Devolving Identities

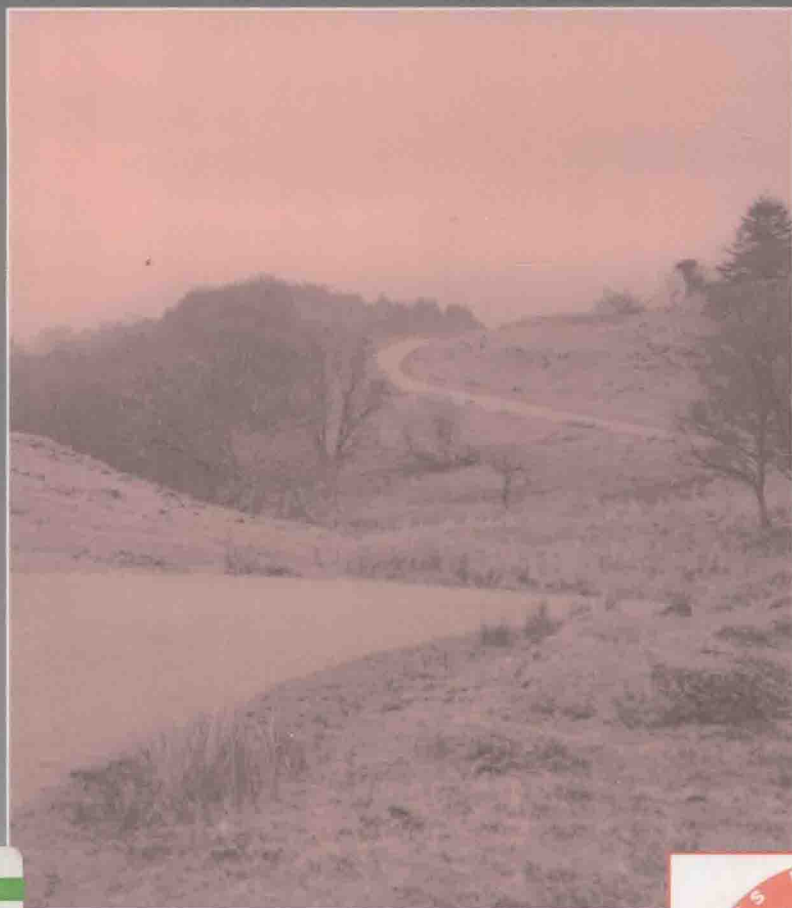*Feminist Readings in Home and Belonging*

**EDITED BY
LYNNE PEARCE**

Devolving Identities: Feminist Readings in Home and Belonging

edited by
Lynne Pearce

Studies in European Cultural Transition

Volume Eight

General Editors: Martin Stannard and Greg Walker

Ashgate

Aldershot • Burlington USA • Singapore • Sydney

General Editors' Preface

The European dimension of research in the humanities has come into sharp focus over recent years, producing scholarship which ranges across disciplines and national boundaries. Until now there has been no major channel for such work. This series aims to provide one, and to unite the fields of cultural studies and traditional scholarship. It will publish the most exciting new writing in areas such as European history and literature, art history, archaeology, language and translation studies, political, cultural and gay studies, music, psychology, sociology and philosophy. The emphasis will be explicitly European and interdisciplinary, concentrating attention on the relativity of cultural perspectives, with a particular interest in issues of cultural transition.

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Devolution and the Politics of Re/location

Lynne Pearce

As its title suggests, this volume marks the impact of devolutionary politics on the female subject's changing sense of 'home and belonging'. Whilst firmly located within the broader context of the major social and cultural upheavals taking place across Europe at the present time, these essays focus specifically on the situation in the British Isles, with feminist academics from England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and Eire re/negotiating issues of gender, class, ethnicity, and national/regional identity through their readings of two literary/cultural texts: an approach and methodology that pays tribute to the central role of imagination and 'story-telling' in the the formation of both subjects and communities.[1]

My decision to revisit the complex, and often strained, relationship between gender and national/regional identity is in direct response to the the radical constitutional reforms currently being wrought by the British government's devolution policy. As I will explain in the next section, this 'commitment' to the devolution of limited political and economic power from Westminster to the various nations and regions that comprise the United Kingdom is far from new, but the opening of both the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales this year (1999), together with the somewhat hasty and pre-emptive establishment of the Northern Ireland assembly in 1998, has moved the process on to a new footing. Although greeted with scepticism by some, the Scottish and Welsh referenda of 1997, and the elections of 1999, produced a significant groundswell of optimism in large numbers of individuals and interest-groups who hoped and believed that the long-awaited decentralization of government power would herald a 'new dawn'.[2] These groups and individuals have, of course, included

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[1] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* [1983] (London: Verso, 1998) and Homi K. Bhabha, ed. *Nation and Narration* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990).

