Chapter 6
In Search of Identity: Terms Related to Emerging American Nationalism during the 1760s and 1770s

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Introduction

The relationship between a mother country and its colony is generally considered problematic. From the perspective of the mother country, financial gain from the colony has often played an important role. For colonies, a restraining feature is usually the fact that real decisions are made elsewhere, and the colony has only executive power. The mutual relationship between Britain and its rapidly grown American colonies is a good example of this. The colonies were a mosaic shaped on the basis of how the colony came into being and what were the local circumstances, until their relationship to the mother country changed during a special time period in the 1760s and 1770s and they became more united.[1]

The rebellion of the thirteen colonies led to the Revolutionary War and, eventually, to the declaration of independence in 1776. At that time the newly born state was not like any other known nation. The inhabitants had to define themselves as other than subjects of the British Crown. This transformation process of national identity from British colonists into American citizens was slow and it had already begun before the declaration of independence.[2]

Despite the fact that the leading figures in the rebellion could easily change their allegiance from the King to the new nation, the idea of national community in the thirteen British colonies was unfamiliar for the majority of the ordinary people.[3] In this chapter it is examined how the national identity of the colonists evolved during the 1760s and 1770s and

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1 Rogan Kersh, *Dreams of a More Perfect Union* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 24–26, 52–53, ProQuest Ebrary.

2 Elise Marienstras, "Nationality and Citizenship," In *A Companion to the American Revolution*, edited by Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 680–82, https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470756454.ch86.

3 Marienstras, "Nationality," 682.

what kind of terminology the colonists used in relation to British or American identity. This subject has been previously studied using material from newspapers,[4] but in this chapter it will be approached by using letters as primary material.

Historical Background

The original thirteen colonies belonging to Britain on the east coast of North America were Virginia, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maryland, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Delaware, North Carolina, South Carolina, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Georgia. The relationship between Britain and its American colonies became increasingly strained when people living in England noticed that there was a difference in taxes between Britain and its American colonies.[5]

When the French and Indian War ended in 1763 it was felt that the colonies should, in turn, help in maintaining the empire by paying more taxes, as costs of the war had been great, and the British considered that they had helped the colonists during the war. Several strict laws were passed, and taxes raised concerning the American colonies in the 1760s and 1770s and these were also more vigorously enforced. Many colonists started to feel distant to the mother country, and this started to bind the colonists together in the thirteen different colonies. Acts, due to which the colonists' nationalistic mentality grew stronger, were, in particular, the Stamp Act in 1765, the Townshend Acts in 1767, the Tea Act in 1773, and the Coercive Acts in 1774.[6]

The colonial situation became a major political theme in England for two decades from the early 1760s onwards. The Parliament in Britain had divergent views on the colonial situation. In America, those who defended

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4 Emma Florio, "The Problematic Search for an Emerging American Identity before the Revolution: An Analysis of Colonial Newspapers and Secondary Literature," Honors Projects, Paper 49 (Bloomington: Illinois Wesleyan University, 2013), http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/history_honproj/49/, accessed December 2, 2019; Richard L. Merritt, *Symbols of American Community, 1735–1775* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966); Alexander Ziegler, "From Colonies to Nation: The Emergence of American Nationalism, 1750–1800," *Chrestomathy: College of Charleston's Journal* 5 (2006): 347–75, http://chrestomathy.cofc.edu/documents/vol5/ziegler.pdf, accessed December 2, 2019.

5 James I. Clark and Robert V. Remini, *We the People: A History of the United States*, vol. 1. (Beverly Hills, CA: Glencoe Press, 1975), 53, 111.

6 Clark and Remini, *History*, 111, 125–128.

the rights of the colonies contacted a faction of Whig politicians called the Rockinghamites in Britain, as they understood the views of the colonists.[7]

It is said that the leader of the Rockinghamites, politician Charles Watson–Wentworth, Second Marquess of Rockingham, was the best-informed politician in Europe concerning the situation of the colonies, which is why the material of this chapter consists of ten letters written from the American colonies to Watson–Wentworth in Britain. Watson–Wentworth was a prominent British Whig statesman, and he served two terms as Prime Minister of Great Britain. Some of the letters he received conveyed information, and some were clearly petition letters for favouring certain causes against English oppression. The Rockinghamites could exploit this information in political comments and discussions and ended up supporting the independence of the American colonies.[8] The breach between the colonies and the mother country led to Revolutionary War which began in 1775 and to the Declaration of Independence in 1776. However, it was only in 1783 when Britain acknowledged the independence of the United States.

