

Introduction

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Nation-State, Devolution and Identity

Most of us in Northern and Western Europe take the democratic form of national government for granted. We believe the nation-state to be some kind of older historical and normative programme of political organisation. The reality is, however, that the nation-state emerges only directly in the second half of the eighteenth century, being fused out of a range of different processes. Habermas (1987) argues that a major factor here was a shift of communicative structures from a bourgeois public sphere of discussion, which laid the foundation of European democracy, to a populist nationalism. In this process 'the state' becomes aligned with the 'nation'. The state is defined as a sovereign or legal form of state power, while the nation (or the people) refers to a community bound by a common heritage language and culture. In the nation-state the form of government is seen as organised for the benefit of the 'nation', that is the people. As Habermas (2001: 113) puts it:

Only a national consciousness, crystallised around the notion of a common ancestry, language, and history, only the consciousness of belonging to 'the same' people makes subjects into citizens of a single political community – into members who can feel responsible for one another.

It is this vision of national unity that allows the operation of state power since it becomes seen as a natural component of the sovereignty of the nation itself. And so for many years in the United Kingdom (UK) it has been possible to meld the potentially independent cultures of Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland (and at one period the whole of the Island of Ireland) around a unified form of identity, Britishness.

Despite the success of the nation state within Europe there are signs that this historical form of political organisation may be coming under pressure (see Ohmae, 1995). The emergent Eastern states of post communism have been born, often through extreme bloodshed, of a belief not in the nation-state, but rather in the 'nation'. What has been sought are ethnic alliances, founded on some form of historical and cultural legacy, as opposed to a pragmatic political unit which might bind various allegiances under one flag for the perceived benefit of all. Equally, many of the post-colonial states of Africa now struggle within an environment of multiethnic claims to power, with limited opportunities in terms of political, legal or economic power to coalesce around a single vision. And within the borders of the classic nation-states of Europe, and to some extent the USA, a multinational and pluralistic context challenges the *raison d'être* not only of a single concept of Britishness, but of other sub-national concepts such as Scottishness or Welshness.

In this context the programme of devolution set out by the Labour government in 1997 raises a range of interesting issues for both the present and future processes of government within the UK. The potentially far reaching consequences of the move to devolution can be seen in the funding allocated by the Economic and Social Research Council to research addressing the nature and outcomes of devolution. Browsing the list of projects¹ where £4.17 million has been invested, it is interesting to note that they focus, in the main, on questions that generally exclude the ‘populace’, or more directly, the devolved citizen. The focus is on law, economics, political theory and so on. However, if we return to the quote from Habermas above, the point made is that whatever the political or economic case one might have made for the nation-state, it would not have been enough on its own. The trick was to get the people to see such advantage within a concept of nationalism; that this advantage was for the people, i.e. the ‘nation’.

Perhaps surprisingly, the views and opinions of ‘the people’ involved in the process of devolution have often been taken for granted. The Scots know who they are, the Welsh know who they are, the Northern Irish know who they are; consequently, the devolved ‘peoples’ are definitionally straightforward. But why should that be the case? Devolution is not a cessation of all power from the centre with the establishment of new states; rather, it is the redistribution of selected responsibilities, with core state power residing in the national, that is, the British, parliament. This alone creates a form of dual identification, Scottish and British, Welsh and British, and Northern Irish and British. However, there is no concept of Northern Irishness that is on a par with Scottishness and Welshness. Indeed, for many Northern Irish unionists, the goal is to remain British; they do not need a second identity. Paradoxically, in the Government of Ireland Act of 1920, they were given the first devolved government of the UK for this very purpose, that is, to ensure that the region of Northern Ireland remained British.

One very real issue for devolution, then, which has not been given significant attention, is what does it mean for the construction and reconstruction of forms of national and sub-national identity? Further, how do devolved peoples cope with a restructuring of the concepts of nation and state? And in a globalised, multicultural context, what is the value of a devolved identity? Indeed, is there even a need for such devolution, given that certain nationalistic claims have always included the devolved regions? These, among others, are the kinds of issues we wish to tackle in this volume. In doing so, we want to draw attention away from the macro contexts of law, economics, and general politics, to the everyday construction of meaning and identity in the complex of options available to the modern citizen. Starting from this general perspective, the chapters deal with a variety of topics; ranging from language policy to the use of symbolic space to individual constructions of identity within the devolved regions. We will return to these topics in more detail below. First, however, we will consider more explicitly the nature and context of devolution in the UK.

