27]. This aspect of his argument was not developed, and precisely what lay behind it is elusive. Was he even at this stage foreseeing the possible union of France and England under Henry V and his heirs, and a consequent reconfiguration of the representation of the kingdoms at future general councils? Whatever Polton's stance may have been on that issue, if his proposal for renaming the conciliar units had been adopted that would have resolved some of the immediate tensions about »national« status at Constance by eliminating the international rivalry focussed on the naming of the *nationes principales*; but it clearly would not have eliminated all of the rivalry and competition between the *nationes particulares* which was exposed in their jostling for position on an international stage.

Regardless of the formula actually adopted for shaping the conciliar nations, the key point for Polton was representation, both of the Church as a single entity, and of its component parts. It was largely for this reason that he rejected voting by head within the Council: under such a system the accidents of numerical presence gave false weight to over-represented groups (or, indeed, resulted in the unjustified weakness of the under-represented), which was unacceptable[28]. The Council should represent the whole Church – a foregone conclusion on the basis of its decree ›Haec sancta‹, so a claim which did not have to be validated; but analogically the representatives of the Nations represent their constituent parts as proctors. The French had complained that there were only twenty-four representatives of the kingdom of England, who were claiming to represent the totality of the English *natio* at the Council. Polton's calculation made the total over 175, without giving any specifics about their geographical affiliations. The precise number, however, did not matter, for

> »just as the legal right of a college or university is known to rest in one person or two, in the same way the legal right of an entire Nation in a general council can legitimately remain in one or two persons, since they do not represent themselves alone but innumerable other people«[29].

There are certainly points in his argument where Polton's analysis is ambiguous, leaving it unclear whether his direct concern is with Big or Little England. While he constructed his view of the English Nation in terms of subjection (real or imagined) to the English crown, the statement appears strikingly free of narrow nationalist assertion and a narrowly nationalist agenda, even as it challenges the French attempt to demote the *natio Anglicana* from a

27) Constantiense concilium (note 2), col. 95; Crowder, Unity (note 3), p. 122.

28) For his rejection of voting by head see Constantiense concilium (note 2), cols. 98–99; Crowder, Unity (note 3), p. 123–124.

29) Crowder, Unity (note 3), p. 123; Constantiense concilium (note 2), col. 97: *Sicut ius Collegii vel universitatis in una persona vel duabus residere noscitur: Sic in unà vel duabus personis jus integra nationis in Concilio generali, remanere poterit & debebit. Cum non solum seipsas sed alias innumerabiles personas repræsentent.*

natio principalis to a *natio particularis.* Polton claimed to speak in an official capacity, to represent both his king and the church of »England or Britain«[30], but he was not addressing an English audience. Until the early sixteenth century his text was probably known in England only through copies of the Council's *acta*[31]. Then Sir Robert Wingfield came across the record of this Anglo-French dispute in a copy of the *acta* located at Constance, and arranged for the publication of relevant extracts at Louvain in 1517[32]. Even in the narrative of conciliar proceedings, Polton's statement is something of an impromptu intervention. It cannot be claimed that, while speaking (or, in reality, writing) as a representative of the king of England, Polton was merely a ventriloquist's dummy for the English government: unless he had been forewarned in good time of the intended French protest of 3 March, he would not have been able to communicate with King Henry V and his ministers about the wording of his response to it[33]. The artificiality of his argument, and the complex purpose of his statement, also means that the protest cannot be read as reflecting a welling-up of grassroots views of Englishness and national pride.

However, the ambiguity of Polton's comments makes it impossible not to read them in relation to his contemporary secular world, and contemporary political realities (or, maybe, aspirations). While his discussion of the conciliar *natio* – Big England – accepts and recognises difference and multinationalism, his statement appears inherently imperialist and imperialistic, claiming English dominance over the other territories of the *natio.* This imperialism certainly mirrored reality[34]. The kingdom and kings of England did actively assert overlordship over the territories on Polton's list – an overlordship which Henry V was actively seeking to extend within France even as Polton prepared his text. This English empire (the word is not inappropriate) was not unified, but in certain respects it was a single entity. English overlordship might be resented and indeed resisted, challenging Polton's vision[35];

30) This wording ignores issues of status for the different churches of the realms he includes – especially the Scots' continued obedience to Pope Benedict XIII.

31) For copies in England, Christopher M. D. Crowder, Constance Acta in English Libraries, in: Das Konzil von Konstanz: Beiträge zu seiner Geschichte und Theologie, ed. by August Franzen/Wolfgang Müller, Vienna 1964, p. 477–517. This surveys texts currently in England, including post-medieval imports. Not every manuscript gives a complete text of the official records of the sessions. Notable among them is London, British Library, MS Cotton Nero.E.V, owned by Thomas Polton: Crowder, Acta (note 31), p. 481–482, 493–494.

32) Genet, Nationalism (note 2), p. 60–61; Finke, Nation (note 1), p. 338.

33) I know of no evidence to support the comment in Griffiths, Island (note 6), p. 182, that Polton's statement was »presumably issued on Henry V's authority«, although the king might have approved of its sentiments if he was aware of it. Genet also suggests that Polton was toeing an official line: Genet, Nationalism (note 2), p. 76.

34) Peter Crooks, State of the Union. Perspectives on English Imperialism in the late Middle Ages, in: Past and Present 212 (2011), p. 3–42.

35) Scotland remained independent, and was one of the few territories still loyal to Benedict XIII in the Schism, even if James I was a captive in England in 1417 and a few areas of southern Scotland were under

but this multi-territorial empire did offer a single context for individual careers in both state and church – in the latter case perhaps no better exemplified than in the career of Robert Waldby. His first bishopric was Aire in Gascony, from which he moved to become archbishop of Dublin in Ireland, then bishop of Chichester in England, and finally archbishop of York (also in England), dying in that post in 1397[36].

Polton addressed his comments to a restricted audience at Constance. His concern was the problem of division within the Church, yet the Church still claimed to be one – and was actively engaged in a process to make it once more a unitary body. To some extent Polton's attempt to differentiate between broad conciliar *nationes* and regnally-based nations reflects a tension between broad and narrow communities which is also the tension between the Church as a single universal body and the Church as an amalgam of smaller national units – a tension exemplified in the Gallicanism of the French church during the years of

English control. For Anglo-Scottish relations in this period, see Alexander GRANT, Independence and Nationhood: Scotland, 1306–1469, Edinburgh 1984, p. 40–46. The lordship of the Isles was never under English control, although its Lords were almost autonomous within Scotland, and were often named as allies of the English in the truces between England and Scotland: see ibid., p. 210–218 (for links with England, p. 214). See also comments on the Lords' »state-building« in Alexander GRANT, Scotland's »Celtic fringe« in the late Middle Ages. The Macdonald Lords of the Isles and the kingdom of Scotland, in: The British Isles, 1100–1500: Comparisons, Contrasts, and Connections, ed. by Rees R. DAVIES, Edinburgh 1988, p. 118–141, p. 133–134. Wales had only recently been brought back under English control after the revolt of Owen Glyndŵr, which had sought not only political sovereignty under a native Welsh ruler, but also the creation of a separate Welsh church which would have given its allegiance in the schism to the Avignonese line of popes: Rees R. DAVIES, The Rebellion of Owain Glyn Dŵr, Oxford/New York 1997, with the aspirations discussed at p. 160–173. Much of Ireland had been Avignonist before Pisa, and its political loyalty was uncertain: see GWYNN, Ireland (note 8), p. 202–213 (with comments on Scotland and Wales at 200–202). The Isle of Man in 1417 was under English control through the Stanley family as the island's Lords, but was treated as still theoretically attached to Scotland, and there was a rival family of Scottish claimants to the Lordship. The diocese of Sodor and Man had been divided by competing lines of Roman-Pisan and Avignonese bishops during the Schism, supported respectively by England and Scotland. See Barry COWARD, The Stanleys: Lords Stanley and Earls of Derby, 1385–1612. The Origins, Wealth and Power of a Landowning Family (Remains Historical and Literary connected with the Palatine Counties of Lancaster and Chester [Chetham Society Publications] 3rd ser. 30), Manchester 1983, p. 99–101; Tim THORNTON, Scotland and the Isle of Man, *c.* 1400–1625: Noble Power and Royal Presumption in the Northern Irish Sea Province, in: Scottish Historical Review 77 (1988), p. 1–30, p. 7–13 (political history), 13–16 (division of the diocese). Gascony's ties were peculiarly complex, sometimes causing problems for the English government. In the 1390 s the Gascons had defended their separatism with regard to France by asserting their inalienable ties to the English crown and then rebelling against attempts to transfer the duchy to John of Gaunt which were seen as a prelude to possible alienation: John J. N. PALMER, England, France and Christendom, 1377–1399, London 1972, p. 154–163.