[2] The referenda of September 1997 asked the citizens of Scotland and Wales to vote on whether or not they wanted constitutional reform which would grant their countries a limited form of devolved government. In Scotland, this would take the form of a full Scottish parliament (the previous one having been 'closed' by the Act of Union in 1707), and in Wales, a national assembly with more limited opportunities for independent legislation. The people of Scotland were asked to vote on two issues: first, the establishment

women, but the fact that feminist issues have rarely been a central part of the devolutionary debate is, indeed, one of the reasons this volume has needed to be written. In what way, or to what extent, is this re-drawing of the British constitutional map going to impact on women's lives? Will a new emphasis on 'the local' help one of the sectors of society most discriminated against by centralized government? Can a feminist consciousness make a significant impact on how the new parliaments and assemblies are run (e.g., less hierarchical/combative structures of 'debate')? Or should we simply expect the patriarchal structures of government to get reproduced on a more local scale? More to the point, perhaps, is the question of whether or not the women of the British Isles care very much about national/regional politics *at all*. On this crucial issue, the contributors to this volume are admittedly very mixed and, on occasion, perceptibly *dis*interested in what devolution might 'mean for them', as well as being wary of an over-involvement in the discourses of 'neo-nationalism'.[3] There are, of course, good historical reasons for these silences which I will return to a little later, but the vital – if superficially contradictory – corollary is that the same contributors all have *plenty* to say about 'home and belonging' in a less explicitly political sense. This is not to say that their engagements are apolitical, of course – anything but: the difference is simply that for this small sample of feminist academics drawn from 'the four corners' of the British Isles, the significance of nation, region, and community is 'known', and mediated, through a sense of place that is ontological rather than overtly ideological. Whilst this distinction could, of course, quickly slide into a typical, and unwelcome, stereotyping of the female psyche, a good deal of recent theorizing around 'the politics of location' supports the view that these alternative ways of 'knowing our place' are entirely valid

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of an independent parliament; second, whether that parliament should be given tax-raising powers independent of Westminster (hence the prominent 'Yes Yes' campaign mounted by Labour and the SNP). The details of what aspects of government legislation should be devolved to the new parliament/assembly, and which should remain under the jurisdiction of the Westminster parliament have yet to be fully resolved, but it was agreed (in principle) that all legislation should be devolved to Scotland *except* foreign policy, defence, social security, macro-economic policy and the constitution. (This is, of course, a fairly substantive 'except'!) In other words, and the tax levy notwithstanding, we have still to see exactly *how* 'independent' the newly devolved Scottish parliament will be (and whether the Welsh Assembly, without actual policy-making legislation) proves any more than a debating chamber.

On this point, it should be remembered that the people of the North of Ireland have also voted 'yes' for a 'regional assembly' as part of their acceptance of the 'Good Friday Agreement' (this referendum was held 23 May 1998). On 25 June 1998 108 members were elected to this assembly but, after a hostile opening session, it has yet to meet on a regular basis.

    3   It is worth noting that, in my original 'proposal' for this volume, I invited all contributors to reflect directly upon what 'devolution meant for them'.

ones.[4] Once again, this is something I will return to, but for the moment I will simply note that amongst those to draw a productive distinction between the discourses of nationalism on the one hand, and the discourses of 'home and belonging' on the other, is Edward Said, who has written:

> Patriotism is best thought of as an obscure dead language, learned pre-historically but almost forgotten and almost unused since. Nearly everything normally associated with it – wars, rituals of nationalistic loyalty, sentimentalized (or invented) traditions, parades, flags, etc – is quite dreadful ... Thinking affectionately about home is all I'll go along with.[5]

In a similar vein, I might conclude that thinking about national and regional identity and UK devolution through a rigorous (and not always 'affectionate'!) sense of home is all a good many of my contributors have been 'prepared to go along with'. Where we were born, where we now live, where we might have lived 'in between', are matters of vital importance to recent generations of (increasingly mobile) British and Irish citizens, but how we 'know' those locations, and how those locations can be articulated alongside other aspects of our identity, is not something that can necessarily be arrived at through our sense of 'nationhood', however complex.