National Identity

Identity can, of course, be defined as people's sense of who they are. According to John E. Joseph a person's identity consists of two basic aspects: their name, which separates them from other people, and something which does not have a specific term, something that is abstract and lies deeper than the name, constituting the person's real being. Joseph identifies three pairs of subtypes regarding personal identity: "one for real people and one for fictional characters; one for oneself and one for others; one for individuals and one for groups."[9]

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7 Marjorie Bloy, "Rockingham and Yorkshire: The Political, Economic and Social Role of Charles Watson–Wentworth, the second Marquis of Rockingham," PhD Dissertation (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1986), 381, http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/3012/1/DX081949.pdf, accessed December 2, 2019; Michelle Nam, "The Whig Ideology's Influence on American Politics," Honors Thesis (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2013), 10, 39–40, https://baylor-ir.tdl.org/handle/2104/8699, accessed December 2, 2019.

8 Bloy, "Rockingham," 385–86; Nam, "Whig," 17, 20–22.

9 John E. Joseph, *Language and Identity: National, Ethnic, Religious* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 3–4, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230503427.

There is a clear difference between individual identity and the identity of a group, for example that of a nation. Group identities, like *American*, are more meaningful than the names of people. In addition to the fact that they indicate certain persons, they also express something more significant about them. However, the difference between these is not so simple. A person's so called *deep* personal identity partly consists of the various group identities into which one stakes a claim, but people still like to believe that they are more than just the sum of these parts.[10]

Joseph considers group identities to be more abstract than individual identities, as they do not exist separately from the people possessing that group identity. Moreover, it is common that the most concrete group identity manifests itself in a single, symbolic individual. It is also useful to acknowledge that even though the group identities adopted by individuals makes it clearer for them to sense who they are, there is a possibility that these identities smother the real self. Individual identity is partly established by rank which is relative to other people sharing the same group identity. Thus, there is tension between these two types of identities and that "gives the overall concept of identity much of its power."[11] It can be stated that there are *repertoires* of identities that individuals feel they possess themselves and that others possess for them. Moreover, identities are not *natural facts* about us, they need to be constructed. Therefore, identity does not remain stable throughout one's life.[12]

Several scholars agree that nation is also a mental construct.[13] According to Max Savelle,[14] the nation is both real and nonetheless non-existing, it is a mental construct, a concept only in the minds of several people. Initially, national identity, for example *American*, exists only as a desire. If the motivation is great enough, people sharing this same desire can become a critical mass in the putative nation. That is when the concept or category, like *American people*, becomes real.[15]

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10 Joseph, *Language*, 4–5.
11 Joseph, 5.
12 Joseph, 6, 9.
13 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd edition (London and New York: Verso, 1991); Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964); Max Savelle, "Nationalism and Other Loyalties in the American Revolution," *The American Historical Review* 67, no. 4 (1962): 901–23, https://doi.org/10.2307/1845245.
14 Savelle, *American* 67, 901–02.
15 Joseph, *Language*, 106.

Benedict Anderson's conception of defining the nation as "an imagined political community"[16] has been influential. It is imagined as the members of this nation will never know most of the other members, but the image of their unity lives in their minds. Ernest Gellner's statement is in agreement with Anderson's definition when Gellner states that "[n]ationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist."[17] Its invention, however, needs to be forgotten. In order to the nation not be perceived artificial, it is essential to create a belief that the nation, in fact, has not been invented.[18]

The Emergence of American National Identity

In eighteenth-century North America the determination of one's nationality might have changed and for many people it may have been a complicated and protracted process. The majority of the first colonists were previously citizens of Great Britain. The inhabitants of the American colonies were loyal to the King of England a long time after they arrived on the American continent. As they, too, were royal subjects, they expected to have similar rights to other British subjects.[19]

