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National Identity, Nationalism and Constitutional Change

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Introduction

Why write a book about national identity, and especially one about national identity in the context of constitutional change? National identity is one of the most basic social identities; it is also, in Michael Billig's term, banal. Most people in Western societies at least, hardly give it a second thought, not because it is unimportant, but because, quite literally, it comes with the territory. Being a 'citizen' makes you French, Spanish, Canadian, while some in these societies see their 'national identity' differently, as Breton, Catalan or Quebecois. But who are the British? We live in a state, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to give it its full title, which makes us 'British'. That is what it says on our passports.

What is the difference, if any, between being English, Scottish, Welsh on the one hand, and being British on the other? The easy answer is that people can be both, that being British is a sort of umbrella identity sitting loosely upon the older territorial identities of England, Scotland and Wales. Simply put, you can be both English and British, Scottish and British, Welsh and British; these may be seen by academics and the person in the street alike as nested identities, complementary, not contradictory, although in practice people sometimes see them as alternatives depending on context. However, over the last 20 years, there has been a steady decline in the number of people signing up to the view that such identities are nested. In our studies of national identity going back almost two decades, we have found that substantial numbers of citizens of this realm no longer think of themselves as British. Notably in Scotland and in Wales, and increasingly in England, more and more people give priority to what we might call for shorthand their 'national'

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identity over their 'state' one. In one part of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland, issues of Britishness have a particular political meaning which relate to history and patterns of settlement which have no counterpart elsewhere in the British state. Not only do the people of the 'mainland' feel less need to proclaim that they are British, but they are subject to an even more fundamental puzzle.

One of the most striking features of the new century to date has been the rise of political parties in Scotland and Wales dedicated to loosening or even ending the ties that historically bound this island together. Nationalist parties are in power in devolved Scotland and Wales, as a minority government in the former and a junior coalition partner in the latter. Further, a party – Sinn Féin – dedicated to ending the union in Northern Ireland is also in coalition with its erstwhile unionist nemesis. What price the United Kingdom in *those* contexts?

That, however, is to see national identity as straightforwardly 'political'. As we shall see in this book, how ordinary people construe and articulate their national identity does not easily predict their politics, neither which party they vote for, nor their constitutional preference. People who deny that they are British do not, necessarily, vote for the nationalist parties dedicated to ending the British Union, nor themselves want that Union to end. Even the growing number of people in England who say they are not British are not, for the time being anyway, clamouring for 'an English parliament for an English people'. So what is going on? Are people hopelessly confused, or are things far more complex than they seem? We think the latter.

National identity is one of those concepts which seem to evoke different responses. On the one hand, there is the view that, quite frankly, there is little to say, for everyone has a national identity whether they like it or not. It is, in fact, conferred by the state in the form of nationality or citizenship; it is an add-on of being a citizen, not a distinct concept varying from person to person. We may debate how long it has been that way, but it certainly seems to be a central part of the apparatus of the modern state. Ernest Gellner pointed out that we are all nationals now, and that nationalism is the taken-for-granted ideology which binds us to the state, or, as he would have it, the nation. People fight and die for the nation – *pro patria mori* – with alarming willingness; *dulce et decorum est*, however, tongue in cheek. Why, Benedict Anderson asked, are people willing to die for their nation, but rarely for their social class? Those who would not die for their nation are remarkably few, and it is not because they have somehow been tricked into so doing. As Gellner observed, the size, scale and complexity of modern

societies are such as to demand loyalty and identification with the state, through the medium of the nation. National identification becomes the *sine qua non* of citizenship. Because, as Gianfranco Poggi has pointed out, the modern state is a 'made historical reality', a 'purposively constructed, functionally specific machine' (Poggi, 1978: 95, 101), it needs to mobilise commitment through a national ideology; in other words, it is continuously faced with legitimising itself to its citizens, and it does so by and large because it stands for the nation; it is its constitutional expression.

