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DURABILITY OR TRANSIENCE? ENGLISHNESS AND THE LEGACY OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND[1]

***Keywords**: Anti-Catholicism, Church of England, Elizabeth I, Englishness, Otherness, Shekhar Kapur*
***Abstract:** Whig historiography has long linked Englishness to an English Protestant church. In the face of evidence suggesting that this pillar of Englishness is shaking in the current secularising times, this article aims to explore the Church of England's contribution to the definition of Englishness by addressing the following questions: Can any elements be identified in 16th-century English culture as instrumental in the country's smooth transition to the English Reformation?; Which role did the Church of England and Protestantism play in the consolidation of English / British national identity?;Does contemporary English society still bear the imprint of the Church of England? On the assumption that "'religion' may exist outside the forms of the churches" (Robbins 82), this work presents data suggesting that England's (and even Britain's) religious heritage has left indelible traces which remain latent in the English imagiNation. Evidence will be supported by a brief analysis of Shekhar Kapur's recent Elizabeth films, which will be shown to borrow from Elizabeth's official iconography and so contribute to the dissemination of formerly hegemonic discourses.*

To Caterina

1. Introduction

In the light of Hobsbwan and Ranger's deconstruction of the notion of the eternal nation traditionally disseminated by historical discourse (Anderson), this article will look into supposedly eternal Englishness and consider whether one of its defining features, namely allegiance to the established Church of England, is just as valid today.

Whig historiography has long linked Englishness (and by extension Britishness) to four closely related elements (crown, parliament, constitution and Protestant church –Langlands 60; Kumar "'Englishness' and English National Identity" 45). There are signs, however, that such pillars of Englishness have been shaken. As far as religion goes, the Prince of Wales' famously expressed wish to become "Defender of faith" (and not "the faith") seems to erode the traditional link between the monarch and the English Church. More importantly, Catholics regularly attending Sunday services today outnumber Anglicans, most of whom only attend church on selected occasions –which Fox humorously refers to as "hatchings, matchings and dispatchings" (353).

In revisiting the connection between religion and national identity we are somehow going against the academic flow, so to speak, both in critical pedagogy and general research (Gordon and Albrecht-Crane 410). It is, therefore, our hope that this small contribution will serve to bring to the fore a connection which has most probably simply become unfashionable or politically incorrect in the current secularising times.

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This article will explore the Church of England's contribution to the definition of Englishness by addressing the following questions:

Can any elements be identified in 16th-century English culture as instrumental in the country's relatively smooth transition to the English Reformation?

Which role did the Church of England and Protestantism play in the consolidation of English/British national identity?

Does contemporary English society still bear the imprint of the Church of England?

2. Englishness and the road to the Reformation

Religious unrest was very much a fact in early 16th-century England: the Church's perceived corruption led to the resurfacing of unorthodox currents previously spread by the likes of Wycliffe and Hus (Pérez Martín 108-109). Crucially, such religious unrest has been linked to the rise of national identities in Europe (Fernández-Álvarez 199). Indeed, well before the golden age of European nationalisms (Newman 124ff), the imagined Christian community was badly eroded, particularly in England (Williamson 75), which gave rise to early instances of "patriotic fervour" (Kumar "'Englishness' and English National Identity" 45; see also Griffiths 222 and Kumar The Making of English National Identity).

The widespread anti-French and anti-Scottish feelings resulting from the 100 Years War, as well as an increasingly important Parliament, must have been instrumental in the development of an early English identity which also brought about religious consequences: the de facto limitation of the English church by royal authority at a time when most popes came precisely from France (Griffiths 208; 211; 221). Most importantly, 14th-century England was home to a devotional trend which, through the vast consumption of religious works in English (Griffiths 212), somehow paved the way for reformed beliefs. Thus, Delumeau points out three typically Protestant aspects that grew steadily among the English population well before the official break with Rome: (1) justification by faith alone; (2) universal priesthood; and (3) Biblical inerrancy (5-25; 74).

In this climate, widespread discontent with the official Church translated as equally widespread unorthodox beliefs amongst wide cross-sections of the population (Williamson 10-11); a fairly representative share of anticlericalism, a certain lack of interest in religion; atheism; and even some heresy (López-Peláez 160-161), especially visible in London, the universities and the east coast (Williamson 109), no doubt incensed by the use of the printing press (Guy 240; 242). Consequently, and here we disagree with Townson (134), it might not be a far-fetched conclusion to argue that Henry VIII, however powerful his personality, may have unconsciously acted as an agent provocateur but was not the ultimate cause of the English Reformation, since this would most likely have taken place even if no such king had ever sat on the English throne.