Thus, as mentioned previously, the colonists were against the numeral laws and acts which were imposed only on the colonies by the Parliament in Britain. A number of colonists felt that they were singled out from British subjects who were living in Britain. Even though many writers both in the colonies and in Britain continued to refer to the colonists as 'His Majesty's subjects', a distinction had been made by the Parliament and it changed the way the colonists saw themselves and their place in the empire.[20] The process of nation-building in America was slow, and it had begun long before the Revolutionary War. According to Richard Merritt, even though the rise of American nationalism was a slow and gradual process, there were certain periods during which the development was more rapid.[21]

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16 Anderson, *Imagined*, 5–6.
17 Gellner, *Thought*, 169.
18 Joseph, *Language*, 115.
19 Florio, "Problematic," 3, 25–26.
20 Florio, 3, 25–26.
21 Richard L. Merritt, "Nation-building in America: The Colonial Years," in *Nation Building*, edited by Karl W. Deutsch and William J. Foltz (New York: Atherton, 1963), 70.

Jon Butler states that the colonies were anglicised in the first half of the eighteenth century, as there were advancements in communication and transportation, leading to easier access to British goods and culture for the colonists.[22] Alan Taylor also points out that a threefold increase in ships crossing the Atlantic between the years 1670 and 1730 provided a strong sense of unity with Britain as the ships carried people, information and goods between the colonies and the mother country.[23]

However, there was also *americanisation* occurring in the colonies. The colonists supported local craftsmen and artisans, which were growing in numbers, by using their new economic strength.[24] Therefore, it can be stated that the colonists began to have a stronger sense of themselves as being distinct people, who wanted to be self-sustaining and focus some of their attention on their own society, while, at the same time, being strongly influenced by the mother country.

In newspapers both colonial and British writers referred to the colonists as a collective group of people, separate from their fellow subjects in Britain.[25] The colonial writers did this mainly to take a stand against the violations of the rights made by Parliament and to symbolically include all colonists in their fight against British rule. Notwithstanding the fact that the colonists were referred to as a unified group, the writers still had many different terms with which to describe them.[26]

Some scholars believe that right up until the Revolution the colonists were still loyal to Britain and the King. Several scholars suggest that the American nation was born within the quarter century from 1750–1775.[27] Therefore, loyalty to the King existed at the same time as a growing sense of a separate identity and desire for independence.[28]

Negative feelings from both sides began to increase after the French and Indian War, which ended in 1763. During the war many soldiers from Britain and the colonies encountered each other for the first time and found that they were, in fact, quite different and even disagreeable. At this

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22 Jon Butler, *Becoming America: The Revolution before 1776* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 154.
23 Alan Taylor, *American Colonies: The Settling of North America* (New York: Penguin, 2001), as cited in Florio, "Analysis," 4.
24 Butler, *Becoming*, 156.
25 Florio, "Analysis," 12–13.
26 Florio, 10.
27 Ziegler, "Colonies," 348.
28 Brendan McConville, *The King's Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688–1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 286.

time the British also needed to do some adjustments in their administration and began to raise taxes in the colonies to cover for example the war expenses. Thus, the tension between the colonists and the British government, Parliament and the King's ministers in particular, had already increased a decade before the Revolution. A distinct identity was certainly developing, but at that time they were not ready to break with Britain and the King.[29]

The next example is from the material of this chapter, from a letter sent from Philadelphia on May 14, 1774:

> The people of Pennsylvania, my Lord, are accustomed to look upon all the manoeuvres of the inhabitants of New England with a jealous eye: But the Cause in which they are at present so deeply engaged is considered as a general one, & the maxim throughout the colonies is – we stand or fall together.[30]

The sentence in the previous example relates to the controversies between Britain and the colonies. The writer of the letter, reverend Thomas Coombe, acknowledges that there are differences between the colonies, but states that there is a common cause and that they are united.

Even in the beginning of the 1770s the Revolution was not inevitable. The actions of the Parliament in Britain created a common enemy for the colonists, but they were still only protesting against certain issues and not creating a single American identity. The colonists had also other difficulties in forming a unified identity, in addition to their challenging relationship with Britain.[31]

According to Emma Florio[32], it would be simple to state that the colonists probably felt more and more "American" as the 1770s progressed, but the loyalists, who were great in number, must also be taken into account. If the colonists had a larger sense of community, it was more often as a British subject, or within the city, region, or colony in which they lived than as an "American."

