Conclusion: towards integration and comparison?

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A volume on so vast a topic as that of the diasporas forged by the peoples of the British and Irish Isles has no claim to being exhaustive. It patently cannot be a final word. What we, the editors and authors of this collection, hope, however, is that what is presented here is an integrated and focused assessment that will stimulate further work. We certainly hope to see still greater interrogation of labels and concepts. As historians, we must seek always for new empirical evidence with which to unite the theory. Collectively, the contributions to this volume throw up a number of areas in particular that merit further exploration, and we want to highlight these here to conclude.

The first striking point worth noting is the similarity we have seen between the groups examined in this volume. Welsh scholars have long recognised the unity of purposes which linked Cornish and Welsh, but English or British scholars might pay more attention and explore further the extent of similarity and difference among British diaspora groups. The well-established understanding of Irish religion émigrés or of Scots Jacobite flight must also be enhanced with as clear an understanding of English religious exile, beyond the migration of the Puritans who established Massachusetts. English Catholics also fled persecution. Examining the extent of uniformity in diaspora behaviours and responses – a uniformity that exists in part because of an underpinning thread of Britishness and imperial connectedness – will enhance further our understanding of what was genuinely British about the diaspora, and what is best examined at a sub-national level. However, this will only happen if we understand that the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries cannot be shoehorned into modernist models which apply to the age of imperialism and nationalism.

Interestingly, even groups that were less strongly linked, such as Irish and Welsh migrants, bore many similar characteristics. That this was the

case even though they were often divided by religion and often were at odds with each other in the new communities in which they had settled deserves further scrutiny. Language bound them, as did global celebrations of national culture: omnipresent Eisteddfodau and globalised St Patrick's Day events being cases in point. These cultural markers also were shared with the Scots, whose literature, music and sports became features of new community life. Likewise, national figureheads served as important anchors for many groups. The worldwide celebration of Burns had striking Scottish inflexions, while Shakespeare's tercentenary (1916) was effectively owned by all cultured people, not merely an English diasporic offshoot. The wider appeal and focus of activities that are, at the outset, overtly ethnic and rooted strongly in old homeland culture is something that also needs to be examined more. While recent advances in the history of ethnic associations have gone some way to improve understanding of the ethnic and civic interstices in diaspora communities, more can be done to untangle these activities. In particular, a glaring gap remains in the absence of a study that examines the role of churches as associations not only for religious purposes, but rather also ethnic ones.

Beyond questions of similar diaspora behaviour and analysis of the ethno-cultural practices of migrants and ethnic associational life, a plethora of unploughed research fields remain, especially in what we might suitably call diaspora politics. Particularly pertinent and timely are questions concentrating on nationalism and identity politics. While we see no nationalism emanating from the British Isles that had the power of the Irish cause as evinced in Irish America, it would be wrong to assume there was no diasporic role in homeland politics among the Scots or the Welsh. Indeed, with the Welsh language under threat at home, Welsh-language culture in the diaspora – which endured to the 1960s in Argentina for example – offers a very clear indication of the diasporic nature of, at least, a form of cultural nationalism. Further north, Scotland provides more recent examples of a new type of cultural nationalism, one that expressly seeks to connect the diaspora with the old homeland around a national agenda channelled through culture and framed by a newly buoyant Scottish national consciousness. The 2009 and 2014 Homecoming Scotland programmes provide the clearest example. Yet, in England now too identity politics are at the forefront, for bound up in the issue of Brexit is also the question of England's place in the world and what it means to be English.

Finally, the contributions in this volume have had it as a central theme to explore what actually makes a diaspora. Authors have engaged with this question in different ways, but what we want to highlight as we conclude is that more needs to be done for one particular aspect: the question of smaller, sub-national diasporas. Thus, here, the Cornish serve as a case

in point to illustrate the value and importance of an examination that transcends the national level. It is through the probing of links, historical and contemporary, at the level below the nation that a new richness can be revealed that significantly enhances our understanding of British and Irish diasporic behaviours and characteristics. We hope that this volume has gone some way towards facilitating further exactly that.