36) Robert N. SWANSON, Waldby, Robert (c.1335–1397), in: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (note 14), vol. 56, p. 764–765. For other instances, see CROOKS, State (note 34), p. 25–26.

the schism and beyond[37]. At the same time, while defending the English Nation as a multinational ecclesial entity, Polton responded to the direct and belittling French attacks on England's status as a single nation – he had to defend both Little England and Big England. In doing that, his evocation of a national identity or a national status reinforces the concept of »nation as artefact«[38]. Yet his focus at Constance raises a question about the audience which he did not address, yet which necessarily lurks in the background: the English back in England.

How would Polton's words have resonated in England, if people there had been aware of them at the time? Obviously, the more esoteric issues about the structure and organisation of the conciliar Nations would not be of widespread, or perhaps any, interest: they were something for the Council to sort out for itself. However, the more concrete issue of nationhood, and the issue of the two Englands – Big and Little – might have struck a chord. Did Polton's multinational stance contrast with what can be known of wider English attitudes to nation and national identity in this period (if such attitudes did in fact exist), or was he mirroring widespread English perceptions? More basically, how much did, or could, the English – who have to be people of Little England – constitute a »nation«?

To some extent – perhaps to a great extent – the concept of Big England was shared by at least the political nation of the kingdom of England, arguably to the same degree that it was rejected by Big England's non-English peoples who desired autonomy and independence for their own lands. As a greater entity in terms of the British Isles (Gascony was another matter; but Gascony was always an extraneous oddity) the relationships between peoples and polities were the outcome of centuries of evolution and conflict. While England (or the English) considered itself to be the dominant partner, if not actually overlord, in this complex grouping, the tensions between incompletely shared subjecthood and different senses of national identity – or at least the English perception that the peoples of the rest of the agglomeration were »not English«, and their lands not part of England – undermined any real unity or unification of the territories as a single entity[39].

37) The classic discussion of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is Victor Martin, Les origines du Gallicanisme, 2 vols., Paris 1939.

38) The train of thought here derives from Kathy Lavezzo, Introduction, in: Imagining a Medieval English Nation, ed. by Kathy Lavezzo, Minneapolis MN 2003, p. VII–XXXIV, p. XV; see also (with a different perspective) Hirschi, Origins (note 10), p. 22.

39) Important here are the successive presidential addresses of Rees R. Davies, Under the Generic Title of the Peoples of Britain and Ireland, 1100–1400, in: Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 6th ser. 4 (1994), p. 1–20, 5 (1995), p. 1–20, 6 (1996), p. 1–24, 7 (1997), p. 1–24. For overviews of this Big England, see Robin Frame, Overlordship and Reaction, c.1200–c.1450, in: Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History, ed. by Alexander Grant/Keith J. Stringer, London/New York 1995, p. 65–84; Andrea Ruddick, Ethnic Identity and Political Language in the King of England's Dominions. A fourteenth-century Perspective, in: The Fifteenth Century, VI: Identity and Insurgency in the Middle Ages, ed. by Linda Clark, Woodbridge 2006, p. 15–31; Ralph A. Griffiths, The English Realm and Dominions and the King's Subjects in the Later Middle Ages, in: Aspects of Late Medieval Government and Society: Essays Presented

Little England raises different and complex problems. To embark on any discussion of nations and national identities in the Middle Ages is to enter a minefield of both theory and interpretation, at least in Anglophone scholarship[40]. The ever-expanding literature produced by medievalists across a range of disciplines dealing with medieval Englishness in terms of nation and national identity demands some attempt at reconciliation with the works of sociologists, historians, and political theorists working on ideas on nation and nationalism in the modern and contemporary world. Yet for the latter nations and national identities are inherently modern phenomena (pre-modern variants or precursors being confined to ethnicities)[41], establishing an approach which makes nations and nationalism virtually inconceivable in the pre-modern era[42]. Working with definitions of nationalism, nation, and nation-state which by their very construction as a »classical modernist paradigm« exclude the middle ages, the middle ages then by definition are a period when the phenomena neither can nor will exist[43]. Medievalists' responses[44], while in some cases adopting el-

to J.R. Lander, ed. by John G. ROWE, Toronto/Buffalo/London 1986, p. 83–105. Big England as a political construct is reflected in occasional grandiose titles suggested for England's kings, listing their »additional« realms, and in the English Parliament's formal receipt of petitions from other »dependencies« of the English crown. See, for example, CROOKS, State (note 34), p. 10, n. 38, p. 11, n. 41, p. 14.

40) Nationality and the idea of the nation are justifiably identified as »those most mistrusted of medieval themes« by GRIFFITHS, Realm (note 39), p. 85.

41) See, for example, Anthony D. SMITH, Nationalism and Modernism. A Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism, London/New York 1998, chapter 8.

42) For an apparent concession of nationhood to (very) late medieval or early modern France, see Anthony D. SMITH, National Identities. Modern and Medieval?, in: Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages, ed. by Simon FORDE/Lesley JOHNSON/Alan V. MURRAY (Leeds Texts and Monographs new series 14), Leeds 1995, p. 21–46, p. 34. This seems to collapse the definitional distinction between »nation« and »ethnie« proposed at p. 27, 29, and contrasts with the seeming denial of English national identity at p. 35, although »a growing sense of English national identity« is acknowledged from the late fifteenth century. The fullest exposition of Smith's attempt to erect a conceptual barrier between pre-modern »ethnie« and modern »nation« (even while claiming to challenge aspects of the »modernist« view of nations) is in Anthony D. SMITH, The Ethnic Origins of Nations, Oxford 1986; but even there it appears insecure.

43) See, for example, the definitions of »nationalism« and »nation« in SMITH, Nationalism (note 41), p. 188. The former implicitly requires secession from a pre-existing unit which presumably lacks properly »national« identity; the latter equally implicitly assumes modern constitutionalist democracy of some kind. For the »classical modernist paradigm« see John BREUILLY, Historians and the Nation, in: History and Historians in the Twentieth Century, ed. by Peter BURKE, Oxford 2002, p. 55–87, p.73, drawing on SMITH, Nationalism (note 41), with extended discussion (in terms of »Modernity and nationalism«), at p. 73–84.

44) For tensions between modernists and medievalists, see David MATTHEWS, Writing to the King. Nation, Kingship and Literature in England, 1250–1330, Cambridge 2010, p. 23–26. For a critique of the modernist approach and attitudes, HIRSCHI, Origins (note 10), ch. 2; HIRSCHI, Wettkampf (note 10), ch. 1, and comments in Susan REYNOLDS, Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900–1300, Oxford 1997, p. 251–253. See also Rees DAVIES, Nations and National Identities in the Medieval World. An apologia, in: Revue belge d'histoire contemporaine 34 (2004), p. 567–577.

ements of the modern theories[45], have generally failed to overthrow the definitional barriers (or smoke-screen) erected by the modernists. This leaves the debate between both sides rather stale and inconclusive: a dialogue of the deaf[46].

The difficulty that arises from this situation is that the medievalists then talk among themselves (but possibly not really to each other), yet still cannot reach consensus; and their divisions leave them in a weak position[47]. There is no agreed methodology for dealing with issues of medieval national identity, which leaves the field a free for all, or one where the fundamental theoretical issues are pushed under the carpet[48]. This is especially evident in work on medieval England and the issue of English identity, where the scholarship goes in several different directions, often reflecting disciplinary particularity. Historians of different periods have different views; while literary scholars assert or deny the force

45) For one attempt at adaptation, Thorlac TURVILLE-PETRE, England the Nation. Language, Literature and National Identity, 1290–1340, Oxford 1996, p. 9–10.