¹ http://www.devolution.ac.uk/Research_Projects2.htm.

Devolution and Identity in the United Kingdom

In 1997, the Labour Government began a process of constitutional devolution, which would see the delegation of powers from the central government (Westminster) to regional or national institutions across the UK. Bogdanor (1999) sees devolution as comprising three main aspects: 1. the transfer of power to a subordinate elected body; 2. the transfer of power on a geographical basis; 3. the transfer of functions at present exercised by Parliament. In line with this initiative, and following referenda in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland² in 1997–1998, devolved administrations were set up in these regions. The Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales, and the Northern Ireland Assembly were formally established in 1999.³ The different institutions have varying powers (Sandford, 2002), although certain key issues such as taxation and defence generally remain within the control of the central government.⁴

Devolution necessarily alters the political and constitutional landscape with different financial and governance and legal structures implemented across the regions (see Hazell, 2003). However, as indicated above, what is less clear is the impact of such constitutional transformations on issues of personal and group identity within and across the respective regions. Opinion is divided as to whether the introduction of devolution signals the beginning of the break up of the UK (see Curtice and Seyd, 2001, Mitchell, 2000, Paterson, 2002, Robbins, 2001). Theoretically, the notion of separate parliaments/assemblies might be expected to intensify feelings of (ethno-)national distinctiveness and/or nationalism, which could ultimately lead to a disintegration of the Union. On the other hand, devolution could work to bolster the Union by providing a space within which different political aspirations can be articulated (Hazell, 2003). Examples of this are explored in the present volume. For example, Condor and Abell (Chapter 2) discuss differing orientations to regional and national governance in Scotland and England, and how these constructions relate to personal identity. In Chapter 3, Coupland and Bishop examine the way in which the Welsh language movement is constructed around issues of ‘community’ and ‘identity’ in post-devolution Wales. In a different vein, Irwin (Chapter 10) looks at the British National Party, and concepts of exclusive nationalism within the devolved context.

Whatever the ultimate outcomes, the concept and process of devolution clearly have implications for issues of citizenship, nationality and national identity within the UK. Indeed, in this respect, the working out of devolution can be seen to encapsulate a number of processes which are increasingly and universally salient; e.g. globalism, localism, (ethno-)nationalism, exclusion and identity rights. As discussed above, we have recently witnessed the emergence of new forms of government and political

² Because devolution in Northern Ireland was entwined with the Belfast (peace) Agreement, which entailed changes to the Republic of Ireland’s constitution, a referendum on the Agreement was also held in the Republic.

³ The Greater London Assembly was also established in 1999, and a number of further regional assemblies are planned throughout England.

⁴ The Scottish Parliament, alone among the new institutions, has minor tax-raising powers.

administration; and the consequent ‘diminishing’ of the nation-state as a marker of civic/ethnic boundaries (see Cable, 1994). In this context, the conventional model of bounded and integral nation-states is challenged by the dual forces of globalisation and deterritorialisation, on the one hand, and regionalism and devolution of government powers, on the other. These forces function in a dialectic, however, such that national alignments and demarcations are simultaneously eroded and strengthened, in different ways (see e.g. Bauman, 1998, Jenkins and Sofos, 1996). This process may be seen, for example, in Chapter 7 of this volume, in which Barnes and Aughey discuss the construction of ‘fantasy echoes’ of Britishness and the attempt to create sameness and identity with the past, within a changing contemporary context.