It is partly in response to the huge challenge we face when asked to define and evaluate our sense of national and regional identity, meanwhile, that I invited the contributors to this volume to use literary or other texts as 'springboards' for their discussions. As several critics and theorists before me have noted, one of the reasons why fiction and poetry are so useful and important in this particular political context is that both 'homes' and 'nations' – despite being defined in very precise territorial terms – nevertheless exist, first and foremostly, as 'acts of the imagination'.[6] It stands to reason, therefore, that a good deal of 'nation-building' goes on in the cultural realm, and that it is through our engagement of an ever more diverse range of cultural products and 'texts' that we are interpellated as nationally, or regionally, defined subjects. Put crudely, literary and other texts (I am thinking particularly of film and popular music) are instrumental in defining/ shaping our locational identity: a 'truism' that literary scholars like Murray Pittock

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4   This idea will be developed at length in subsequent sections of the Introduction, but see in particular Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Oxford: Polity, 1994) and Elspeth Probyn, *Outside Belongings* (London: Routledge, 1996).

5   Edward Said, *The Nation* 22, 15 July (1991), p. 116. Cited by Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics of Home* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 201. Further page references to the latter volume will be given after quotations in the text.

6   See Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (note 1 above) and followers like Andrew Parker et al, *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1994).

believe a pro-independence party like the SNP have ignored at their peril.[7] Less instrumentally, however, I would suggest that 'texts of the imagination' are also the means by which we, as subjects, can explore, test, assume, or reject different versions of national or regional locatedness; they are the spaces/places where we can inhabit nations and cultures that may not yet exist (for good or bad) in 'the real world'.[8]

As I will explain more thoroughly in a later section, the literary and other texts examined in this volume are therefore a 'means' rather than an 'end'. This is most definitely *not* a book 'about' the national and regional literatures of the British Isles (unlike Ian Bell's *Peripheral Visions* (1995), for instance) although it is hoped that it will have a supplementary role to play in making visible a fair number of non-canonical texts that have hitherto been ignored or forgotten.[9] What the discussions will reveal, however, is the way in which some of the nations and regions which presently comprise the British Isles are better served in terms of a legitimated 'indigenous' literature than others, and how this most decidedly *does* impact upon the way the contributors are able to see and talk about their sense of 'home and belonging'. It is precisely at this point, indeed, that we see that UK devolution has a cultural as well as a socio-political face, and that this has already had a significant impact on the impending 'break-up of Britain'.[10] (The huge 1990s boom in all areas of the Scottish arts and media is probably the most striking example of this, although the recent success of Welsh rock bands is testimony to a similar ground-swell there.) Indeed, another of the 'hard facts' faced by my contributors is that it is currently much easier to explore the complex intersection of gender/nationhood through writers from the so-called 'Celtic margins' than through those from 'middle-England' – simply because these issues are being *consciously* dealt with in their texts.[11] Whilst contemporary women writers from

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7   See Murray Pittock, *The Invention of Scotland: The Stuart Myth and The Scottish Identity, 1638 to the Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991): 'The SNP is too dependent upon the political issues of the day for its support ... [its] concentration on economic matters is often in danger of rendering it a regionalist pressure-group rather than a nationalist party ... Few, if any, modern European nationalist parties have been successful without cultural nationalist priorities' (pp. 158–9).

8   Space/place: the differential meaning of and/or articulation of these two terms is discussed in note 1 to Chapter 8.

9   Ian A. Bell, *Peripheral Visions: Images of Nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995).

10   See Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain* [1977] (London: Verso, 1981). The 'cultural face' of devolution has more recently hit the headlines with the lauch of a new Scottish 'Newsnight' which will 'break away' from its London counterpart every night for the last 20 minutes or so of programme time. (*Newsnight* is the UK's most highly-rated TV news programme.) This 'compromise' is seen by many as symptomatic of the fact that all that devolution has delivered to date is a new 'regionalism'. See Rob Brown, 'A broadcasting Culloden?', *Sunday Herald*, 'Seven Days', 29 August 1999, p. 1.