46) For a riposte which does engage with and firmly challenges the modernist approach, see HIRSCHI, Origins (note 10). This builds on, and derives from, HIRSCHI, Wettkampf (note 10). For an attempt to counter modernist arguments by demonstrating »that the concept of the nation that lies at the heart of all forms of nationalism was widespread long before the eighteenth century«, see Susan REYNOLDS, The Idea of the Nation as a Political Community, in: Power and the Nation in European History, ed. by Len SCALES/ Oliver ZIMMER, Cambridge 2005, p. 54–66, p. 55. The modernist approach also has its modernist critics; see, for example, Christopher A. BAYLY, The Birth of the Modern World. 1780–1914, Global Connections and Comparisons, Oxford 2004, p. 199–208. Medievalists do seem to be at a disadvantage in firing at a constantly moving target. Alongside the attempts to monopolise the definitions, the inconsistencies, argumentative fuzziness, and sheer variation in the modernist arguments makes it very difficult to respond to them – especially when they seem to be overtaken by recent events, as may apply to the comments on South Sudan in Anthony D. SMITH, The Antiquity of Nations, Cambridge/Malden MA 2004, p. 2 (unless this represents a clear tipping point when an »ethnie« moves through a stage of stateless nationhood to full nationhood in less than a decade).

47) This lack of consensus provides the opening for the assault on medieval nationhood in John BREUILLY, Changes in the Political Uses of the Nation. Continuity or Discontinuity?, in: Scales (Ed.), Power (note 46), p. 67–101, p. 70.

48) See comments in HIRSCHI, Origins (note 10), p. 34–35. For one medievalist's criticism of other medievalists' ambiguous use of »national« as a term, see REYNOLDS, Kingdoms (note 44), p. 253–254. Her suggested resolution that »Until we can sort out what the medieval idea of a people did or did not have in common with modern nationalism it is better to avoid the words nation and national altogether« (p. 254) does not actually eliminate the problem. For medievalists consciously to avoid using the words »nation« and »national« would effectively concede the field to the modernist definitions of nation and nationalism (or, at least, allow it to be treated as a concession), and essentially preclude analysis of the medieval situation. Reynolds in fact breaks her own rule: the taboo term reappears when she writes later of »regnal – or national – solidarity« (p. 262), collapsing the two terms together and so letting ambiguity back in by allowing subsequent uses of »regnal« to carry connotations of »national«, especially in the context of »regnal solidarity« (see for example p. 282–283). If »Kingdoms were units of government which were perceived as peoples«, and »The government and the solidarity [which is presumably here ›regnal – or national – solidarity‹] were both essential« (p. 331), then the debate in reality is back where it started. See REYNOLDS, Idea (note 46), p. 56, for a limited response to this difficulty.

of national identity, or nationalism, in a range of texts and literary genres. Some of this scholarship has to be mentioned before the paper can turn to its own (still somewhat tentative) consideration of English national identity in the decades either side of 1400.

For some scholars, the secure existence of England is not a contentious issue. Coagulation and coherence is traced from the strength of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom onwards, consolidating into a nation and a nation-state. In this trajectory, England under the later Anglo-Saxon monarchs was »becoming a powerfully imagined community, a nation-state«, and over the following centuries (in a process ostensibly completed by 1350),

> »the very early institutional maturity and self-definition of the English state and the tight weave to its power structures, ethnic self-profile, and historical mythology gave it a remarkable resilience and cohesion. It was much the earliest as it was the most enduring of European nation states«[49].

The existence of medieval English nationalism is here perhaps implicit rather than explicit. The governmental structures certainly could exist without it, but the combination of ethnic self-profile and mythology might be seen as nationalistic. For other medievalists, however, nationalism is out of the question[50].

Strikingly, while historians of England in the Anglo-Saxon period and through to around 1300 do address issues of nation, national identity, and nationalism, they seem to attract little interest from historians of later medieval England, even when producing books with titles like ›Shaping the Nation‹[51]. It is left to Adrian Hastings, entering the fray from a different starting point, to identify the later fourteenth century as »the very latest point at which it is plausible to claim that the English nation state had gelled so decisively that no imaginable circumstance could have diverted English history into some quite other form«[52]. Among late-medievalists, arguments about the emergence of national identity and nationalism tend to focus on writings about England (which may be in French or Latin) and writing in English (both literary and administrative), both identified with the emergence and assertion of Englishness and the consolidation of an English identity. This emergence, however, is located at differing points (although perhaps most forcefully placed between 1280 and 1340), and because of its focus on the use of English is itself contentious. In particular, the persistence of French as a literary (and administrative) language within Eng-

49) DAVIES, Empire (note 12), p. 50, 201.

50) Derek PEARSALL, The idea of Englishness in the Fifteenth Century, in: Nation, Court and Culture: New Essays on Fifteenth-Century English Poetry, ed. by Helen COONEY, Dublin/Portland (Oregon) 2001, p. 15–27.

51) Gerald HARRISS, Shaping the Nation: England 1360–1461, Oxford 2005. There are no index entries for »nation« or »nationalism«.

52) Adrian HASTINGS, The Construction of Nationhood. Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism, Cambridge 1997, p. 51. This is the culmination of his survey of English history tracing the evolution and consolidation of England as a state, starting from Bede: ibid., p. 36–53.

land well into the fifteenth century provides a weapon to deny the rise of English (and, implicitly, Englishness)[53].

The theoretical knots of nationalism, national identity, and ethnicity are important; but ultimately the key issue is how people identified themselves. Here questions of »national identity« and »national consciousness« do matter; but any satisfactory testing of the reality is virtually impossible: assessment necessarily depends on the availability of evidence, which is often skewed and limited. It also depends on the differing interpretations of individual scholars, which again weakens the medievalists' case, exposing it to potential demolition from a modernist position[54]. In responding to this situation, the suggestion that »Historians should treat ›the nation‹ […] as a social science concept, rather like other group concepts such as class or occupation«[55] is worth consideration. There are clearly potential problems in such an approach, in the balance of agency between observer and observed, and the risk that it may deny agency to those who actually constitute the nation, denying them the right to identify themselves as a nation. Nevertheless, the suggestion has to be considered. One further possibility, which may square some of the circles, would be to treat a nation more as a network than an entity. This would allow it, as an »imagined community« to move beyond the imaginary as a »community of the mind«, to be treated as a set of relationships and ties which, while open to manipulation and influence, still require individual and collective agency and action to make them real, and thereby give reality to the nation or national identity which they generate[56].

From this starting point, a recent challenge to the mainstream modernist approach to nationalism may be important for medievalists. For Michael Billig, most discussions of nationalism are defective because they are based on a model which is essentially episodic and conflictive: nationalism as something manifested through active but intermittent opposition to or rivalry between actual or prospective nations. Billig seeks an analysis which addresses the gaps between such eruptions, the passive nationalism manifested not in the foreground of conflict and rivalry, but in the ways in which nations reproduce and reinforce themselves as a constant process. This is a totalising or holistic process:

> »For such daily reproduction to occur, one might hypothesize that a whole complex of beliefs, assumptions, habits, representations and practices must also be reproduced. Moreover, this complex must be

53) Butterfield, Enemy (note 6), chapter 9.

54) See, for example, the attack on constructions of medieval English nationhood in Breuilly, Changes (note 47), p. 70–84.

55) Breuilly, Historians (note 43), p. 86.

56) These thoughts derive from suggestive comments in Christine Carpenter, Gentry and Community in Medieval England, in: Journal of British Studies 33 (1994), p. 340–380, p. 366–367 (which also supply the term, »community of the mind«, possibly something more concrete than an »imagined community«), but here transposed from the regional to the national level. The concept of an »imagined community« obviously derives from the arguments of Benedict Anderson; see his Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism, London/New York ^{2}2006.

reproduced in a banally mundane way, for the world of nations is the everyday world, the familiar terrain«.

This »banal nationalism« provides a pervasive yet almost invisible constant, the infusion and reinforcement of an almost unconscious nationalism based on signs, symbols, and unthinking use of language which functions subliminally to become an unassertive assertion[57].

Almost by definition, such banal nationalism is different in its effect from the more dynamic ways of provoking and instilling national identity. The dynamic and the passive can, however, exist alongside each other, as can be argued for England in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. To ignore the warfare of the period as a stimulant of national identity – formal warfare against Scotland and France, or the military responses to anti-English insurgency in Wales and Ireland – would be to turn too blind an eye to a potentially significant factor. Its precise significance is elusive, but it must have played a part, in emotion, and in the reality of contribution to a war effort. War propaganda will have aroused sentiments not only of xenophobic enmity, but of patriotism, which could be played on for national purposes. Admittedly the positive evidence here is limited (or may not have been recognised), and blurs with other non-bellicose declarations of shared national goals; but even this limited evidence is suggestive[58].