3. The Church of England and the consolidation of English national identity

The special circumstances described above explain why the break with Rome, ironically triggered by a conservative and essentially Catholic Henry VIII, was not really opposed by the English people. Indeed, the only visible protest against the move, the 1536 Pilgrimage of Grace, targeted Lutheran-friendly Thomas Cromwell but did not question the Act of Supremacy that had effectively beaten the Pope as Head of the English Church (Williamson 133; 146).

Under Edward VI's Protestant régime (1547-1553), the majority of the population could still be described as (unorthodox) Catholic in their beliefs (Doran 4), which accounts for the many revolts in the period (Townson 147). Mary's legitimate succession even found the support of notoriously Protestant East

Anglia (Williamson 219). Her Catholic restoration was widely welcome at first but this soon changed due to two main factors: (1) her fanaticism, which translated as some 300 Protestants burnt at the stake, and "alienated the non-partisan majority" (Williamson 239-240); and (2) her Spanish marriage: the English, later helped by John Foxe's 1563 Book of Martyrs,[2] wrongly blamed King Philip for the burnings (Williamson 226; Townson 149). Thus seen, the fanatical massacre ordered by a half-Spanish queen, under the influence of a Spanish husband, to support a foreign pope, together with Foxe's image of Protestant England as an "elect nation" (Doran 5), must have greatly determined the Elizabethan settlement.

Most of Mary's bishops refused to conform to the Protestant Elizabethan Church (Williamson 254-255; 268; Townson 152) but the vast majority of the clergy did conform. In the 1560s Catholics were still numerous (Doran 49) but this soon began to change. Thus, it has been estimated that only about one third of the population remained Catholic in the middle years of Elizabeth's reign (Mattingly 31; see also Williamson 306).[3] This may well have been due to the broad, ambiguous doctrine of the established Church, which obviously suited the non-partisan majority, as well as the lax application of measures against those who refused to conform (Townson 153).

The Armada episode proved crucial in the consolidation of a Protestant English identity. The surprising English victory left the country with a sense of tremendous achievement and hope for the future (Williamson 414), was widely interpreted as the triumph of English freedom over Spanish tyranny (Gómez-Centurión 15), and certainly demonised the Catholic cause, spreading the image that "there was nothing ungodly about the English Church" (Doran 43).

By the end of Elizabeth's reign, Catholics only represented 1 or 2% of the population (Doran 48). Several factors contributed to this situation: street preaching (López-Peláez 174); the gradual death of old Catholic priests; freedom in practice to retain some Catholic rituals in the parish church (Doran 49-50; 52); the economic interests of many in the gentry and noble classes (Mittingly 31-32).[4]

Yet the main reasons behind the success of the Elizabethan settlement seem to be different. First, it must be remembered that the majority of the population were, from the very beginning, non-partisan, and these, either Catholic or Protestant, never truly held visibly distant positions or had a truly refined theological training, all of which seems to conjure up a mix of Catholic customs and Protestant beliefs as the most accurate portrait of the lay population of the time (Delumeau 262-263). More important still was the conjunction of religious allegiance and national identity, especially in the aftermath of the Armada episode: England being threatened by Catholic powers, and most especially Spain, support of both the State and the English Church was very much seen as proof of patriotism (Townson 155). The "State's autobiographical performance" (Shapiro 84) was immediately set in motion. It is precisely in this light that we must interpret Elizabethan imagery, one of the true pillars of her régime, which, encouraging the cult of the Virgin Queen, not only fully justified the Queen's flouting of what was universally perceived as royal duty (marriage and the preservation of the dynasty) but actually presented her unorthodox behaviour as heroic (Prieto-Arranz "Images of English Purity" 116).

The nationalist approach to religion, with the monarch serving as Supreme Governor of the Church of England, was preserved with the Stuarts, and was often given artistic expression in churches throughout

[2] A first version of this book came out in 1559 (Suhamy 322), and the Protestant propaganda machinery contributed to the spread of anti-Catholic feelings even before 1563 (Álvarez Recio 97-148).