11   I should note here, however, that my suggestion (in an earlier draft) that it is subsequently 'easier' to identify as a 'Scottish feminist' at the present time than as an

the peripheries have struggled hard to negotiate and align the different aspects of their marginalization, the writers from the centre seem, by and large, not to know where to begin.[12] Fortunately, the same cannot be said of the 'English' contributors to this volume, all of whom have fascinating – and often amusing – stories to tell. In conclusion, then, it may perhaps be said that whilst this is not a volume 'about' the national/regional literatures of the British Isles *per se*, it most certainly *is* 'about' the significance of such texts in the making/marking of ourselves as 'devolutionary subjects'. The 'readings' of the book's title are thus a promise not of textual *explication*, but of *exploration*: a readerly engagement that has enabled the authors to confront the complex nexus of gender/nation/region (and other aspects of identity-formation) *through* their chosen texts.

To the extent that most of these 'readings' are autobiographically inflected, it is clear that the contributors are also presenting *themselves* (and/or their 'locational identities') as 'texts to be read'. Despite the strong move towards the use of 'the personal' in feminist theorizing in recent years I have, as editor, been constantly aware that this is a practice, or 'method', that will not appeal to all readers; one that – without rigorous monitoring – could easily lead to charges of solipsism and self-indulgence. As I indicate in the ensuing subsection ('Re/locating the Self'), however, a critical evaluation of these 'self-texts' *alongside* the work of others is often anything but 'self-indulgent' for the authors concerned. This is not 'telling one's story' for the sake of it, but for the 'strategic' purpose of enunciating some of the most knotted (and hence 'unspeakable') aspects of identity formation.[13] This methodological point relates, too, to the way in which the feminism of this project as a whole inevitably slips in and out of view, with the 'multi-implicated' author-subject frequently struggling to keep all her political plates spinning at the same time. Once again, I will say more about these silences and 'blind spots' in the enunciation of the 'located self' directly, but to readers of the volume who may occasionally find themselves asking 'what is specifically feminist about this analysis?', I would suggest that feminism (as a 'politics') is not necessarily inherent in *any* text or textual analysis: it is rather what we (as authors, readers and

English one has been hotly contested by one or two of my contributors. Ruth McElroy, for example, has pointed out the severe difficulty 'Welsh feminists' experience in getting academic jobs: 'Either Welsh or feminist, but not both for God's sake!'

[12] Although it is doubtless iniquitous to name examples, it is striking that many of Britain's best-selling feminist authors of recent years like Jeanette Winterson and Angela Carter have tended toward fiction which, although admirably 'materialist' in some respects, is pointedly non-specific in geographical terms. The superficial 'invisibility' of Englishness may also be compared to similar debates *vis-à-vis* 'whiteness'. See, for example, Richard Dyer, *White* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

[13] 'Strategic use of the personal pronoun': see Elspeth Probyn, *Sexing the Self: Gendered Positions in Cultural Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 7–31, and also my own discussion of Probyn's 'method' in *Feminism and the Politics of Reading* (London: Arnold, 1997), p. 26. Further quotations from the latter volume will be given after quotations in the text.

citizens) then elect to *do* with the issues those texts have raised. Thus whilst some of the authors acknowledge the need for this 'second move' in the essays themselves, sometimes the responsibility for converting a 'gender-aware' text into an overtly 'feminist' one lies with the reader/citizen. For a project like this one, with its literary and cultural analyses so explicitly linked to an *immediate* social and political context, the opportunities to initiate change should be clear and urgent. My hope as a feminist editor is, therefore, that taken together, these essays will inspire women throughout Europe to re-think the possibilities of domestic, local and national 'belonging' in ways that are more comfortable to them; to take into their own lives, and communities, new ways of inhabiting the spaces, and places, we call 'home'.