Furthermore, it is often thought that a colonist either had an American or a British identity, but it should be taken into consideration that people living in the colonies had come from several European countries. There were large numbers of people living in frontier areas who did not feel

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29 Florio, "Analysis," 5–6, 16.
30 WWM/R/1/1489, Letter from Rev. Thomas Coombe, Philadelphia, to Rockingham, 14 May 1774.
31 Florio, "Analysis," 6, 8–10.
32 Florio, 10.

bonded with other colonists and did not have a sense of identity as a British subject or as an American.[33]

There were different circumstances socially, economically, and politically in each colony. Moreover, as stated in the previous paragraph, ethnic diversity was quite significant. On top of this, the land area was extremely vast, and the colonists did not have the need or even means to interact with other people outside their own colony. Gradually, however, the differences became less noticeable as the colonies became more and more similar.[34] However, Florio reminds that while the economic and social conditions became more similar, the colonists might not have been aware of that.[35] Therefore, even though their lives were not that different, the colonists may not have had a connection ideologically.

Slowly these intercolonial communications increased. The gradual unity of the colonies can be noticed in a letter which is included in the material of this chapter: "our People are imbolden'd – Add to this they are all United – Every man inspirits his neighbor and Colonies echo to Colonies. We are Englishmen and will be free"[36]. This letter has been sent from New York on November 8, 1765. As can be noticed from this example, some writers refer to the colonists as Englishmen, usually in connection to their rights as Englishmen.

At some point, however, the colonists started to identify themselves as American and not as British, which can be referred to as the emergence of American national identity. It was not a natural process or bound to happen at some point. As it was a collective imagining of a new identity by a great number of people, there must have been forces that encouraged people to think of themselves as American.[37]

A breaking point was in 1775 when the Revolutionary War began from the battle of Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775. It seems to be the date on which Great Britain officially became the enemy of many American colonists.[38] According to Alexander Ziegler,[39] 1775 appears to be the

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33 Florio, 6, 16.
34 Florio, 6–7; Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 171–74.
35 Florio, "Analysis," 8.
36 WWM/R/1/522, Letter from Governor Thomas Boone, New York, to Rockingham, November 8, 1765.
37 Ziegler, "Colonies," 347.
38 Ziegler, 353, 361.
39 Ziegler, 361–362.

jumping off point for an emerging sense of American identity. When the colonists had distanced themselves enough from the mother country, a group of select men declared the colonies independent in 1776.[40]

Recent Studies

As mentioned in the introduction, some scholars have examined the development of American national identity in newspapers published in the American colonies. Two most recent studies are Ziegler's and Florio's articles written in 2006 and 2013, respectively. The goal of both of these studies was to detect the emergence of American national identity as evidenced by the language used in newspapers in the latter part of the eighteenth century.[41]

From 1750 to 1775 Ziegler focused on the South Carolina Gazette, which was published in Charleston. After 1775 he read other Charleston newspapers until 1800. In order to analyse the content of the newspapers, Ziegler formulated a list of terms for which he would search for in the newspapers during his research. This list consists of two groups: *British identity*, containing words or phrases supportive of British culture and their control over the colonies, and *American identity*, containing words or phrases supportive of a new American culture and freedom from the British rule.[42]

Based on his findings, Ziegler states that the American nation was not established at a specific moment in the minds of the colonists. The growing of American national identity was a gradual process, but Ziegler identifies 1775 as a breaking point and from 1785 their identity started to spread more rapidly.[43]

Florio examined what kind of words were used to describe the colonists (for example *Americans* or *British subjects*) in order to find out how they were viewed and how the colonists viewed themselves. Florio looked at three newspapers, *The Boston Post-Boy*, *The Boston Gazette*, and the *Georgia Gazette*, at three different periods: 1765–1766, 1769, and 1773–1774. These years were chosen as they are set between the end of the French and Indian War and the beginning of the Revolution, and thus provide a good range.

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40 Florio, "Analysis," 3.
41 Ziegler, "Colonies"; Florio, "Analysis."
42 Ziegler, "Colonies," 353.
43 Ziegler, 367–68.