If the concept of banal nationalism provides a tool to identify the nation as a continuing entity – if banal nationalism is actually a fundamental means of reproducing a nation and ensuring that its members continue to identify themselves as one – then it is certainly worth searching for it in medieval England (and, of course, elsewhere[59]). Obviously, it will not be found in the same places as now, and, equally obviously, not to the same extent. Whether it was there at all may be legitimately debated. If it is a requirement that »Daily, the nation is indicated, or ›flagged‹, in the lives of its citizenry« so that »Nationalism, far from being an intermittent mood in established nations, is the endemic condition«[60], this demands mechanisms and means of communication and dissemination to ensure the »flagging« which may have been beyond the capacity of medieval polities; while the precondition that nationalism

57) Michael BILLIG, Banal Nationalism, London/Thousand Oaks CA/New Delhi 1995; quotation at p. 6. His »familiar terrain« is that »of contemporary times«, so the world of »now«, but I see no reason why »contemporary« cannot also mean »then«, contemporary with the period under discussion.

58) John BARNIE, War in Medieval English Society. Social Values in the Hundred Years War, 1337–1399, Ithaca NY 1974, p. 97–116 (although patchily). He comments that »it is vain to look for nationalism as a major force in fourteenth-century social and political life […] nationalism in its fullest sense was a product of the fifteenth century« (p. 97). However, in his discussion of patriotism in both the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, »No distinction is made between nationalism and patriotism« (p. 171, n. 1). See also discussion in GREEN, Identities (note 6), p. 115–130.

59) This is to some extent the achievement in Colette BEAUNE, The Birth of an Ideology. Myths and Symbols of Nation in Late Medieval France, Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford 1991, originally published as Naissance de la nation France, Paris 1985. The difference between the English and French titles should be noted.

60) BILLIG, Nationalism (note 57), p. 6.

can only become »banal« after a nation has become »established« posits a tipping point which lacks precise definition and identification.

The background noise of banal nationalism is in some ways the stand-by function of full-blown nationalism. It sustains a weak form of national identity which, with due prompting, can transform into something much more dynamic and active. In this, it can also be seen as resembling a network of strong and weak ties, in which weak ties provide comparatively porous and indistinct lines of contact to shape identity rather loosely, while strong ties erect barriers which obstruct contacts and reinforce separation and a sense of distinctive identity[61)]. Normally the ties of national identity function at a weak level, especially internally within a nation. It is notable that medieval Englishness seems to be most consistently and vociferously asserted in Big England, as happened in Ireland. There the Englishness of the settlers faced erosion through acculturation with the Irish, stimulating a defensively assertive reaction; yet at the same time their Englishness (and, indeed, political autonomy) was not fully conceded by the English of Little England[62)]. Within Little England, a consciousness of national identity could be on stand-by for much of the time, usually until reignited by war, although it might manifest in xenophobic episodes like the attacks on Flemings alongside the Peasants' Revolt of 1381[63)]. The task and challenge for those wishing to mobilise the people on a truly national or nationalistic level would then be to ensure that this weak version and tie of nationhood was sustained at a sufficient level to be speedily converted into a strong and assertive tie when needed.

Here the concept of banal nationalism makes its contribution. A full assessment of its existence and promulgation within England around 1400 cannot be attempted here. There are indicators to suggest that it did exist, but the argument at present remains problematic. The basic difficulty arises with what would perhaps instinctively be considered the most fundamental indicator of national identity: language[64)]. Much of the most important recent work on late-medieval Englishness has been produced by literary scholars, whose concerns impose a particular perspective. The emergence of English as a literary language underpins

61) The basic framework of strong and weak ties derives from Mark GRANOVETTER, The Strength of Weak Ties, in: American Journal of Sociology 78 (1972–1973), p. 1360–1380; IDEM, The strength of Weak Ties. A Network Theory revisited, in: Social Structure and Network Analysis, ed. by Peter V. MARSDEN/Nan LIN, Beverly Hills CA/London/New Delhi 1982, p. 105–130. The theory is used to underpin some of the analysis in CARPENTER, Gentry (note 56).

62) Robin FRAME, *Les Engleys nées en Irlande:* the English political identity in medieval Ireland, in: IDEM, Ireland and Britain, 1170–1450, London/Ronceverte WV 1998, p. 131–150, p. 142–145, 149; IDEM, Exporting State and Nation. Being English in Medieval Ireland, in: SCALES (Ed.), Power (note 46), p.143–165, p. 150–153.

63) Rodney H. HILTON, Bond Men Made Free. Medieval Peasant Movements and the English Rising of 1381, London 1973, p. 195–198.

64) Although, for the suggestion that the spoken language is not necessarily central, Rees R. DAVIES, The Peoples of Britain and Ireland, 1100–1400, IV. Language and Historical Mythology, in: Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 6th ser. 7 (1997), p. 1–24, p. 3–4.

arguments about how far there was an English national identity which are essentially founded on linguistic dominance and unification. The delayed emergence of works specifically in English, and the problem of knowing quite what to make of texts (especially official or quasi-official texts) written in English, has produced debates about and denials of the existence of a real nationalism in thirteenth-century England[65]. If non-existent in the thirteenth century, the textual emergence (or is it construction or creation?) of something which can be called an English identity must then occur later. Thorlac Turville-Petre notably located its appearance in the first decades of the fourteenth century[66]; David Matthews (thinking in terms of »nation as artefact«) identifies one of its main protagonists as the slightly later writer Lawrence Minot[67]; but most attention focuses on the period between 1350 and 1450 and its pantheon of major writers – Langland, Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate.

If it is true that »A people must have a common language before they can be fully conscious of themselves as a nation: it is the enabling condition of nationhood«[68], language *per se* nevertheless proves a dangerous factor to evoke in a search for banal nationalism in late medieval England. The existence of nationhood in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England can be challenged by England's notable lack of linguistic unity, and in particular by the prevalence within the realm of French as a significant literary and spoken language throughout the fourteenth and (well into the) fifteenth century[69]. In such circumstances, the use of English cannot be appealed to as conclusive evidence of a specifically »English« identity. This, though, may be to insist too much on linguistic barriers and separation. The multilingualism of late medieval England, and the cross-fertilisation of Anglo-French and Middle English as terms switched and adapted between the two, argue for a linguistic spectrum which, while it included monoglotism, nevertheless undermined its limiting effects by encouraging inter-linguistic osmosis[70].

How far written English helped to create and instil a sense of national identity, even of nationalism, among the people of late-medieval England remains an open question. English was clearly being more widely used than previously in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries; but how much it facilitated and encouraged a real national identity is open to de-

65) Matthews, King (note 44), p. 18–22.

66) Turville-Petre, England (note 45), see especially his comment at p. 22. For a shorter (and earlier) statement of his core argument, idem, The »nation« in English Writings of the Early Fourteenth Century, in: England in the Fourteenth Century, ed. by Nicholas Rogers, Stamford 1993, p. 128–139.

67) Matthews, King (note 44), p. 135–155, developing idem, Laurence Minot, Edward III, and nationalism, in: Viator 38 (2007), p. 269–288.

68) Pearsall, Idea (note 50), p. 27.

69) The central argument of Pearsall, Idea (note 50); with the challenge most fully advanced in Butterfield, Enemy (note 6).

70) William Rothwell, The trilingual England of Geoffrey Chaucer, in: Studies in the Age of Chaucer 16 (1994), p. 57–66.

bate, and even denial[71]. After all, the linguistic differences within the English of England were still sufficiently great in the sixteenth century for at least one author to plan to issue a text in »southern« and »northern« versions to ensure that it received national reception[72]. This continued a practice recorded in earlier centuries; the important consideration here is that this was seen as translation *within* one language, not *between* two[73].