In the remainder of the Introduction I will range through a selection of political, theoretical and methodological issues that I perceive to have informed the volume as a whole. Given the variousness and complexity of its points of intellectual reference – nationalism, regionalism, UK Devolution, discourses of 'home and belonging', feminism – this is no mean feat, but I will do my best to demonstrate the ways in which I see all these interests coming together (and straining apart!). The headings I will be working under are: (1) *The Devolutionary Moment*, which will attempt to map historically the political and cultural impact of devolutionary policy in the British Isles over the past twenty years or so; (2) *The Politics of Location*, which will attempt to theorize, in a little more detail, the crucial and, I believe productive tension between thinking about locational identities in terms of the discourses of 'nationhood' on the one hand, and the more 'homespun' narratives of 'home and belonging' on the other; (3) *Re-locating the Self*, in which I will link the considerable methodological challenges facing the contributors to this volume in terms of 'finding a postion' from which to speak with an epistemological 'defence' of various types of 'personalist criticism' and my own model of 'implicated reading',[14] and (4) *Re-Locating Home* in which I will preview the individual chapters and attempt to draw some general conclusions.

On this last point, it should also be said that the pre-occupations, themes and motifs ranging across the chapters were so ubiquitous – e.g. exile, mobility, 'the border' – that they could not be used to group the contributions in any useful or meaningful way. For that reason, the order in which the chapters appear is more or less arbitrary, and my editorial rationale is simply that readers will make their own connections between the ideas and sentiments expressed. As someone who has had the pleasure of getting quite minutely involved in each of these compelling stories of 'home and belonging', however, I must finally confess to finding the co-incidence of our experiences and our negotiations intellectually and emotionally consolidating.

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[14] 'Implicated reading': see Pearce, *Feminism and the Politics of Reading*, pp. 13–16.

The devolutionary moment

Needless to say, my own perspective on the 'devolutionary moment' within the UK is necessarily partial and biased. It is the view of someone who grew up in Cornwall during a period when 'Mebyon Kernow', the Cornish Nationalist Party, was enjoying a brief resurgence, but whose calls for 'independence' and the re-opening of the 'Stannary Parliament' (with an historic right to policy-making separate from Westminster) no-one took too seriously. The fact that this was also the period – the 1970s – when Scotland and Wales were launched on their previous devolution campaigns escaped me entirely. I have no personal memories of how that campaign was fought; how it coincided with the demise of the old Labour party and the Tory election victory of 1979; how it marked the end of a decade or more of massively unwieldy (and costly) attempts at local government reform.[15] This amnesia for the first devolutionary moment is mirrored, interestingly, in the 'non-memories' of a Scottish friend. When I asked her about 'the last time' she said that, to be honest, she didn't remember much about it, followed by: 'I don't think we thought it was a good thing – at that time.'

In contrast, the second devolutionary moment – the one heralded by the election of New Labour in May 1997 and followed by the Scottish and Welsh referenda of September 1997, the post Good Friday referendum and elections in the North of Ireland in May/June 1998, and the Scottish and Welsh elections of May 1999 – is something that I have lived through, and will remember. What I will remember most of all is being in Scotland the night of the referendum vote (September 11 1997) and sharing in the excitement of what a resounding 74 per cent of the Scottish population seemed to find *very* exciting: with a few predictable regional variations it was 'Yes Yes' all the way to the polls.[16] The big question two years on, of course, is what was it *exactly* that we were all so excited about? And what was it exactly that the people of Scotland voted 'Yes Yes' for? Although the 'official' answer to the last question is clear enough: the people were voting (1) for an independent Scottish parliament and (2) for that parliament's right to its own

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[15] Both in *The Break-Up of Britain* (see note 9 above) and in his more recent writing, Nairn draws a depressing connection between devolution and the successive waves of local government reform that have surrounded it. See also Tom Nairn, 'Virtual Liberation or: British Sovereignty Since the Election', *BT Scottish Affairs: Understanding Constitutional Change* (Edinburgh: Unit for the Study of Government in Scotland, 1998), pp. 13–37. Further page references to this essay will be given after quotations in the text where the source is not ambiguous.