These years also depict the political atmosphere in the colonies with 1769 being a relatively quiet year and the other two periods more turbulent with the stamp duties in 1765–1766 and more concrete rebellion in 1773–1774, for example the Boston Tea Party and its aftermath.[44]

Florio suggests that despite the fact that many secondary sources state all colonists had a clear idea of themselves as being a single group of people, this was, in fact, not the case. According to Florio, neither the colonists nor people in Britain could identify the colonists as a group with a clearly distinct identity. Throughout the time period from 1765 to 1774, there were several terms in use when referring to the colonists. The colonists did have a steadily increasing sense of a distinct identity, and the term *American* is more widely used by the 1770s, but it cannot be stated that a single colonial identity existed prior to the Revolution.[45]

In addition, Rogan Kersh has studied the development of separate colonies into united colonies which functioned more clearly together, and eventually, the development into the United States. In Kersh's study this development culminates in the years 1775–1776 and it is clearly seen rhetorically as well.[46]

Material and Methods

Using newspapers as material was justified by Ziegler by a statement that the rise of the American national identity was driven by the colonial elites as they were the ones who had the tools for print communication.[47] Many other scholars have also underlined the importance of newspapers and the press in bringing the colonists together before the Revolution. Pauline Maier reminds, however, that the majority of the colonists might not have had access to these newspapers.[48]

It is therefore interesting to examine the development of American national identity in letter material. The material for this chapter consists of ten letters belonging to an archival collection called *Wentworth Woodhouse Muniments: Papers of Charles Watson–Wentworth*, held in the Sheffield City

44 Florio, "Analysis," 9–10.
45 Florio, 32–33.
46 Kersh, *Dreams*, 52–57.
47 Ziegler, "Colonies," 349–50.
48 Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765–1776* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971) as cited in Florio, "Analysis," 7.

Archives. The letters are mainly unedited. One letter has been printed in the first volume of *Memoirs of the Marquis of Rockingham and his contemporaries* by George Thomas Keppel[49] and one letter has been partly edited and published in the second volume of *Memoirs of the Marquis of Rockingham and his contemporaries*.[50]

The letters have been sent from the American colonies to Watson–Wentworth in Britain during the 1760s and 1770s. Four of these letters are from the latter half of the 1760s and six are from the first half of the 1770s. Six of the letters are from New York and two from Philadelphia. One letter has been generally marked "North America" and in one letter the place from where it has been sent is not mentioned. However, from the contents it can be deduced that it is from North America, possibly from Providence, Rhode Island.

Two of the letters have been sent by a member of the higher class and one sender belongs to the middle class. Two senders are not known people and their rank in the society cannot be determined. As many as five of the letters are unsigned. Unfortunately, in the scope of this chapter the personal lives, opinions, or other political activities of these known senders cannot be examined further. The length of these ten letters ranges from a one-page letter of 164 words to a sixteen-page letter of 3,721 words. Altogether the material consists of 11,678 words. Therefore, the material for this chapter is very small, but it still gives an idea of the development of American identity.

In this chapter certain predefined terms are looked for in the letters in order to find tendencies pointing to either British or American identity. The terms can be found in Appendices 1 and 2. The method of data collection is content analysis of private letters. Content analysis refers to any technique that enables to draw systematic and objective conclusions by identifying special characteristics of messages relating to social communication.[51]

The terms are the same Ziegler used in his study in which he examined terminology used in American newspapers.[52] As stated in the previous section, this list of terms consists of two main groups: British identity and American identity. The group referring to British identity contains words

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49 WWM/R/1/532 in George Thomas Keppel, *Memoirs of the Marquis of Rockingham and His Contemporaries*, vol. 1 (London: Richard Bentley, 1852), 250–52.

50 WWM/R/1/1480 in Keppel, *Memoirs*, vol. 2, 246–52.

51 Ole R. Holsti, *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities* (Reading, MA: Addison–Wesley, 1969), 14.

52 Ziegler, "Colonies."

or phrases which support British culture and British supremacy over its colonies. This group includes references to the British Empire, to British possessions, to the King of England, and to the colonists as subjects.

The group referring to American identity contains words or phrases which support the new American culture and people who are no longer under the British rule. It includes references to America, to colonial union, colonial possession and to colonists as being citizens of an independent nation. If a phrase contains more than one of these terms, the phrase is still counted as one. The results and discussion on the basis of these results are presented in the next section.

Results and Discussion

In this section I will present my findings in terms of quantity and percentage of the occurrences. I will also discuss the quality of these occurrences and some of their possible implications. In the following Figure 1 the number of references in terms of quantity is given.