The persistence of non-English languages within England is also a problem for assessments of banal nationalism. Attitudes to such differences at the time are elusive. There are no signs of formal recognition of Cornish, which was being pushed into retreat; nor were the Welsh speakers on the English side of formal frontier between Wales and England given much attention[74]; while the complication of the merging of northern English into Lowland Scots was not openly addressed, unless to legitimate the synonymity of England and Britain[75]. Paradoxically, the claim that a common language creates a nation should perhaps have made the Cornish a nation long before their English neighbours became one; but there would have been speakers and readers of French even in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Cornwall, who perhaps lacked the bilingualism of their equivalents among the English. Does this mean that the medieval Cornish speakers were a nation, but medieval Cornwall was not[76]?

The emphasis on French as an obstacle to the emergence of an English national identity also silently ignores the role of Latin, which could be seen in similar terms[77]. While the rise of English did lead to the erosion of Latin's dominance in some areas of England's written culture, the process as a whole was slow. Much of England's textual culture remained in

71) Barnie, War (note 58), p. 101–102.

72) Anne Hudson, Lollards and their Books, London/Ronceverte WV 1985, p. 238.

73) Robert N. Swanson, Church and Society in Late Medieval England, Oxford 1989/1993, p. 264; Turville-Petre, Nation (note 66), p. 137; Idem, England (note 45), p. 19–20. See also John Trevisa's reference to the »diverse manners of English in the realm of England« cited in Davies, Peoples (note 64), p. 3.

74) For a French-speaking priest rejected as a candidate for a Devonshire benefice because he could not communicate with his parishioners, London, British Library, MS Harley 3300, fol. 42r. For complaints from Herefordshire parishioners that an English-speaking priest could not communicate with his Welsh-speaking flock, Arthur Thomas Bannister, Visitation Returns of the Diocese of Hereford in 1397, in: English Historical Review 44 (1929), p. 279–288, 444–452, p. 289.

75) For the similarity between Scots and English, see Davies, Peoples (note 64), p. 8–9.

76) On medieval Cornish identity, Mark Stoyle, The Dissidence of Despair. Rebellion and Identity in Early Modern Cornwall, in: Journal of British Studies 38 (1999), p. 423–444, p. 424–431, 434.

77) Most recently Butterfield, Enemy (note 6), excludes it from her discussions while admitting its importance: see ibid., p. xxiv; for positive comments see p. 212, 344. While cross-references in her index guide towards discussion of Latin, the promised index entry for »Latin« is omitted – see p. 439. For cross-references see for example p. 438–439, under »Language« and »[Language] oral and written status of«, and p. 444 »vernacular«. The scholarly teleology which assumes the evolution of a single written »English« silently ignores the continuation (even to the present day) of a kind of bilingualism in the language, with varying degrees of distinction between written and spoken versions, and the persistence of local grammatical forms (generally condemned as »ungrammatical«) and vocabularies (or »dialects«) which rarely appear in print.

Latin, even after 1500. Yet here there is a paradox, for Latin – a Latin no longer classical, and often structurally akin to the vernaculars – also ensured communication by overriding the regionalisms of English[78]. The widespread use of Latin, with extemporised vernacularisation (or the quasi-impromptu rendering of English into Latin for purposes of record), is characteristic of many elements of late-medieval English textual culture, as is the deliberate ambiguity of accounts and other documents which float between looking Latin and being recognisable in English (or French)[79]. Here the disciplinary bind of thinking of national identity through a literary language becomes significant, because the scholarly focus on the growth of literature in English ignores the potential for the assertion of English identity – even nationality – through Latin, and more specifically through administrative Latin[80]. The continuing utility of Latin as a transcendent language, ironing out differences between dialects, explains the continued issue of royal proclamations in Latin for much of the fifteenth century, providing a brief statement which could be reformulated in the local version of English[81]. The same might apply to the summaries of war news regularly distributed by royal command for oral transmission in sermons and calls to prayer[82]. The continued ex-

78) Rothwell, England (note 70), p. 47–48; Linda Ehrsam Voigts, What's the word? Bilingualism in Late-Medieval England, in: Speculum 71 (1996), p. 813–826.
79) Rothwell, England (note 70), p. 48–52; Laura Wright, Bills, Accounts, Inventories. Everyday Trilingual Activities in the Business World of Later Medieval England, in: Multilingualism in Later Medieval Britain, ed. by David A. Trotter, Cambridge 2000, p. 149–156, p. 149–154.
80) For a reading of fourteenth-century Latin monastic historians and their derivatives – especially Ranulf Higden and Thomas Walsingham – as making a »formative contribution« to »the idea of vernacular and secular nationalism« (in Higden's case perhaps more by a kind of *via negativa* than by positive assertion), see Andrew Galloway, Latin England, in: Lavezzo (Ed.), Nation (note 38), p. 41–95, p. 44.
81) James A. Doig, Political Propaganda and Royal Proclamations in Later Medieval England, in: Historical Research 71 (1998), p. 253–280, p. 264–265, 275. In contrast, royal letters to instil loyalty which may have been intended for public recital were being written in English from the reign of Henry V (1413–22): ibid., p. 271–273.
82) For such activity, Alison K. McHardy, Liturgy and Propaganda in the Diocese of Lincoln during the Hundred Years War, in: Studies in Church History 18 (1982), p. 215–227; William R. Jones, The English Church and Royal Propaganda during the Hundred Years War, in: Journal of British Studies 19 (1979–80), p. 18–30; Alison K. McHardy, Some Reflections on Edward III's Use of Propaganda, in: The Age of Edward III, ed. by James S. Bothwell, Woodbridge 2001, p. 171–192; Andrea Ruddick, National Sentiment and Religious Vocabulary in fourteenth-century England, in: Journal of Ecclesiastical History 60 (2009), p. 1–18, p. 4–10 (but see caveats at p. 16–17). For earlier instances D.W. Burton, Requests for Prayers and Royal Propaganda under Edward I, in: Thirteenth-Century England, III: Proceedings of the Newcastle upon Tyne Conference 1989, ed. by Peter R. Coss/Simon D. Lloyd, Woodbridge 1991, p. 25–35; David S. Bachrach, The Ecclesia Anglicana goes to War. Prayers, Propaganda, and Conquest during the Reign of Edward I of England, 1272–1307, in: Albion 36 (2004), p. 393–406. See also Crooks, State (note 34), p. 23–25 – but some of his examples show communication elsewhere in the »English empire«, which perhaps creates an overlap between »banal nationalism« and »banal imperialism«. How effective these activities were cannot be assessed: Doig, Propaganda (note 81), p. 266, 268, 275, suggests that the propagandistic impact of proclamations may have been less than is often assumed, and cannot be properly demonstrated. The lack of

istence of this trilingual culture in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, as a complex intermingling of Latin, French, and English – perhaps with some functional separation of cultural roles – may seem to challenge ideas of national identity by insisting on difference and social and cultural barriers. (Needless to say, the privileging of those three specific languages again also marginalises the Celtic languages in the border regions.) However, while the balance in the relative status of the languages may have been changing in this period, there is no reason to suppose that the overall situation was in fact very different from the one which has been suggested for earlier in the fourteenth century – that the three languages, as written languages, reflect »not three [separated] cultures but one culture in three voices«[83].

Yet the English voice was developing. While the final judgement has yet to be delivered about when and why English eventually triumphed over French to become the dominant literary language in England, the fact that English did eventually triumph over both French and Latin is incontestable. One obvious task here was to develop a universally accepted standard form of English which could overlay the myriad local forms of the language. Some scholars have argued for an emerging standardisation of written English in the early fifteenth century, in the evolution of a »Chancery English« with orthographic uniformity. Initially in essence an administrative form of English, this would have been still in its early days at the time of the Council of Constance. However, this argument has been strongly criticised[84].

The search for banal nationalism sustained through the political structure is also challenging, perhaps because England was a monarchy with limited scope for extensive active participation in its political system[85]. In this respect, the question arises of whether banal

direct control over what should or would be said could be counter-productive, making proclamations »something of a wasted tool« (p. 275). For similar concerns, W. Mark ORMROD, The Domestic Response to the Hundred Years War, in: Arms, Armies and Fortifications in the Hundred Years War, ed. by Anne CURRY/Michael HUGHES, Woodbridge 1994, p. 83–101, p. 97.

83) TURVILLE-PETRE, England (note 45), p. 181.