[16] Taking Scotland as a whole, 74.3 per cent of voters voted for a Scottish parliament and 63.5 per cent for tax-varying powers. There was turnout of 60.4 per cent. Reviewing the press coverage of this referendum vote alongside the Scottish parliamentary elections in 1999, it is striking how this vote, and, indeed, this turnout, was deemed resoundingly positive for the former, but exceedingly 'poor' for the latter when the difference (for the turnout) was less than 5 per cent. It is also striking how such representation distorted my own statistical memory of both polls!

tax-raising powers separate from Westminster, it is clear that 'unofficially' people were voting 'Yes Yes' to a good deal more.

Living through the media 'production' and 'reflection' of the event, I would say that a substantive part of the visual imagery and rhetoric of that long and memorable night had its origins in the discourse of 'rebellion'. It became the moment, right enough, when the spirits of Scotland's long-dead 'Bravehearts' rose and walked again; when the people of a long-oppressed nation made their stand for 'freedom'; when the same people genuinely – if temporarily – believed that they were on the threshold of a new democracy, a better world.[17] On 'the morning after the night before', indeed, those lines from William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* seemed never far away from anyone's lips ('Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive/ But to be young was very heaven').[18] I have distinct memories of Scotland's leading woman (and feminist) writer, Liz Lochhead, saying as much when she was interviewed for BBC Radio Scotland beneath Edinburgh's Salisbury Crags; and, as evidenced in my newspaper archive, it was also picked up on in several newspaper reports, headlines and editorials. My point here, then, is that what 'the people' of Scotland were celebrating that dawn – perhaps even what they had voted for the day before – was 'the moment itself'. Whilst political commentators and theorists are markedly divided on whether this support for devolution and its partial autonomy is based, principally, on social and economic discontent (see Tom Nairn, David McCrone) or a desire for/assertion of 'national identity', it is my tentative belief that that the 'Yes Yes' vote was principally a vote 'for Scotland' in an almost *iconic* sense.[19] I should add that I use this last term advisedly because although, at one level, I am indeed implying that the 'Yes Yes' was for something very abstract, very emotive, and strikingly detached from a grounded political agenda, on another, I am thinking of the research I have done on the press photography associated with the devolution campaigns, and my hypothesis that a good number of 'poetic' images produced by the media were/ have been absolutely central in the making/marking of the voters as 'devolutionary subjects'.[20] Such iconicity can quickly be translated back into

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[17] A good deal has already been written on the significance of the Hollywood movie, *Braveheart* (1995), in the resurgence of national/nationalist sentiment in Scotland (and amongst the Scottish diaspora), with few disputing the political significance (e.g., a sudden increase in Scots joining the SNP) but many criticizing the *ersatz* version of Scottish history on which the ideological turn was based. See for example Angus Calder, 'By the Water of Leith I Sat Down and Wept: Reflections on Scottish Identity' in Harry Ritchie, ed., *New Scottish Writing* VII (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), pp. 218–38.

[18] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: A Parallel Text*, Book X (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978).

[19] See Nairn, 'Virtual Liberation' (note 15 above) and also David Crone's introduction in the same volume.

[20] Paper presented at the 'Anglo-Saxon Attitudes' conference, sponsored by the ESRI, and held at Salford University July 1999: 'From "Yes Yes" to "No No": Press Photography and the Making/Marking of the Devolutionary Subject'.

nationalism, and/or a desire for independence, admittedly, but I have my doubts about to what extent such connotations were consciously carried forward into the ballot box on 11 September 1997. Beyond that, if I had to attach one word to what the people of Scotland were voting for, it would have to be 'revolution' (and with quite specific echoes the French republican chant of 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity'): a fantastical dream, way beyond the scope of anything a Westminster-inspired devolution policy could deliver, but a compelling 'vision' all the same. And in creatively 'imagining' this moment, the voters of Scotland were, of course, symbolically joining hands with any number of ex-colonies throughout the world who have celebrated the birth of a 'new nation' *as* the moment of liberation from an old and oppressive one.[21]