From this theoretical perspective, national identity is taken as 'natural', as essential, but it is also seen as actively constructed by the state. Its taken-for-granted quality may serve the state well, but it has to be continually manufactured and sustained. It is not a once-and-for-all process. To some – but not Gellner – national identity is something of a con trick, worked by the state and its institutions to make the citizenry malleable and willing to do its bidding. This is the view that nationalism is a form of secular religion, and national identity our 'church' membership card. We belong whether we like it or not, and most of us like it. Hardly any of us question it.

This has led some writers to be sceptical of national identity, seeing it as a form of what Marxists call 'false consciousness', somehow not quite right as identities go, and certainly less 'real' than social class, gender, ethnicity, because from these certain clear-cut life chances derive. In a sustained attack on the national identity concept, Brubaker and Cooper (2000) argue that national identity is far too loose to have much analytical value. In their view, it can mean identification and categorisation, self-understanding and social location, as well as commonality, connectedness and groupness. As a concept it is too vague, internally inconsistent and unspecific.

We do not share this pessimism. We think it is time to recover national identity as an analytical concept. We do not find it helpful simply to treat it as a 'top-down' idea, as some kind of ideological cement in modern, complex societies, open to construction and manipulation by the state. Put simply, modern societies can no longer be described as 'nation-states' in which the political realm, the state, wraps itself in the cultural concept of the nation, such that the two become coterminous. We have grown so used to treating state and nation as synonyms that we forget that they belong to different realms, the political and cultural respectively. States may have several nations within them. They are multination-states. It is one of the criticisms of Gellner's work that if he is correct that the modern state has the power and capacity to

manage nationalism as a secular ideology, it doesn't do it at all well. Across the Western world at least, the so-called nation-state suffers from what Benedict Anderson called 'the crisis of the hyphen', a growing inability to make the political and the cultural planes connect. The Israeli sociologist Yael Tamir commented: 'The era of the homogeneous and viable nation-states is over (or rather the era of the illusion that homogeneous and viable nation-states are possible is over, since such states never existed) and the national vision must be redefined' (1993:3). In fact, the nation-state strictly defined was always more of a political aspiration than a sociological reality, based on a claim that the cultural sphere – the nation – and the political realm – the state – coincided. As Daniel Bell aptly comments, the nation-state is 'too big for the small problems of life, and too small for the big problems of life' (quoted in McGrew, 1992:87).

National identity matters. In fact, it seems to matter more as time goes on, and not only because added fixes of 'nationalism' are required to hold the citizenry closer to the state precisely at the moment at which it can deliver less and less in a 'globalised' world. One of its most obvious manifestations is the emergence, or re-assertion, of substate nationalisms, of being Scottish, Welsh, Flemish, Quebecois, rather than British, Belgian or Canadian. These are interesting to us, not because we necessarily believe in their virtue – that is for electorates to decide upon – but because they provide imagined alternatives to the dominant national ideologies of the state itself. Why does that matter? Because it helps to make explicit what is usually taken for granted. From our perspective as social researchers, the existence of alternative and contested forms of national identity makes the varying accounts of their national identity, which groups of people give in different contexts, very revealing. As people struggle to grasp such tools of the social scientific trade as national identity, the alternatives they offer make their 'imagined' identity accessible to the outside observer. They frequently envisage their national identity by comparing themselves, sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly, with 'others'. This may be to assert similarity but they often express their national identity by contrasting it to that of others, by delineating who (or what) they are not.

Getting at national identity

In our previous work on national identity, we found the atypical and unusual a valuable analytical device. It took a novelist rather than a social scientist to put his finger on the issue. The Scottish writer Willie McIlvanney once observed, back in 1999 just before the first Scottish

parliament was elected: 'Having a national identity is like having an old insurance policy. You know you've got one somewhere but you're not sure where it is. And if you're honest, you would have to admit you're pretty vague about what the small print means' (*The Herald*, 6 March 1999). What he seems to have been getting at is that most people will say they have a national identity, but they are usually unclear about precisely what it signifies. Such clarity dawns sporadically in specific contexts or while interacting with specific people. On the other hand, we can point to some groups where it is much more salient; because they are somehow peripheral to mainstream concerns or their claims to be 'national' are rejected by the majority or they are accused of not being 'loyal'.