84) Stanley HUSSEY, Nationalism and Language in England, c.1300–1500, in: Nations, Nationalism and Patriotism in the European Past, ed. by Claus BJØRN/Alexander GRANT/Keith J. STRINGER, Copenhagen 1994, p. 96–108, p. 102–103; J. David BURNLEY, Sources of Standardisation in Later Middle English, in: Standardizing English. Essays in the History of Language Change, ed. by Joseph B. TRAHERN (Tennessee Studies in Literature 31), Knoxville TN 1989, p. 23–38. For a provocative analysis of the links between a quasi-official national English and the emergence of literary English see Jeremy CATTO, Written English. The making of the Language, 1370–1400, in: Past and Present 179 (2003), p. 24–59. For comparable evolutions in Germany, HIRSCHI, Origins (note 10), p. 106–108, also p. 12 for a more complex comment on the linguistic issue. For a summary of the challenges to the advocacy of »Chancery English«, amid a broader assessment of the linguistic shift in central government documents, see Gwilym DODD, The Spread of English in the Records of Central Government, 1400–1430, in: Vernacularity in England and Wales c. 1300–1550, ed. by Elisabeth SALTER/Helen WICKER, Turnhout 2011, p. 225–266.

85) The extent to which monarchy and dynasticism as factors in the shaping of polities contributed to or obstructed the development of a national identity is another variable in the debate between medievalists and

nationalism is something which must impact on everyone, or merely on the »political nation«, that much smaller group of nobles and potential members of Parliament (or their electorates) who claimed to act on behalf of the totality, and saw themselves as the embodiment of an English community. To demand a shared and common perception (let alone assertion) of national identity of everyone within a nation would certainly be to ask too much[86]. On the other hand, there were no barriers to the political nation – or an intermittently politicised nation – seeing itself as a unity. In theory Parliament represented the »community« of England, and the rebels in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 claimed to act for that same community[87]. As a regnal or national community it could only be an imagined community; but its imagination was also its reification, even if incomplete.

There are elements of banal nationalism which might be expected to have extensive resonance. If coins and heraldry can construct propaganda, they may also provide a subliminal message of identity and membership in a body of subjects[88]. So might official documents which recite the royal style, or carry (with countless other documents) dating clauses based on regnal years. The extension of the tax state embroiled almost everyone in national enterprises, and in the process would enhance awareness of nation, identity, and shared aspirations (or conversely, awareness of shared oppressions and failures). Even if the rebels of 1381 were not among the Parliamentary electorate, they were aware of taxation as a national political issue[89]. The law and legal system were equally influential, through their essential application across all of England (despite organisational exceptions, notably in the localised courts of Chester and Durham). It may be true that »The common law was the law of the

modernists, but is deliberately excluded from the present discussion as an unnecessary additional complication.

86) This does not seem to be a pre-requisite of modern nations for modernist historians of nationalism, so there is no obvious reason why it should be required of the middle ages. Benedict Anderson appears content for national identity to be imposed on a people: while commenting positively on José de San Martin for including the indigenous peoples in his nascent Peruvian nation, he says nothing about whether they were consulted on their future identity, or when and how they found out that they were now to think of themselves as Peruvians: ANDERSON, Communities (note 56), p. 49–50, 145, 193.

87) John WATTS, Public or plebs. The Changing Meaning of »the Commons«, 1381–1549, in: Power and Identity in the Middle Ages. Essays in Memory of Rees Davies, ed. by Huw PRYCE/John WATTS, Oxford 2007, p. 242–260, p. 248–250.

88) John W. MCKENNA, Henry VI of England and the Dual Monarchy. Aspects of Royal Political Propaganda, 1422–1432, in: Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 28 (1965), p. 145–162, p. 146–151. These examples are in the specific context of attempts to assert Henry VI's claims to the throne of France, and so necessarily partisan; less assertive coin imagery might provide a more subtle message, possibly more effective because it did not invite challenge.

89) The title adopted for The English Rising of 1381, ed. by Rodney H. HILTON/Trevor H. ASTON, Cambridge 1981, raises its own questions about how much that label recognises or imposes a national character on the revolt(s). In fact, it seems to have been a label of convenience, to incorporate discussion of both urban and rural risings: Rodney H. HILTON, Introduction, in: ibid., p. 1–8, p. 1.

English rather than the law of England«[90]; but within the realm of England, Little England, it was essentially a territorial law. Its constant operation, perhaps especially in »civil« matters, between parties, rather than in the state-enforced criminal law, made it a basic fact and factor of life. (The personal or »ethnic« character of English law applied only outside Little England, essentially in Wales and Ireland[91]).

Possibly the most striking vehicle of banal nationalism, and so for both the reproduction and consolidation of national identity, was the Church. This is not to claim that the church in early fifteenth-century England was actively and consciously promoting an English national identity, despite calling itself the *ecclesia Anglicana.* Indeed, structurally, it was not a unified national body, existing as two distinct provincial units each of which included (or claimed to include) territories beyond Little England. Liturgically, the English church was also fragmented. Widespread adoption of the Use of Sarum almost made that version of the liturgy the national rite, but it was never the sole rite of the pre-Reformation English Church[92].

Despite all this, the church within England may have played a vital role in constructing (probably unintentionally) the sense of a large-scale community which might pass for a nation. One of the major challenges to medievalists seeking pre-modern nations is to break through the barrier which seems to prevent elite (and elitist) assertions of national identity from being shared by the populace as a whole, or more fundamentally the lack of sources through which the general populace might voice any sense of nationhood audible to modern scholarship. This difficulty may be due to accepting the modernist stance that »it is nationalism which engenders nations«[93], and so seeking nationalists and nationalism rather than nations[94]; it may be due to the more fundamental problem that, if the concept of banal nationalism is valid, and if there is no need for the mass of the nation to assert itself through displays of nationalistic fervour until prompted and propelled to do so, then the only evidence is silence. Faced with this situation, and perhaps paradoxically, the structures and practices of the medieval Church, as they existed within the regnal unit of England, may have served both to assist the creation of vertical connections which linked the social layers of the populace, and to consolidate the horizontal ties which constituted awareness of a na-

90) Rees R. DAVIES, The peoples of Britain and Ireland, 1100–1400. III: Laws and customs, in: Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 6th ser. 6 (1996), p. 1–23, p. 4.

91) Ibid., p. 4–6.

92) For geography, SWANSON, Church (note 73), p. 1–2, 6–7. For the regional uses, Richard W. PFAFF, The Liturgy in Medieval England: a History, Cambridge 2009, p. 445–509. Note his comments about the lack of uniformity in Sarum Use volumes, which would limit the extent of conformity, even if the perception and expectation was that the Sarum Use was indeed being used: ibid., p. 443–444.

93) Ernest GELLNER, Nations and Nationalism, Oxford 1983, p. 55; see the equivalent assertion of Eric J. HOBSBAWM, Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality, Cambridge ²1992, p. 10, that »for the purposes of analysis nationalism comes before nations. Nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way round«.

94) This is, possibly, a trap fallen into by HIRSCHI, Origins (note 10).

tional community. If this did happen, then such religious practice may provide a version of the »steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity« which reifies the nation as a »sociological organism« based on »deep, horizontal comradeship«[95)].

The main ecclesiastical text which conveyed a message of banal nationalism, and which may also be a key indicator of the place of the nation within popular consciousness, was the bidding prayer at mass – a text regularly repeated within the liturgy and drummed into minds on at least a weekly basis[96)]. In it the people were enjoined to pray for their society, their neighbours and their fellow Christians, in a roll-call of terrestrial communities starting with the universality of the Church, and narrowing down to the parish and its components. Here the nation slots in, although not in such words. The prayer was actually for the king and his noble ministers, and for the good governance and benefit of the realm[97)]. From one point of view the chain of prayer is linear, outlining something like a line management sequence through the social structure (in distinct chains, with the spiritual hierarchy preceding its secular counterpart, but with obvious overlap from the prayer's spiritual function). Narrowing down to the individual, the prayer delineates the many potential social roles of any one person. Structurally, this prayer highlights specific, reducing, entities: universal Church, state, town, parish – but as it narrows its focus, as it traces the line, there is an unavoidable yet unstated acknowledgement of all the other communities, the other parishes, towns, jurisdictional units, which exist alongside those being prayed for. By implication there are ingroups and outgroups, and the latter may be or become rivals and enemies. At one level these are other kingdoms, other nations, awareness of whose existence would generate an awareness of difference and distinction which, even if not actually experienced by many within England, would nevertheless reinforce a sense of otherness which might also be an essential ingredient of banal nationalism[98)].