This last observation must also remind us, however, that even within the British Isles, devolution has been, is, and will continue to be experienced very differently by the constituent 'home nations'. Despite the fact that the Welsh referenda and elections were seen (by some) to be deliberately rigged towards a 'yes' vote by being staged alongside, or immediately after, the Scottish votes, the results have been far less conclusive. Compared to the 74 per cent endorsement in the Scottish referendum, the Welsh 'yes' vote only just scraped a majority, and also registered continuing stark divisions throughout the country in terms of the historical north/ south, rural/urban and language-speaking divides. Most commented on of all, however, was the comparatively low turn-out for both the referendum and the assembly elections in Wales (c.46 per cent), which has caused devolutionary sceptics to argue that there is a distinct lack of interest in constitutional reform. The relative, and surprising, success of Plaid Cymru in the Assembly elections of May 1999 can, however, be used to tell a different story (17 Plaid Cymru seats compared to 28 for Labour), and it has been my impression – reviewing *all* these statistics – that the bias of the press has been absolutely instrumental in both interpreting, and promoting, the 'will' of these two nations throughout this period (see notes 16 and 30).

When we turn to the situation in the North of Ireland, moreover, we are faced with a history and context so specific and 'other' that the government's attempts to link it to the devolution of Scotland and Wales must, in itself, be regarded with suspicion and concern. 'Northern Ireland' is, after all, the British government's

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21   This distinction between different types of nationalism – between 'nationalisms of oppression' on the one hand and 'nationalisms of liberation' on the other – is defined and problematized by Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1991): 'There is always a "good" and a "bad" nationalism. There is the one which tends to construct a state or a community and the one which tends to subjugate, or destroy; the one which refers to right and the one which refers to might; the one which tolerates other nationalisms and which may even argue in their defence … and the one which radically excludes them in an imperialist or racist perspective. There is one which derives from love (even excessive love) and one which derives from hate' (p. 47).

longstanding 'experiment' in devolution (see Chapter 11 by Eilish Rooney), and one that has been spectacularly *unsuccessful* according to the reckoning of most of those who have lived with it (however politically postioned).The attempt to align this war-torn province with the processes happening in Scotland and Wales may thus, at one level, seem almost laughable: an incommensurability rendered graphically, and materially, tragic by the fact that the Northern Ireland Assembly – although voted for by over 70 per cent of voters in the wake of the 1998 'Good Friday' agreement – has yet to meet on a regular basis after the fiasco of the first sitting (see note 2). Because of its very specific history it is clearly impossible for the North of Ireland to enter the devolutionary arena on the same terms as Scotland and Wales, and yet one could argue, once again, that the 'will of the people' (recorded in the emphatic 'Yes' vote) notionally *aspires* towards such a possibility. How we interpret this 'will', when confronted with the apparently intractable problems of the political reality is, of course, a point of serious contention.

Outside the 'home nations', meanwhile, the prospect of devolution continues to mean something rather different again. Although the North-East of England, Yorkshire, Cornwall and several metropolitan centres (most notably London itself) have begun some quite high-profile campaigning for their own 'relative autonomy', their 'devolutionary moment' has yet to come. On this point it will, indeed, be interesting to see if, and when, the government's vague, 'in-the-future' promises to set up regional assemblies throughout the UK materialize. The problem that presents itself here is that all these regions are invested (or not) in devolution for rather different reasons, and represent very different socio-economic and cultural bases. Whilst the North-East is currently arguing strongly that it needs devolution to help it compete with the new economic and other benefits enjoyed by its Scottish neighbour, Cornwall is using its extreme geographical isolation at the other end of the British Isles, together with its acknowledged poverty and cultural distinction (it is seen, historically, as another Celtic country with its own language and culture), to argue for both devolution and massive government investment.[22] Needless to say, both campaigns are predicated on a very different rationale from the case of London whose past experiment with the GLC (Greater London Council) is seen by some as a model of how the capital city would also benefit from a freshly devolved social, cultural and economic autonomy. Such a claim inevitably renews long-standing issues of equality, of course, with the rural regions arguing that further investment in the capital is the

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[22] The economic demise of Cornwall, in particular, came to light with the closure of the last tin mine in 1998. Soon afterwards the region was officially declared the poorest in Britain, and in 1999 won 'Objective One' funding from the European Union. The tin-mine closure also saw the launch of a new quasi-nationalist support movement called 'Cornish Solidarity' which is fighting to keep the economic, social and cultural concerns of Cornwall separate from its wealthier neighbours in what the government is designating the 'South-West' region.