When we, the editors, began our research on national identity in the early 1990s, we chose to study two 'elite' groups, one of Scottish landowners, and the other of arts managers who were in charge of Scottish national institutions in music, drama and the arts more generally. Clearly we did so not because they were in any way representative of the population at large, but because at the time many of them were accused in the media of not being fit and proper persons to be in charge of such 'national' icons, land and the arts. They were judged not to be fit because, the accusers said, they were not 'Scottish', but born in England in particular, and could not be properly trusted to speak for, or even properly understand, the nation.

The point of our focus on these groups was not because we went along with the accusations in any way, but because they presented us with two contrasting, ready-made and identifiable groups who were far more likely to have had to consider who they were and what they were doing. To return to McIlvanney's analogy, they were far more likely than most to know what the 'small print' said and to have evolved accounts of who they were. And so it proved. Virtually all had thought about national identity, their own and that of the institution in their charge, and were able to give quite sophisticated accounts. Much, for example, hinged around the significance or otherwise of birthplace, which we know from our surveys tends to be the taken-for-granted criterion used by the population at large. You are a Scot or English or whatever, because you were born in Scotland, England and so on. However, as many people told us, none of us choose where we are born; that's for our parents to decide. Choosing where you want to live, and investing time, knowledge and skill, and even money in order to contribute to the country of your choosing, seemed to many far more significant indicators of commitment, and hence 'national identity'. In other words, it had more to do with a process of identification, than a static sense of national identity over which you had little or no control.

'To identify' – the active verb – was deemed much more important than 'identity' – the noun, and signified a process of action and choice. Criteria other than birthplace could be put in the pot: your ancestry or parentage – the bloodline, if you like; what you were 'taken for' by others – accent and dress being two of the more obvious factors affecting this. In other words, if you spoke with what was thought to be a 'national' accent, or if you dressed in a 'national' way, then you had far more chance of being taken as 'one of us' rather than 'one of them', whatever your birthplace or parentage.

A couple of years later, we moved on from contestable people to contestable places. The literature on nationalism has many examples relating to borders and frontiers, where, by and large, those occupying – sometimes literally, as occupiers – debatable lands tend to be much more aware of who they are and who they are not. In the case of the former Yugoslavia, living on the border could be dangerous, and a 'frontier mentality' developed whereby those who lived there were more 'national' than the nationals. In these islands, on the other hand, there is only one serious, and contested, land border – between Northern Ireland and the Republic. One might make a case for saying that, historically at least, those from the 'mainland' who were settled in the north from the seventeenth century became vociferously more British than the people they left behind, overlaid as they were by religious, cultural and political differences.

How, we wondered, did people living in historically debatable land do identity? Even if a border was no longer contested, did simply living on a salient and at one time shifting border impact on people's sense of identity? Between England and Scotland lies Berwick-upon-Tweed, within the current jurisdiction of England but a town which had changed hands 14 times between Scotland and England up to the sixteenth century. We found that the people of Berwick related easily to issues of territorial identity, and most, within the old town of Berwick, or 'within the walls' as they still said, solved the problem of national identity by emphasising their Berwickness. There is in fact a ditty which captures this nicely: 'They talk about Scotland and England indeed; There's Scotland, and England and Berwick-upon-Tweed'. We found that claiming local identity was considerably more important than national, but that, if pressed, at the time more claimed to be English than Scottish. More than ten years on, the local media revisited the issue and ran their own opinion poll, this time showing that a majority of those answering thought Berwick should be in Scotland. Why? Had the good people of Berwick suddenly uncovered Scottish ancestors? The answer seems more mundane and the result of a process which was

already evident in nascent form at the time of our study but had been accelerated by constitutional change. Ten years of a Scottish parliament had reinforced awareness that they lived on the border dividing two nations and, importantly, made the material differences between the Scottish and English jurisdictions more pronounced, with better quality educational, social and welfare services to the north. Berwick found itself a periphery on a periphery: the county of Northumberland was distant from London, and Berwick was peripheral to the more populous city of Newcastle where local power was located. The fact that the county of Berwickshire was in Scotland but the town of Berwick in England became an anomaly with growing political significance, especially as Scotland's nationalist government went out of its way to make welcoming noises.