95) Anderson, Communities (note 56), p. 26 f.

96) E. Calvert, Extracts from a Fifteenth Century MS, in: Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Natural History Society, 2nd ser. 6 (1894), p. 104–106. This version derives from the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield; slightly different versions survive from other English dioceses.

97) Ibid., p. 105: »you shall pray especially for our sovereign lord the king of this realm, and the queen, [and] for all other lords and estates of the realm, [such] as dukes, earls, barons, knights, and esquires, and especially for those lords who have the counsels of this realm in governance, that God in his mercy give them grace to take such counsel and to act in accordance therewith, that it may be pleasing to God, [and bring] salvation of their souls, profit and welfare to this realm, [and] the discomfort and overcoming of our enemies both physical and spiritual. You shall pray especially for the community [*comonty*] of this realm of England and of all true Christian realms« [modernised].

98) Hirschi, Origins (note 10), p. 39, emphasises that a nation is not generated or sustained in a vacuum: »Nations are formed by their relations to other nations […] in a world of nations, the self-image of a nation can only be defined in juxtaposition to the self-images of other nations.« This may well apply for the cosmopolitan elements in medieval societies, the elites on whom he focusses his attention as generators of nationalism. It is unclear how far such national »self-images« did or could penetrate in medieval contexts. For those lacking contact with people of other nations, self-awareness as a participant in a nation, as

The ubiquity of this prayer, and its place in the liturgical background, does indeed make it banal. It was not just a parochial prayer: it was adopted and used in other contexts, even in private prayer[99]. Once freely available through uncontrollable dissemination, available for voluntary rather than compulsory participation, its subliminal impact could only be increased. Moreover, the prayer's silent assertion of the existence of ingroups and outgroups, and of England's existence as one realm or nation among many, would have been repeated and reinforced by more specific commentary in prayers for definitely national intentions – success in war, relief from plague or bad weather – and in sermons encouraging participation in such intercessions[100].

The Church may also have contributed to a sense of English national distinctness by its promotion of certain saints, although the real effect of this is elusive. In 1398, during the obscure archiepiscopate of Roger Walden at Canterbury[101], a provincial constitution for the southern province mandated the celebration with nine lessons of the feasts of three »native« saints: David (of Wales), Chad (buried at Lichfield), and Winifred (enshrined at Shrewsbury[102]). The motivations behind this action are obscure, but the action itself is striking. These saints were Celtic (or British) rather than Anglo-Saxon (or English); so how they were to contribute to the evolving self-identity of the *ecclesia Anglicana* is debatable (especially with David being associated more with Wales than with England). This elevation was re-affirmed in 1415, in a provincial council which coincided with the aftermath of Agincourt, and which also promoted the cult of St George[103]. His promotion was almost certainly inspired by patriotism, a stage in his growing recognition as national patron[104]. How much »nationalism« should be read into these provisions as a group is uncertain; and the overall response remains unclear[105]. In any case, the decrees only applied to the southern ecclesiastical province of Canterbury: there is no sign that the elevation of David,

personally sharing »nationality« with others of the same »nation«, may have been more important than a totalising national »self-image«, with awareness of constructed images of other nations more important for emphasising difference than the self-images constructed for themselves by those nations.

99) Robert N. Swanson, Prayer and Participation in Late Medieval England, in: Studies in Church History 42 (2006), p. 130–139, p. 136 f.

100) See note 82, with sermons considered in Ruddick, Sentiment (note 82), p. 11–16.

101) He had been put into the see following the translation – effectively deposition – of Thomas Arundel, but was himself ejected in 1399 at the fall of Richard II: Richard G. Davies, Walden, Roger (d.1406), in: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (note 14), vol. 56, p. 779–780.

102) Wilkins, Concilia, vol. 3, (note 22), p. 234–236; Records of Convocation, IV: Canterbury, 1377–1414, ed. by Gerald Bray, Woodbridge 2005, p. 184–185.

103) The Register of Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1414–43, vol. 3, ed. by Ernest F. Jacob, (Canterbury and York Society 42, 45–7), Oxford 1938–1947, p. 8–10; Records of Convocation, V: Canterbury, 1414–1443, ed. by Gerald Bray, Woodbridge 2005, p. 19, 21–22.

104) For development of the cult of St George, see Henry Summerson, George [St. George] (*d.c.* 303?), in: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (note 14), vol. 21, p. 770–780; Jonathan Good, The Cult of St George in Medieval England, Woodbridge 2009, p. 62–121.

105) See comments in Pfaff, Liturgy (note 92), p. 439–440.

Chad, and Winifred was repeated within the province of York (although the evidence relating to the York Convocation is much more limited), and the promotion of St George to a double feast at York occurred only in 1422[106].

Beyond such activity, the defensiveness of the national church in relation to papal power – which may be aligned with the attitude of the political nation towards the papacy – also served to emphasise English exceptionalism. English common law was wary of accepting papal authority and claims to jurisdiction in some areas; while the frequently antagonistic relationship between England and the papacy on papal provisions and taxation provided numerous opportunities to assert national independence[107]. It would obviously be wrong to make too much of this for present purposes. There was no suggestion (except among Lollards[108]) that England should break away from the universality of the Church, and it manifestly did not; but there was manoeuvring for position in relation to the papal Church, a manoeuvring based on regnal or national claims, and a kind of ecclesiastical xenophobia.

The basic weakness of this attempt to apply Billig's concept of banal nationalism to late medieval England is the inherent problem on one hand of demonstrating the continuity and pervasiveness in the dissemination of »nationalist« impulses at a national level which is required to prove its existence, and on the other of demonstrating reception and receptivity. Despite everything said so far, legitimate doubts can still be raised about the reality of an English national identity in this period. A *patria* need not equate with a national territory; the focus and awareness of »patriotic« identities and loyalties need not be instinctively regnal[109]. As the bidding prayer acknowledged, each person was involved in a multitude of relationships which imposed their own identities, and which each person would prioritise in line with immediate personal concerns and contexts. If identity derives from relationships and the creation of Benedict Anderson's imagined communities, in which external comparison produces a sense of otherness and difference from other national groups and reinforces loyalty and cohesion with one's own, then the creation of an English nation would require the creation and widespread sharing of such a sense of otherness at a national level, perhaps specifically seeing the otherness of the others as threats and challenges to the

106) Records of Convocation, XIII: York, 1313–1461, ed. by Gerald Bray, Woodbridge 2006, p. 375.
107) Swanson, Church (note 73), p. 183; Richard H. Helmholz, The Oxford History of the Laws of England, vol. 1: The Canon Law and Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction from 597 to the 1640 s, Oxford 2004, p. 177–180; William E. Lunt, Financial Relations of the Papacy with England, 1327–1534 (Publications of the Medieval Academy of America 74), Cambridge MA 1962, p. 75–168, 307–445.
108) For a version of »Lollard nationalism« see Jill C. Havens, »As Englishe is comoun langage to oure puple«. The Lollards and their imagined »English« community, in: Imagining a Medieval English Nation (note 38), p. 96–128, p. 106–107.
109) As in the loyalties discussed in Matthew L. Holford, *Pro patriotis:* »country«, »countrymen« and Local Solidarities in Late Medieval England, in: Parergon 23 (2006), p. 47–70, although these layered loyalties are not mutually exclusive. If national loyalty or identity only needs to be asserted occasionally, while nevertheless underpinned by the constancy of banal nationalism, then a lesser loyalty can become the primary expressed loyalty in the intervals between the calls to national loyalty.

Englishness of the nation. Yet how many people were aware of such otherness in late medieval England as a constant in their existence (rather than something intermittently excited in response to war or other events)? There are strong grounds for suggesting that participation in a national identity would be limited if identified in any sense other than linguistic (which itself raises problems) and possibly monarchic (which, being centred on a personified office, need not be identified as »national«). Most English people lacked real awareness and experience of a foreign »other«, although they might be aware of a propagandistic »other«. Against the ethnography of the ›Travels of Sir John Mandeville‹ – whose catalogue of other nations has the advantage that they are so distant that their otherness makes them more curiosities than rivals or threats – must be set the almost complete lack of interest in foreignness in the ›Book‹ of Margery Kempe when she describes her overseas travels. True, she mingles mainly with other groups of English speakers, and there is an undercurrent of feeling threatened by strangers; but she gives no sense of herself as a foreigner wandering through strange lands, except in her occasional mention of language difficulties[110)].