In Figure 1 is listed the number of occurrences of references to British identity and to American identity per 1,000 words. These are arranged in chronological order from the oldest letter onward. A month could not be provided for the second letter, as it only contains the year in which it was written.

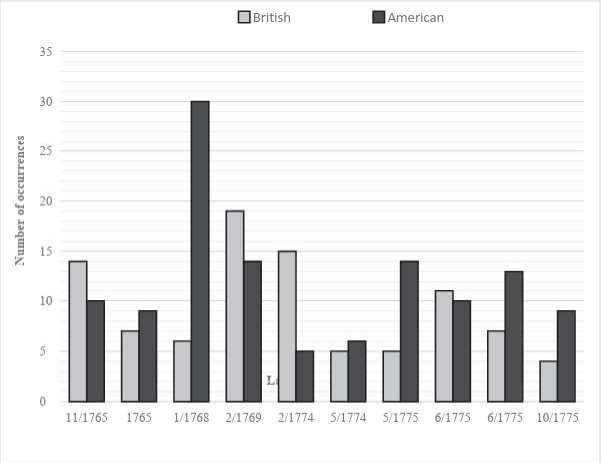

Figure 1: Quantity of references to national identity.

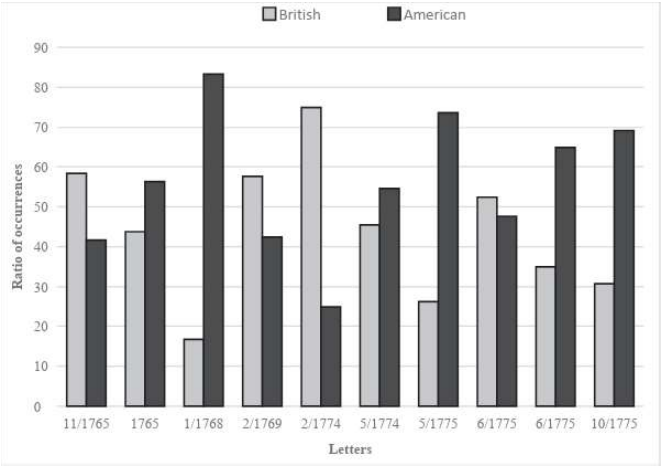

Figure 2: The percentage of references to national identity.

It can be detected in this figure that the occurrences referring to American identity are more frequent in the 1770s than in the 1760s and that there is a clear drop in references to British identity in the course of this ten-year period from 1765 to 1775. The spike in letter 5 from February 1774 is the result of exuberant use of the terms *colonies* and *colonists*.

The development can be compared in Figure 2, which shows the percentages for these two categories. For example, in the first letter, written in November 1765, the percentage for references to British identity is 57 and, correspondingly, the percentage for references to American identity is 43. The increase of the percentage for American identity is not clearly linear. The total number of occurrences in the second letter from 1765 and in the third letter from January 1768 is very small and that might make the results somewhat distorted. However, the overall pattern is the increase in references to American identity and the decrease in references to British identity, which is line with Ziegler's findings.[53] The last letter from October 1775 has a ratio of 69 per cent of references to 31 percent of references in relation to American and British identity, respectively.

Most of the examined terms were used at least once. The most common terms are *His Majesty/Majesty's*, *the King*, *subjects*, *His Majesty's subjects*, *subjects of Great Britain*, *province*, *colonists/colonies*, *America/Americans*, *the peo-*

53 Ziegler.

ple, *country (this/our)*, and *Congress*. The most common terms pointing to British identity are references to British possession, especially the terms *colonists* and *colonies*. References to the King of England are also frequent. There are also many references to colonists as colonial subjects, but from May 1774 onward these terms disappear and there is only one reference to the King of England after this date.

The most common terms pointing to American identity are references to America and references to colonists as citizens of an independent republic. References to colonial union are also frequent, especially from May 1775 onward, which is natural, as the Revolutionary War had begun a month earlier. The start of the Revolutionary War is also a significant watershed in the overall occurrences of references to national identity; after that the references to American identity outnumber the references to British identity.