What, one might properly ask, does studying contestable people or contestable places have to do with studying constitutional change as we then went on to do? The short answer is that such change seemed to us to present an opportunity, a context within which we could more effectively get at issues of national identity. To what extent, in other words, does constitutional change, notably creating a Scottish parliament, make people feel more Scottish (or possibly less); or was constitutional change driven by a prior increase in national feeling in Scotland? These are important issues which are dealt with in this book, although, as we have already indicated, our reason for creating the programme¹ had much more to do with the potential devolution had for raising the *salience* of national identity rather than changing or determining it. In other words, it set the context within which a study of national identity became timely; it gave the opportunity to get people to look out their national identity 'insurance policy' and possibly even examine the small print for us. Identity politics were on the agenda, and as Mercer pointed out: 'identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty' (1990:43). We are not claiming that identity became 'an issue', that there was some identity crisis in Scotland or in England, but we were attracted to the context of heightened identity salience which devolution provided.

Researching national identity

How did we then go about creating the programme? Identity, including national identity, is not the preserve of any single social science discipline; it is plainly a political, sociological, cultural and psychological

phenomenon, and more. Inevitably, and usefully, sociologists, social anthropologists, social psychologists and political scientists bring different perspectives to bear. Accordingly, our team was drawn deliberately from different disciplines, using a variety of methods and approaches. We were attracted to the possibilities of a combination of research perspectives and the triangulation of research methods – surveys, in-depth interviews, done singly or repeated at intervals to see whether people's opinions had changed, ethnographic studies of organisations, as well as case studies and laboratory experimentation such that key stimuli could be controlled and varied, and results measured more precisely. Not all the perspectives and associated findings are represented in this book, but we have tried as far as possible to give a flavour of their richness and variety.

We made no attempt to get all the researchers signed up to the same set of assumptions and approaches, for in many ways that would have defeated the purpose of our search for diversity. The editors were, however, the prime movers in this research programme, and to a large but not exclusive extent gave the programme its underlying rationale. This is worth spelling out more explicitly. In our previous work, we were attracted by the performative and presentational aspect of identity, and symbolic interactionism, especially as manifested in the distinctive and groundbreaking work of Erving Goffman was an early influence. Goffman took the view that identity was a tactical construction designed to maximise player advantage. We are less concerned with identity as a tactical issue but have developed further the idea from Goffman that it involves claims, the receipt of claims and the attribution of identity characteristics to others on the basis of what the audience is able to perceive. One of the obvious implications of this approach is that people have more control over and 'play' more with aspects of identity than a top-down approach might imply. Our research on landed and arts elites, for example, suggested that actors have considerable capacity to construct and negotiate national identities. Thus, presenting oneself as Scottish, English, British or whatever is a matter of meaning and mobilisation involving actors and audiences, as well as an ability to read signs of identity. In other words, there is a complex matrix involving how actors define themselves, how they attribute identity to others and how they think others attribute identity to them. This moves us away considerably from the view that national identity is handed down from on high as tablets of stone. Rather, it confers much more negotiating and mobilising power on the actors themselves. This is not to imply that individuals freely and without constraint can make it up

for themselves as they go along. It was Stuart Hall (1992) who pointed out that identities are constituted *within*, not outside, representations. He comments: 'we only know what it is to be "English" because of the way "Englishness" has come to be represented, as a set of meanings, by English national culture' (1992:292). What we have here is a good example of the interplay of social structure and social action, the former emphasising the constraints on individuals in the interests of social order; the latter emphasising the capacity of social actors to shape the world around them – society as the creation of its members, as it were. The concept of identity, therefore, can be seen as the hinge between structure and action. People are neither extemporising actors on a stage, making it up as they go along, nor are they puppets dancing to the hidden strings of state and institutional power.