While it may be legitimate to seek a »national« identity and consciousness in late medieval England, finding and appreciating it is problematic. If people did not look outwards, and were not really aware of an »outside world«, could they then erect the boundaries to create a suitable sense of national »sameness«? »Identity« within England may often have been localised, linked to a »country« – a *patria* – which could be quite small (a radius of 15–20 miles – 24–32 kilometres – has been suggested as a standard[111)]), but could extend to a greater region perhaps defined in broader dialectic terms. Such identities were themselves invoked only intermittently, and might be seen as artificial. They were almost impossible to institutionalise, and would be affected by a host of other factors. Attempts have been made to isolate regional gentry identities in terms of »county communities«, but the validity of that category is contested[112)]. Moreover, whether, and how far, such local identities co-existed with a broader English identity has not yet been tested. The issue here is that such identities did not need regular assertion. Shared »country« identities were asserted against outsiders, and to reinforce links within localities and between strangers outside their shared »country«, and also by people who happily operated elsewhere in England but retained a sense of connection and loyalty with their native »country«. Here national and regional

110) Most readily accessible in The Travels of Sir John Mandeville, translated by Charles W. R. D. Moseley, Harmondsworth 1983, and The Book of Margery Kempe, translated by Barry A. Windeatt, Harmondsworth 1985. Recent work on the depictions of Jews in late medieval England suggests how a »propagandistic other« might be created, but some aspects of the argument are perhaps excessive: Anthony Bale, The Jew in the Medieval Book. English Antisemitisms, 1350–1500, Cambridge 2006.

111) Holford, *Pro patriotis* (note 109), p. 66.

112) Carpenter, Gentry (note 56), p. 340–380; for a response (focussing on the early fourteenth century), Peter Coss, The Origins of the English Gentry, Cambridge 2003, p. 210–215. Carpenter challenges the concept of county community, but still seems to want to construct some form of regional identity based on different foundations and networks.

identities have shared characteristics, and may indeed be constructed on similar conceptual foundations, including the regionalisation of language through dialect[113)].

The creation of a nation and the creation of a state are two different processes, with the creation of a »nation-state« something different from both. Much of Big England might be considered as a state in the early fifteenth century, essentially a dynastic state which, while dominated by England and the English, nevertheless remained a collection of distinct units[114)]. As units, their union was incomplete, and in the case of Scotland more aspirational (from the English perspective) than real. The ties were often somewhat semi-detached, with the English outside England seen as not quite as English as those of England. Nevertheless, the key point was that the components of Big England were all (somehow, even if only in imagination) attached to the kingdom of England: Gascony's attachment was not through Englishness but through dynastic loyalty reinforced (maybe driven) by a determination (which might itself be loosely termed nationalist) to resist incorporation into Valois France[115)]. As a dynastic entity, Big England was an agglomeration of parts, with no obvious limits to its potential size. From 1415, and while Polton was at Constance, it looked like it was in the process of becoming an even bigger England, as Henry V embarked on his invasion and conquest of France.

As for Little England, the kingdom of England, its statehood was undeniably more solid, if statehood is measured in terms of governmental structures and efficiency. Ideas of nation and nationhood were also strong, at least in relation to the otherness of the non-English peoples within Big England and beyond. Episodic xenophobia plays a part here. Whether banal nationalism was yet sufficiently disseminated and sufficiently adhesive and cohesive to reproduce a national identity which did not rely on an awareness of otherness to ensure its own continuation is more open to question: it is much harder to evaluate than its modern manifestations; but that it existed can certainly be argued. However, the nationwide sense of nationhood was probably still inchoate, although it would perhaps also be wrong to deny its existence, and limit late medieval Englishness to an ethnic rather than national identity. If Scotland, Wales, and Ireland are allowed nationhood – or at least the aspiration to it – on the basis of their rejection of English claims to domination, then it would be bizarre to deny nationhood to the fragment which would be left behind, England itself.

Even so, in seeking assertions of Englishness in the era of the Council of Constance, an Englishness which can be recognised as a coherent and positive manifestation of national identity, the evidence remains patchy, to some extent contradictory, and maybe insufficient. This, though, might be said of all national identities when the stridency of nationalism

113) Much of the comment in this paragraph derives from reflections stimulated by Holford, *Pro patriotis* (note 109), p. 47–70. Holford suggests that the community of the »country« has strong similarities with the nation as »imagined community«: ibid., p. 49, 61, 63.

114) Frame, Overlordship (note 39), p. 77.

115) Ibid., p. 77–81.

is removed. After all, national identity and nationhood are fluid concepts, evolving over time and space. It is a reasonable proposition, perhaps a truism, that even if a nation exists as »a real group constituted through common language, customs, association or interests«, there will still be volatility and change in how its national identity is actually constructed, making it necessary to accommodate »discontinuities, fractures, conflicts and multiple forms of national identity«[116]. That messiness in the actuality of nationhood poses problems for its analysis, and indeed for its identification.

It is time to return to Thomas Polton and his discussion of nations. Despite some ambiguity, the overall clarity of his treatment of nationhood is manifestly in a different category from the less concrete and more uncertain manifestations of awareness of national identity among the wider constituency of »the English« at this time. His assertions, made in a context of debates over status and identity, can validly be considered nationalist; they imagine a community defined through conceptualisations of nation. They need not, however, be evidence for English nationalism, if nationalism requires the conscious advocacy of an identity to be adopted by, or imposed on, the imagined nation. The specific context and motivations for Polton's intervention means that his words cannot be taken as representative, or definitive, of common contemporary English views about either England or Englishness.

Within England itself – Little England – the limited evidence is difficult to interpret accurately. In total, it does seem to suggest that there was a sense of English nationality and national identity at the turn of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which had been building for some time. That identity was amorphous, perhaps fluid, certainly imprecise, but nevertheless there. Insofar as it was not constructed on theoretical foundations, or from some of the factors which the modernist historiography of nations insists on for its own definitions, its national and nationalist quality can be challenged. Combining as it did a textual legitimation of English (even as its textual culture remained vigorously multilingual) with emphatic subjection to the crown in a quasi-constitutional structure, and integrating some features of banal nationalism alongside the belligerent evocation of otherness in warfare, it may nevertheless still be legitimate to treat this national identity as nationalist. This nationalism, however, would be a factor or phenomenon, rather than a process; an element in the collective psyche which did not have to be consciously imposed or adopted, although it might well be officially encouraged and endorsed.

The dispute over nationhood at Constance was an event within an event. In his validation of the status of Big England, the conciliar *natio*, Thomas Polton sought to secure that *natio*'s place, and the influence of Little England as one of its components, at the heart of the Church's conciliar structure. That conciliar structure evaporated when the Council of Constance itself dissolved, and the *nationes* also melted away.

116) Breuilly, Historians (note 43), p. 81.

The ending of the Council, and with it the silencing of the nations, makes the dispute over nationhood at Constance appear no more than a minor disruption or irruption in the search for ecclesiastical reunion. Yet Polton's arguments – about Big and Little England; about the relative status of *nationes principales* and *nationes particulares*; about the messages conveyed in the naming of conciliar *nationes*; and implicitly about the challenge of nation-based fragmentation for the universal Church – were not insignificant, or of short-term relevance. Polton's submission defended English interests, but his comments potentially had much wider application. As he readily acknowledged, they could be applied to each of the conciliar *nationes* – Big Germany, Big France, Big Italy, and Big Spain; although in each case the comment would apply in different ways, and might well be developed further. Just as Big England contained several components, each latently a nation, so did those other Nations. Polton's statement has been interpreted here through a specific lens, that of nationhood, and in particular English nationhood. Yet that interpretation, it might be argued, privileges an analysis which ignores the real thrust and core of Polton's concerns. At the heart of his text, Polton sought to grasp the nettle of how a Europe of Nations – which was also a Europe of nations and national churches – might be meaningfully brought together in the supranational body of the universal Church. That was not a problem which the Council of Constance actually solved; it was a problem which would become more insistent as the fifteenth century advanced.