Terms of which there were no instances are *His Excellency*, *English settlements in America*, *United States of America/United States*, *fellow citizens*, *patriot*, *Continental Association*, *Senate*, and *House of Representatives*. The term *United states* is used after the Declaration of Independence from 1776 onward. It is thus natural that it is not found in the material of this study. Ziegler found the terms *patriot*, *Senate*, and *House of Representatives* only in newspapers dated after 1775,[54] so it is not surprising that these terms are not found in this material either.

The term *American* is very significant in building identity and creating unity amongst the colonists. The term *American* or *Americans* is used before the Revolution, but the terms *subjects*, *His Majesty's subjects*, and *Englishmen* are used almost as frequently, and the term *colonists* is very popular as late as 1774. According to Florio, the term *Americans* had become generally accepted by the 1770s, but it was only a term with which it was convenient to refer to the colonists as a single group, for example as a geographical unit.[55] At the beginning of the 1770s this term was not yet used to refer to the colonists as a group with a common identity or ideology. Based on the adjectives used in connection with the term *American*, the term can also have a negative implication. For example, this is the case in the phrase *plain American* which refers to Americans in a derogatory sense.[56] However, in the material of this study there were no instances of this kind of use.

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54 Ziegler, 370–71.
55 Florio, "Analysis," 2.
56 Florio, 29–30.

The term *subject* is interesting as it has many variations: in addition to using the term as such, it can be extended to terms like *His Majesty's subjects*, *British subjects*, *subjects of Great Britain*, and *American subjects*. All of these terms convey the identity of the colonists in a different way. The term *His Majesty's subjects* makes no distinction to subjects in other British colonies or people in Britain and therefore does not treat people in the American colonies as a distinct group. However, often this term can be refined, for example as *His Majesty's subjects in America*, which makes that distinction. *His Majesty's subjects* contains the idea of being subjects of the King, but at the same time it does not exclude the idea of being Americans.

Therefore, the term is vaguer than *British subjects*, which mentions the place of origin and thus implies a closer connection to being British. However, this term also excludes a large proportion of colonists who came from somewhere else than Britain and did not consider themselves British.[57] Similarly to the term *Englishman*, the term *British subjects* was used when the colonists wanted to emphasize their rights, as this example from the material shows: "the Colonists are, I conceive, entitled to all the Liberties of British subjects."[58] According Florio, *British subjects* were considered "natural born" while *American subjects* were considered "liege," connected to Britain only through their loyalty and not through a natural connection.[59] References to colonists as colonial subjects occur steadily from 1765 to 1774, but are not found in the last four letters of the material for this chapter, all written in 1775.

As a result, it can be stated that although writers referred to the colonists as a unified group, they still used many different words to describe them. Sometimes these references appear in the same sentence as is the case in this example from the material: "People of America Subjects of the Crown of Great Britain."[60] This example has been considered as two individual phrases: *People of America* and *Subjects of the Crown of Great Britain*. Even though these phrases, in turn, contain more than one relevant term each, they have been counted as one, as stated in the methodology. The variety of terms with which the colonists have been described asserts Florio's notion that neither the colonists nor people in Britain had a clear idea of the identity of the colonists.[61]

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57 Florio, 25.
58 WWM/R/1/1480, An unsigned letter, North America, to Rockingham, 5 February 1774.
59 Florio, "Analysis," 27.
60 WWM/R/1/1480, An unsigned letter, 5 February 1774.
61 Florio, "Analysis," 2, 28.

As the 1770s pressed on, it can be noticed that references to colonial union increased. A good example is the term *Congress*, which identifies the governing body for the colonies. In the six letters from 1765 to 1774 this term was used altogether three times, but in the last four letters from 1775 it was used altogether eleven times. If all references to colonial union are counted, it can be noticed that there were altogether nineteen references in the four letters written in 1775 and only twelve references in the six letters written before 1775.

The results of this study have largely been in line with Ziegler's findings, but a differing result is the use of the term *state*, a term traditionally used by the patriots in opposition to the term *province*, which was traditionally a European term. Ziegler found in his study that the word *state* did not appear before 1780 in his newspaper material.[62] However, in the material of this study the word *state* is used already in the earliest letter from 1765. There is not, however, a particular increase in the use of this term, it is rather steadily used during the ten-year period from 1765 to 1775. Furthermore, the use of *province* did not decrease during this period, it is also steadily used. Sometimes these two terms are used in the same letter, which is particularly interesting. Possibly the letter writers of this study did not relate these terms to British or American identity.