[3] Although the trend would always be for the Catholics to see their numbers dwindle, their ratio could vary substantially across the nation. Thus, the northern counties of Lancashire and Cheshire are known to have remained "largely and covertly Catholic" for many years (Howard 11).

[4] Persecutions are not included on this list since anti-Catholic measures were only strictly applied exceptionally at perceived times of crisis, especially in the years surrounding the Armada episode (Townson 153).

the country, often featuring royal imagery and thus suggesting that faith in the Protestant God and patriotism were one and the same thing (Chapman 55).

This must have also helped both the English and Scottish population accept the union of their two countries. Such an approach, best represented by the King James Bible and the English Prayer Book, last revised in 1662 (Bradley 29; 112), was the driving force behind the 1688 Glorious Revolution and the 1701 Act of Settlement, which still makes it impossible for a Catholic to succeed to the throne.

Thus, a new, Anglo-centric British identity spread in the 18th century, based on the essentially English myth of liberty, and built against the Catholic tyranny of France and Spain. Both Armada Day and Guy Fawkes' Night became popular all across Britain, and the celebration of the accession, coronation and birthday of the monarch replaced traditionally Catholic feasts (Bradley 118), all of which further linked religious and national discourses. These mediated the understanding and perception of the "foreigner." Thus, it was no coincidence that Grand Tourists visiting the "core" of European civilisation systematically left out Spain (Prieto "Does Travel Really Broaden the Mind?").

The mediality and mediation of religious and national discourses can be seen all throughout the 18th and well into the 19th century in at least two ways (Bradley 106): (1) the use of caricatures both to ridicule Popery (Bradley 106) and to represent Englishness/Britishness, epitomised by the down-to-earth, liberty-loving figure of John Bull (Bradley 125); and (2) the cult of the virgin-like Britannia as the mother of the nation, which reached its peak in the 18th and 19th centuries (Bradley 76-77). Eventually, the religious association of liberty and Englishness/Britishness even reached the fields of music and literature. Examples include Wordsworth's writing on "the flood of British freedom" or the ever popular "Rule Britannia" (1740), but also the far more recent "Land of Hope and Glory" (1902) or "There'll Always be an England" (1939) (Bradley 101-102; 120; 125).

By the end of the 19th century, the Bishop of London saw the Church of England as "the church of free men," whereas the Catholic Church was "the church of decadent peoples" (Robbins 89). However, the number of Catholics grew steadily throughout the 19th century, mostly due to Irish immigration. This was resented not only by the Anglican hierarchy but also by the "old" British Catholic minority (Robbins 88), which seems to indicate that even this subgroup fell prey to the very discourses that identified them as the epitome of Otherness.

Protestant church attendance begins to decline in the late Victorian era, especially in the large urban centres, and the trend continues in the Edwardian period (Robbins 119-121). The Daily News published in 1902-3 that "in the London area only about two persons in eleven attended church or chapel." Yet former religious and national discourses were still hegemonic. On the occasion of the 1906 engagement of Princess Victoria Eugenie to Spanish King Alfonso XIII, the Daily Chronicle voiced and supported the Archbishop of Canterbury's contempt at the future queen's conversion to the Catholic faith. Only two years later, the British Government aborted a Catholic procession in London. Lootings and violence were used in Liverpool in 1909 to prevent Catholics from moving into certain districts. Early British supporters of a union of European countries in the interwar years were panned by the Academia and suspected of Roman Catholicism (Robbins 33; 125-126).

Not surprisingly, religious and national discourses explicitly merged again in the context of World War II. For Churchill, "the survival of Christian civilization" depended on the outcome of the Battle of Britain. Lionel Curtis's Civitas Dei: The Commonwealth of God (1938) resuscitated England/Britain as the champion of Christian freedom, asking "Who, indeed, would wish to have lived in the days of [...] the Armada, [...] rather than here in England today [...]?" And even George Orwell encouraged fellow Britons "to be the children of God" although he must have sensed that something was changing since for him "the God of the Prayer Book no longer exists" (Robbins 195; 199; 213).

3. The legacy of the Church of England

Only a tiny minority of Church of England followers regularly attend religious services today. Active religious participation remains stronger among Catholics but seems to depend on new Britons. In London, black churchgoers outnumber whites any Sunday and African Caribbean churches have seen attendance double in the last two decades or so. And yet some three quarters of the British population would still consider themselves Christian (Bradley 16-17; 174-175). In England, evidence suggests that the Church of England still plays an important yet loose role in the identity of a sizeable majority.