The growth of supranational administrations such as the European Union (EU), then, diminishes the political power of individual nation-states, while simultaneously fostering a diversity of regional identities and national collectives (Jenkins and Sofos, 1996). In fact, as a number of commentators have pointed out, the very nature of globalisation/supranationalism can itself prompt a search for identity, and hence, the (re)emergence and strengthening of tribal-type ethnic bonds (see Giddens, 1991, Ignatieff, 1994). Moreover, in contexts such as the EU (and the UK), constitutional commitments to cultural diversity mean that these cultures can be granted varying status and rights within the (supra)national order. This facilitates the assertion of cultural minority rights in a way that was not possible within the traditional order of the nation-state, and further, foregrounds the issue of identity rights and recognition for minority groupings *within* national/regional boundaries (Benhabib, 2002, Stapleton and Wilson, 2004a).

In the UK context, post-devolution, we can see the global/local dialectic at work in the forces of progressive regional autonomy alongside increasingly centralised civic structures. A number of writers have observed that this dialectic opens up a complex of new identity possibilities (see e.g. McCall, 2002a, McCrone, 2002). At the very least, UK citizens have the dual identities of (ethno-)nationality (English, Scottish, Welsh or Northern Irish)⁵ and a common state-based ‘British’ identity.⁶ Moreover, because devolution intensifies the distinction between national/territorial and state structures, we might expect a consequent decoupling of cultural and civic identities. As mentioned above, much debate surrounds the extent to which the British state is being undermined, or diluted, by the devolution process (e.g. Curtice and Seyd, 2001), and such issues are clearly bound up with concepts and perceptions of identity and citizenship within the UK. Some writers, such as McCall (2002a), claim that devolution potentially bolsters ‘exclusivist “ethno-national” identities ... at the expense of a “civic” British identity’ (McCall, 2002a: 158). This theory is supported by some recently available research which suggests that, in its first few years, devolution

⁵ The Northern Irish identity is less straightforward as an ethno-national category within the UK context, since many of its (nationalist) citizens reject any association with the UK, preferring instead to describe themselves simply as ‘Irish’.

⁶ Of course this conceptualisation does not engage with the further complexities of ethnicity/race within these categories (For a useful discussion of these issues, see McCrone, 2002).

has *not* strengthened feelings of Britishness, but has somewhat strengthened national identities in England, Scotland and Wales (Jeffery, 2004). On the other hand, this same research, collated by Jeffery, highlights the usage of multiple identities among UK citizens, and shows little evidence for an actual rejection or deterioration of Britishness as an identity category (see also Rosie *et al.*, 2004).

Devolution does not only have implications for (ethno-)national and civic identities. Ideological shifts and institutional/administrative changes are likely to influence (in different ways) the positioning of minority identity groupings, both indigenous and migrant, within the different jurisdictions (see e.g. McCrone, 2002, Stapleton and Wilson, 2004a). Some identity developments of this sort are publicly articulated and are visibly and formally linked to constitutional change. For example, in this volume, Roulston (Chapter 8) discusses the ways in which women's political representation has developed across the UK regions pre- and post-devolution, while Bryan (Chapter 6) looks at the struggle over symbolic emblems (in particular national flags) in post-devolution Northern Ireland. On the other hand, some identity processes, which are less explicitly linked to changes in formal political structures, may nonetheless be considered as emergent within this socio-political context. For example, Wilson and Stapleton (Chapter 1) discuss the current prominence of, and debate over, the Ulster Scots identity in Northern Ireland in relation to issues such as institutional support afforded under the Belfast Agreement⁷, and the identity questions posed by progressive devolution across the UK. It is also worth noting that the particularities of regional/national contexts will shape experiences of devolution, and hence the extent to which newly available identity frameworks are embraced or rejected (Wilson and Stapleton, 2006).

The Present Volume: Aims and Overview

As stated at the outset, this volume addresses issues and questions of 'lived identity' under devolution. This approach should be distinguished from, on the one hand, macro-level analyses of the political, economic, legal and societal aspects of devolution (e.g. Bogdanor, 2001, Hazell, 2003, Pilkington, 2002) and, on the other, quantitative, or survey-based, studies of devolution and identity (e.g. Curtice and Heath, 2000, Jeffery, 2004). Here, we are centrally concerned with the ways in which identities are shaped and negotiated within the changing socio-political landscape(s). The volume as a whole is situated within a broadly qualitative framework, in which we see cultural, social, political and discursive structures as simultaneously constructing and being constructed by individual and group subjectivities (for a general treatment of these issues, see Barker and Galasinski, 2001). Hence all of the chapters focus, in different ways, on the newly available structures and spaces for identity realignment and/or on the negotiation and articulation of identities within these structures and spaces.