When the contents of these letters are evaluated as a whole, their purpose was to be an unofficial way to influence the legislation of the mother country and the attitude concerning the situation of the colonies, and also to give information to the receiver about the colonies and about the writer's views. The letters are sent by writers who supported a greater level of independency for the colonies or at least going back to the situation prior to the Stamp Act crisis in 1765. Therefore, the letters do not represent the attitude of all people living in the colonies, but the change in the minds of active agents and how it was reflected in writing.

Conclusion: The Evolution of National Identity in the Thirteen Original Colonies

This chapter examined the evolution of national identity in the thirteen original colonies which belonged to Britain until 1776. The evolution of national identity was examined through the terminology used in letters sent from the colonies to Britain during the very crucial period of change

62 Ziegler, "Colonies," 362.

in the 1760s and 1770s. In 1775 this period culminated in the Revolutionary War.

The letters were sent across the Atlantic to the centre of power in Britain in order to get the people in power more aware of the situation in the colonies. The receiver was an opposition politician whose group was able to bring to the discussion in Parliament views which supported a greater level of independency for the colonies or were otherwise in favour of the colonies.

The study was carried out by scrutinising terms pointing either to British or to American identity. This study is in agreement with previous studies[63] in that the results show the change from British colonists to Americans was far from being a quick and simple process. Stating a specific date or event when the American nation came into existence is, naturally, impossible, and was also not the purpose of this study. However, this study strengthens the view that even during the 1760s and 1770s, when Britain imposed taxes and laws to the colonies, the colonists still seemed to be loyal to the King and saw themselves as members of the British empire, not as Americans. The beginning of the Revolutionary War in 1775 seems to be the moment when the colonists started adopting a separate identity.

It would be easy to state that the American nation came into being when the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776, but even at this point the identity of the Americans was in flux. In October 1775 there were still references to colonies as being British possession while at the same the colonists fought for their independence. Ziegler states that the American nation did not exist even in 1780 and that the development of their national identity became more rapid from 1785 to 1800. By 1800 it was clear that the American nation was becoming established.[64]

Unfortunately, the material used for this study was only from the years between 1765 and 1775. Therefore, examining the developments after the Declaration of Independence was not possible. Moreover, the amount of material used in this chapter was very small. In order to get a better understanding of this complex subject, this kind of study could be carried out by using a bigger corpus of letters.

There are also other problems which would need to be addressed in a wider study. For example, simply counting the specific words and phrases does not take into account whether these uses occurred in positive or negative contexts. Considering also the context might alter the results to some

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63 Florio, "Analysis"; Merritt, *Symbols*; Ziegler, "Colonies."
64 Ziegler, "Colonies," 367–68.

extent. Moreover, even though this study does bring out tendencies relating to the overall development of American national identity and to some extent generalisations can be made, the use of certain terms points only to the letter writers' national identity, and even then it cannot be stated with certainty that a particular word was used as a conscious political statement. According to Florio, the writer may have found a certain word only as the most convenient term to use.[65]

Many of these words open up further discussion, for example the word *subject* which was used in different phrases. Considering in which kind of contexts a specific term, like *subject*, occurs, could give more insights into the term. It could also be possible to create time spans for different terms, which would in turn provide more information about the evolving identity of the colonists.

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65 Florio, "Analysis," 18.

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Appendix 1: Terms Suggesting British Identity

References to the King of England
His Majesty / Majesty's
The King
His Excellency
Royal

References to colonists as colonial subjects
Subjects
His Majesty's subjects
Subjects of Great Britain
British subjects
Englishmen

References to the British Empire
Empire
Imperial

References to British possession
Province
His Majesty's colonies in America
English settlements in America

Colonists / Colonies

Appendix 2: Terms Suggesting American Identity

References to America
America / Americans
North America / North Americans
United States of America / United States

References to colonists as citizens of an independent republic
The people
Fellow citizens
Inhabitants of North America
Patriot

References to colonial union
Continental association
Continental Congress
Country (this/our)
Congress
Senate
House of Representatives

References to colonial possession
American colonies / colonists
North American colonies / colonists
American colonists
State (of)
States