In the context of English secularisation Robbins reminds us that "'religion' may exist outside the forms of the churches" (82). The data presented in this article suggest that England's (and even Britain's) religious heritage has left indelible traces which remain latent in the English imagiNation. An article in The Times as recently as 1980 stated that, should the Prince of Wales decide to marry a Catholic, a sizeable minority in both England and Wales might object to it, and that the vast majority simply hoped "that the matter should not be raised" (Robbins 1993: 85). This is not likely to be put to the test in the near future since, as we all know, the Prince of Wales did not marry a Catholic, but we can still try another research path which can only be outlined here, and this is the analysis of British historical films since, as James Chapman puts it, these are "as much about the present in which they are made as they are about [the] past in which they are set" (319).

We will focus here on two recent productions, namely Shekhar Kapur's 1998 Elizabeth and 2007 Elizabeth: The Golden Age, which shall be summarily analysed following Giroux's critical methodology guidelines, in an attempt to "historize them" and so foster "sane historical sense" (1994: 120).

By the end of Elizabeth I's reign, her reputation as "good Queen Bess" had already been established (Loades 101). Today, thanks to film and TV representations of Elizabeth's life, this particular English queen seems to have the same heroinic resonance. Equally important is the positive –almost hagiographical- view of the last of the Tudor monarchs. Indeed, after William Camden's "strange chronicles" of the Elizabethan period, probably designed to help consolidate the figure of the never-too-popular James I (Collinson 475-476), later authors would set the trend for what Rushton would call the "Whiggish" version of English history, presenting Elizabeth as a "Protestant paragon" and a "national heroine" (Collinson 479). This, however, started during Elizabeth's reign, with the Queen controlling an official iconographic discourse which will prove essential to the analysis of Kapur's Elizabeth productions.[5] These must be seen as part of an incredibly large set of Tudor-themed British costume dramas, which suggests that the English 16th century

[5] As suggested above, the characters of Gloriana, Good Queen Bess or the Virgin Queen all came to life during Elizabeth's reign, being sanctioned by the Queen herself and widely disseminated through various means. One of these, namely her official portraiture, will be central to our discussion (see Prieto-Arranz "Images of English Purity" for a full discussion of Elizabeth as an early case of mass mediation). Indeed, many of her portraits, especially those produced in the latter half of her reign, were highly symbolical and greatly contributed to the building of her myth (Strong). Kapur's films crucially resort to Elizabeth's official iconography and use it in various ways. Thus, her "Coronation Portrait," with a young Elizabeth represented as the personification of Virtue, Magnanimity and, most significantly, the sun-dressed woman from the *Book of Revelation* (Álvarez Recio 97-99), props the coronation scene in *Elizabeth*. Elizabeth's official iconography would gradually evolve to represent her as an ageless virgin goddess upon whose virtue the nation's welfare rested. Especially representative is her "Armada Portrait," which presents her as the commander of the winds that destroyed the Spanish fleet. This portrait clearly inspires *Elizabeth*'s closing transfiguration scene and its message is verbalised in *The Golden Age*'s scene with the Spanish ambassador: "I, too, can command the wind, sir! I have a hurricane in me that will strip Spain bare if you dare to try me." Such borrowings are especially evident in *The Golden Age*: the supernatural connotations of the "Ditchley Portrait" are used in the battle preparation scene; finally, the "Rainbow Portrait" hangs over Walsingham's deathbed, clearly replacing Marian imagery, and is cleverly brought to life by a trick of the camera.

occupies a special position in the English imagiNation. The special relevance of the mock-Tudor(bethan) style (Duncan 41) in what Anderson and Gale would call British (or British-influenced) "cultural geography" further strengthens this argument.

Kapur's Elizabeths are very much about the opposition between (tyrannical, irrational, bigoted, foreign) Catholicism and (liberty-loving, rational, tolerant, Church of England) Protestantism. This is of course not a fight between equals and so the narration clearly sides with the latter. This is shown both verbally and, especially, non-verbally, mainly through the use of colour and light.