7 Throughout the volume, this is referred to as, variously, the Belfast Agreement, the Good Friday Agreement, the Peace Agreement, the Multi-Party Agreement or, simply, the Agreement'.

The volume draws together a range of different social science and humanities perspectives on these issues, with contributors from fields such as Politics, Linguistics, Psychology, and Communication. Crucially, given the emergent nature of this topic, we have *not* attempted to impose a particular, or ‘unitary’, research agenda/paradigm on the chapters; the authors were asked to address the core questions and issues relatively independently from within their own theoretical and methodological frameworks. Similarly, we have not tried to foreclose on particular findings or to draw ‘overall’ or definitive conclusions from the analyses (such as, for example, the extent to which devolution has strengthened or weakened attachment to particular identity categories – answers to which would almost inevitably be inconclusive and context-dependent). Rather, our primary aim, in compiling this volume, was to generate different perspectives and approaches to the lived experience of devolution; thereby providing new insights and understandings, while, at the same time, raising further questions and potential research synergies, within an open-ended format. This approach is further consolidated in the *Epilogue*, in which Gerry Philipsen reflects, from an American perspective, on the diversity of issues raised in the collection, which, in themselves, cause him to consider fresh queries, reflections and avenues for research.

The volume contains theoretical and empirical analyses from across the devolved regions of the UK. However, just as they do not address a unitary set of questions, the chapters do not follow a ‘neat’ inter-regional comparative framework. Rather, as suggested above, they address a range of emergent thematics (e.g. language, marketing, art, gender, parliamentary debates), which are heightened, or thrown into relief, by the devolution process. Indeed we believe that it is important *not* to regionalise these themes in any definitive manner, as any given outworking of an issue has a general and shared significance across the regions, while simultaneously reflecting the particularities of the context within which it takes place. Nonetheless, a number of the contributions show interesting cross-referring themes and areas of interface. Hence, while we have not formally divided the book into sections, we have facilitated these natural interfaces by grouping the chapters into three clusters, loosely organised as: (a) language and discourse; (b) the symbolic and artefactual; and (c) specific social projects.

Language and Discourse

This cluster comprises *Chapters 1–3*. In each of the chapters, outlined in more detail below, there is a central concern with language/discourse and how this is deployed in the realignment of ‘devolved’ identities and subjectivities. In *Chapters 1* and *3*, the focus is on the ways in which social actors construct and negotiate their own identities, and indeed that of their wider cultural/national groups, with an emphasis on everyday sense-making and on the construction and delineation of particular identity categories. *Chapter 2*, on the other hand, discusses how language and language-related issues are themselves being conceptually and discursively reformulated in relation to broader alignments of national, cultural and minority identities.

In *Chapter 1*, John Wilson and Karyn Stapleton discuss the growth of Ulster Scots as an identity category among Protestants/unionists in Northern Ireland. They consider the ways in which devolution both motivates and facilitates the expression of this identity. Then, drawing on empirical discursive data, they examine the configuration of Ulster Scots as a personal identity category, as well as its relationship to conceptions of Britishness (and other ethno-national categories) in the post-devolution context. This analysis highlights two issues central to any consideration of devolution and identity: changing relationships between Britishness and regional/(ethno-)national identities and the emergence and articulation of ‘new’ and/or minority identities, in the post-devolution context.

In *Chapter 2*, Nikolas Coupland and Hywel Bishop consider how the post-devolution period in Wales has seen the National Assembly for Wales take several significant new funding initiatives regarding what tends to be called ‘the language’ (Welsh), linked to new policies relating to ‘heartland communities’ (those where the Welsh language is deemed to be, still, a ‘living, community language’). The chapter focuses on the political and para-political discourses that make up the ideological climate in which language and community are debated. The authors develop critical analyses of key passages from governmental and non-governmental sources, with the aim of providing a ‘road map’ through the complex politics of language and community in post-devolution Wales, set against wider sociolinguistic assumptions about these concepts.

