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Scottish Power

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Most people from Scotland, to varying degrees, tend to identify themselves as Scottish and/or British. For personal reasons (and we're all products of our past, as well as, hopefully, visionaries of our futures) I've always felt a strong emotional connection to both.

Like many Scots, I grew up saturated in something I assumed to be 'Britishness', and I loved it. I was personally liberated by the welfare state, specifically the Butler Education Act. This meant that my college fees would be paid in full by the state, and I would also receive a full grant, which amounted to two-thirds of my dad's wages.

But as post- (military) imperial, welfare-state Britain declined, what I've also learnt, and, like many Scots, am constantly having reinforced, is that a lot of what I believed to be 'Britishness' was really just another term for 'Englishness'. This English appropriation of Britishness, what the cultural theorist Stuart Hall calls "an assumed Englishness, which always negotiates against difference", is now a powerful hegemonic force, which serves this state. In the past, when that 'Britishness' was formed by imperial and industrial expansion, and the esprit de corps engendered by the First and Second World Wars and the creation of a welfare state, it was largely an inclusive concept. Then, this 'assumed Englishness' was only a minor irritant to Scots. In the context of these islands now being a 'sales territory' in a globalised, monolithic, neo-liberal economic order, it becomes a far more sinister, inherently marginalising force.

So my main contention; the problem for both Scotland and England is not so much an inherent cultural assumption of the movable feast that is 'Britishness', but this within the context of the UK as a political state, formed on imperialist, hegemonic structures. This state has stopped England from pursuing its main mission, namely to build an inclusive, post-imperial, multiracial society, by forcing it to engage with the totally irrelevant (from an English perspective) distractions of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. From the viewpoint of the Scots, it has foisted 35 years of a destructive neo-liberalism upon us, and prevented us from becoming the European social democracy we are politically inclined to be.

Therefore I'm advancing another proposition: political separation could promote the cultural unity that the UK state, in its current form, with its notions of 'assumed Englishness', is constantly undermining. Despite the shallow flag-waving by social engineers in government and sections of the media, who tried to turn it into a bread-and-circuses propaganda event, the Olympics were the best expression of inclusive Britishness we've had for decades. Danny Boyle, in a couple of hours, did more to assert democratic socialist values over neo-liberalism than the UK Labour Party has managed to do in almost 40 years. But it was also nostalgic; it mirrored not just what many of us still aspire to, it showed us what we have to accept we've irredeemably lost. But I cheered just as ecstatically when Brad Wiggins crossed the line as

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when Chris Hoy did, and plenty other Scots I know did too. So post-UK, why not, for example, just keep the British Olympic team?

If we rid ourselves of the political imperialist baggage of the UK state, new possibilities emerge. For example, it would become feasible for Ireland, as an established sovereign nation, to see itself as part of a shared geographical and cultural entity. This, in turn, brings potential opportunities for the continued development of the peace process in Northern Ireland. The idea of the political independence of England and Scotland leading to conflict, hatred and distrust is the mindset of opportunistic status-quo fearmongers and gloomy nationalist fantasists stuck in a Bannockburn-Culloden time warp, and deeply insulting to the people of both countries. Swedes, Norwegians and Danes remain on amicable terms; they trade, co-operate and visit each other socially any time they like. They don't need a pompous, blustering state called Scandinavia, informing them from Stockholm how wonderful they all are, but (kind of) only really meaning Sweden.

Getting rid of the UK state won't instantly redress the massive inequities, but it will allow the constituent countries the opportunities to put their divergent houses in order. And I believe it will permit an inclusive, respectful sense of true British identity to emerge, based on shared cultural values, rather than disparate political ideals flimsily held together around the shabby worship of an exploitative hierarchy. Better together? Yes, certainly, but better independent and free together.