Both films could be said to have a parallel thematic structure, even if the time setting is slightly different – the first film is set in the years immediately before and after Elizabeth's accession, and the second in the years immediately before and after the Armada episode. In both cases, the same technique is used to set up the discursive framework required for the audience to interpret the film. The opening is a syncretic sequence in which verbality prevails against a background of dramatic images. This opening is then followed by a first scene exposing what is presented as the Catholic/Spanish threat: a hyper-realistic portrayal of the infamous Marian burnings in Elizabeth, the gloomy figure of Philip II of Spain in an Byzantine-looking church boastfully claiming that "God has spoken to [him]" in The Golden Age.

Both films develop along rather similar lines, with thriller plots loosely based on historical facts around one central issue: the fight between good and evil, virtue and corruption, England and the foreign world, Elizabeth and Mary (in Elizabeth) or Philip (in The Golden Age). This is largely achieved visually. The palace that grotesque, histrionic Mary inhabits is gloomy and dark, somehow signalling her forthcoming death. Spaniards invariably cover their dark flesh in threatening black. Oppression and darkness dominate the grand Escorial interiors, the Spanish king's sumptuous residence, while his church is orientalised with Byzantine features and dense incense smoke. Always dressed in black, rosary beads in his hands, Jordi Mollà's performance as Philip II can only be taken as a degrading caricature. Philip must have been around 60 when the action takes place, and young Mollà's creaky little voice and walking antics succeed in turning what should have been the portrayal of an old aged man into an utterly ridiculous human being.

On the other hand, colour and light are always present around Elizabeth, clearly pointing to life, passion and utter joy. Very much like Philip, Elizabeth is played by a youthful Cate Blanchett (Elizabeth was in her mid 50s in 1588) although this serves the opposite purpose, creating a sense of majesty and godliness clearly borrowed from the "white mask of youth" used in her official iconography. Even more interesting is the films' use of light, invariably signalling reason, purity, tolerance and divine protection (Dyer). This is clearly seen in Elizabeth's proclamation, coronation, and Reformation Bill Parliament scenes (Chapman 313).

After similar climaxes (the crushing of Norfolk's rebellion in Elizabeth, the defeat of the Armada in The Golden Age), both films also feature similar endings. In the former, a transfigured Elizabeth emerges in her throne room as Gloriana, in a white version of the Armada portrait dress, as she solemnly declares: "[...] I have become a virgin" – clearly pointing to the constructed nature of her virginity but also to the ultimate sacrifice she is making. "[...] I am married to England." In The Golden Age, the Armada fiasco is largely portrayed as an army of crosses and rosaries drowning in the sea, out of which a mystically transfigured, statuesque Elizabeth emerges victorious. Her transfixed expression, open hands and aura, reminiscent of her Virgin Queen persona, inevitably remind the viewer of Catholic iconography. Gloriana has not defeated the Virgin Mary. Both have merged, the film suggests.

Concluding remarks

This article has tentatively explored the Church of England's contribution to English and, to a lesser extent, British national identity discourses. Thus, it has been argued that the English Reformation, rather than

the product of improvisation by a megalomaniac sovereign was, like so many other historical events, the natural consequence of the discursive context that defined English society at the time.

Secondly, evidence has been provided that religious and national discourses in England (and later Britain) clearly merged from the late 16th century onwards, thus clearly influencing the perception that the English had of themselves but also of Other nations.

Finally, it has been suggested that, even if England seems to be no exception to the secularisation that by and large characterises much of Western Europe, there is still evidence that hints that formerly hegemonic discourses are still being disseminated today. This is indeed a tentative conclusion that can be reached through a preliminary analysis of Kapur's Elizabeth films, which have been shown to borrow heavily from Whig historiography and even Elizabeth's own official iconography. Although this would most certainly need expanding, what we are suggesting here is that the merger of religious and national identity discourses in the country, which, far from transient, seems to remain remarkably durable, might well be a good starting point for a thorough analysis of the image of Spain and the Spanish disseminated by discourses currently in force in England and perhaps the whole of the UK.

Future research could therefore explore the role of the British monarch as a powerful "icon of affinity" (Ward 14) in both his/her religious and national dimensions, as well as the perpetuation of related discourses in the media outside the world of fiction –the Armada is indeed a widely used image to refer to Spain's potential threats to British interests, be it in the field of sports (especially tennis or football) or economics, as has been recently seen through the reactions to Iberia's forthcoming merger with British Airways.

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