Susan Condor and Jackie Abell (*Chapter 3*) discuss the concept of ‘vernacular identity construction’ in post-devolution Scotland and England. They reject the social scientific tendency to treat ‘national identity’ as an analysts’ resource, but rather consider the ways in which ordinary social actors themselves construe nationness as a psychological matter of ‘identity’. Using interview accounts produced by comparable samples in Scotland and England, they note the tendency for speakers in the two countries to adopt qualitatively different orientations to their nationality as a matter of identity. They note the correspondence of these lay understandings with formal academic theories of national identity developed by writers in Scotland and in England. From their analysis, they also highlight the need to be wary of attempts to equate the constructs of ‘national identity’ either with attitudes towards the Union, or with the construct of ‘imagined community’.

The Symbolic and Artefactual

Returning to the notion that identities are structured and articulated within broader cultural and socio-political realms, we have grouped *Chapters 4–7* together on the basis that they all deal with aspects of the symbolic and artefactual context of devolution. *Chapter 4*, like the chapters discussed above, is based on analysis of actual discourse (in this case, interviews and the resulting narratives). We have included it in this section, however, on the basis of its subject matter and the remit of its analysis – i.e. the relationship between art and broader issues of culture, nationness and identity. *Chapter 6* deals with a particular discourse artefact, i.e. newspaper

‘letters to the editor’, and considers how citizens use this public realm to express and construct devolution-related identities and categories. *Chapters 5* and *7* (focusing respectively on flags and public commemorations/exhibitions) both discuss the question of contested symbolism and heritage within post-devolution Northern Ireland, while also considering more general issues around devolution, history and symbolism. We will now outline these chapters in more detail.

In *Chapter 4*, William Housley reports on a study carried out on art and devolution in Wales. It explores practitioners’ understandings of ‘visual art in Wales’ and the notion of ‘Welsh art’ as national parameters that are both recognised and contested. The chapter analyses examples of artistic narrative as a means of describing the nature of these understandings and the various discourses used by artists in negotiating the relationship between the creative self and wider social, cultural and national boundaries. To this extent, Housley explores the narrative of the creative self in relation to wider discourses of nation. This case study, he argues, has resonance with the study of culture, marginalised collective experience, national renewal and cultural modernisation in Wales, the UK and beyond.

Dominic Bryan, in *Chapter 5*, also explores a particular context of post-devolution culture in his discussion of public symbolism and visual culture in Northern Ireland. Symbols such as flags and parades, play an important – if contentious – role in Northern Irish political and social life. However, the Peace Agreement and the newly devolved institutions offered the possibility for the development of symbolic representations of a new Northern Ireland. Whilst there were some obvious examples of this process, such as a new badge for the police service and a new emblem for the new Assembly, debates over the flying of flags appear as intense as ever. Bryan examines the strategies to resolve disputes over the use of flags and emblems and looks at the attempts by public agencies and institutions to symbolically create a new devolved dispensation. It concludes that contradictory policy approaches derive from conflicting conceptions of the Agreement and of the role and purpose of devolution in Northern Ireland.

In *Chapter 6*, Richard Fitzgerald and William Housley examine the increasing intersection between the discourse of public access media and political representation within post-devolution Wales. This chapter applies the principles of Membership Categorisation Analysis to analyse national identity, categorisation and interaction. Focusing on ‘letters-to-the-editor’, Fitzgerald and Housley explore the three interrelated issues of public access media interaction, political accountability and the discourse of national identity. They explore the discursive construction of motives mapped onto categories of political and national identity through public access media, within devolved Wales, and their relationship to other layers of social and political organisation. The authors then discuss perceptual shifts in the locus of political and national identity through a consideration of the perceived relationship of post-devolution Wales to both local and wider political and economic spheres (e.g. the UK and Europe).

Carol-Ann Barnes and Arthur Aughey (*Chapter 7*) consider the issue of modern British identity in terms of a ‘fantasy echo’. This concept, drawn from Scott (2001)

signifies the ambiguity of repetition of something imagined and an imagined repetition. ‘Fantasy’ discovers relations of identity between past and present; ‘echo’, on the other hand, tends to undermine the idea of enduring sameness. Political identities need a sense of historic continuity but the echoes of that continuity can be deceptive. Focusing in particular on the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the Irish Act of Union, Barnes and Aughey discuss current debates about the values, character and shape of contemporary – in particular post-devolution – Britishness, within that interpretative framework, and critically assess the respective influences of fantasy and echo, continuity and change.

Specific Social Projects

The chapters in this group are concerned with the ways in which devolution shapes and/or facilitates the pursuit of particular social projects, ranging from gender representation and politics (*Chapter 8*) to regional marketing (*Chapter 9*) to the exclusivist national politics of the British National Party (*Chapter 10*). In all of these cases, devolution is shown to have impacted upon the form and trajectory of these projects, both through formal, constitutional mechanisms (particularly true for gender issues) and, more intangibly, through the changing social, political and discursive spaces of the post-devolution context.

In *Chapter 8*, Carmel Roulston discusses the impact of devolution on gender issues within the UK regions. Specifically, she examines the relationship between devolution and women’s inclusion and representation in mainstream politics in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The chapter investigates how the programme of devolution in the UK has opened a space for dialogue and deliberation on the symbolic and substantive representation of women in the new political institutions. It explores how contextual factors within the three societies facilitated or delimited the formation of pro-feminist alliances around issues of effective representation of women’s diverse needs and values. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the relationship between nationalism and gender identity, with particular reference to Northern Ireland, and on the continuing struggles for gender equality within the three societies.

Sharon Millar (*Chapter 9*) explores identity-making in the context of devolution in the UK and regionalisation in Europe from a marketing/business perspective. She argues that, since processes of localisation occur in a global context, the dimension of local/global may be equally or more apparent than that of regional/national, at least on a macro-level. This argument is explored using the websites of relevant government bodies in Wallonia, Belgium and in Scotland. Her analysis demonstrates the role of global corporate culture in identity-making by state institutions, whereby state institutions are constructed as business organisations; citizens and residents are customers/consumers (and, in Wallonia, stakeholders); and cities, regions, and countries are products in the global marketplace. Devolved and federal powers give local Parliaments a greater freedom to act within these trends, to ‘go glocal’ in the pursuit of economic and political success.

David Irwin (*Chapter 10*) tackles the seeming antithesis of the modern devolution process and the call for a centralised British state as espoused by the British National Party. While it would have been interesting in itself to reflect on oppositional positions to devolution, Irwin highlights a range of paradoxes and contradictions within the BNP position, most specifically from our perspective, the support of local and regional identities within a British nationalist context. The BNP recognises the multi-ethnic nature of the historical foundation of Britain, but not the multi-ethnic nature of its modern position; hence, their central policy of the repatriation of immigrants. Operating alongside this is, at the same time, a positive recognition of the Scots, Welsh, and Northern Irish positions within Britain. Regional traditions and histories, even regional languages, are to be given their role within a national British state. As Irwin notes, this is an unusual position and one which both pulls for and against devolution at one and the same time. The reality is, as he notes, that the BNP must continually construct and deconstruct world views to force some form of consistency into an inconsistent ideology.

Summary

Through examination of these thematics across the regions, the volume provides insights into a number of issues and questions. The central question is ‘How does devolution impact upon individual/group identities; and what can this tell us about nature of the devolution process itself?’ Hence, the chapters examine contemporary configurations of both ‘national’ identities, and ‘Britishness’ within devolved regions. This focus on identity also reflects the more general relationship between socio-political structures and individual/group identities; and in particular, the processes through which identities are transformed and/or maintained in the context of socio-political change. As indicated above, however, the collection aims to generate different perspectives, debates, and indeed, to raise new questions and avenues for research. Gerry Philipsen’s final *Epilogue* reflections are also undertaken very much in this spirit. He concludes with the view that, rather than providing definitive ‘answers’ to the questions surrounding devolution and identity, this volume provides ‘a remarkable resource for posing such questions and for sketching some possible lines along which answers can be anticipated’.