We have also found useful Anthony Cohen's concept of 'personal nationalism' which asserts the primacy of the actor as a 'thinking self' (1994:167). Our concern with the small-scale, personalised and negotiated nature of national identity drew us to Billig's 'banal nationalism', which argues that, for example, national flags 'melt into the background as "our" particular world is experienced as *the world*' (Billig, 1995:50). This seemed to us close to Ernest Renan's famous dictum that national identity involves a 'daily plebiscite', each individual asserting in action their national identity in a matter-of-fact, hence, daily, way. In the second chapter in this book, Steve Reicher, Nick Hopkins and Kate Harrison point to the capacities, the power, of national identities to shape how we see the world, and our capacity to act within it. They argue that identity definitions, far from being set in stone, may be redefined and reinvented.

This focus on the individual, the personal, means that our prime concerns are with how people 'do' identity, who they think they are, who they think others are, what kinds of people are thought to be 'like us' and 'not like us'. National identity also involves quite basic social, political and economic issues such as the legitimacy of public policies, matters of social inclusion and exclusion, prejudice and discrimination, whether we judge the actions of organisations to be in the 'national' interest, that is, the interest of the collective 'we', and whether we are willing or not to move away from 'us' and live among 'them'. In other words, we see identity as helping to organise social action in different ways. First, the *content* of identity affects the types of action which are seen as legitimate or illegitimate, the type of policies and projects which are endorsed or rejected, and the types of goals pursued. Second, the *boundaries* of identity will affect who is accepted as part of the community,

and who is excluded as 'the other'. Third, the way identity is visualised affects which place one thinks of as 'home' and which place one sees as 'foreign'. We chose to examine these aspects of national identity through the prism of devolution as it developed across the Scottish–English divide in the first five or six years after the decision to create the Parliament. Constitutional change afforded the key critical context in which the nature of the claims to identities, and the way they are negotiated, are likely to change. Once more, the novelist Willie McIlvanney articulates it best: 'Identity, personal or national, isn't merely something you have like a passport. It is also something you discover daily like a strange country. Its core isn't something solid, like a mountain. It is something molten, like magna' (*The Herald*, 13 March 1999).

In the first place, then, we were strongly committed to finding out how individuals 'did' national identity, how such identities were carried, altered and used by people themselves. We did this in a number of ways. First of all, we tried to assess the general level of public opinion in both Scotland and England concerning how constitutional change was received, and how issues of territorial identity were negotiated around it. This meant establishing through surveys, as benchmarks, what people in the two countries thought. We have drawn on these surveys largely but not exclusively to answer questions such as are people in England becoming more or less English, as opposed to British? This matters hugely, because 85 per cent of the UK population lives in England. If they are shifting away from saying they are British to saying they are English, one wonders how great that withdrawal of identification can be without calling into question the survival of the British state.

A prior and more fundamental issue, however, is whether people in England make any distinction between what we have called state identity and national identity. It could be, for example, that calling oneself English as opposed to British is simply a change of label for what the English see as the same thing. Running alongside these territorial issues are 'ethnic' ones, for England's ethnic minority populations have to bring identity labels such as 'British' and 'English' into line with their own ethnic identities. These also reflect back onto the indigenous white population's own conception of themselves and others, which raises issues as to whether such claims are legitimate or not. The 'English Question', whether there indeed has been a rise in Englishness, either along with, or at the expense of Britishness, is addressed in this book by John Curtice and Anthony Heath, whose chapter on trends in national identity in England uses data from the British Social Attitudes series. Drawing upon different measures of national identity they explore

whether there has been an increase in English national identity, and whether such a shift has social and political implications which give rise to specific political claims. While these two authors were not formally part of the research programme, they draw upon survey data specifically collected for the programme, as well as other British Social Attitudes data since the late 1990s. Ross Bond takes the relationship, if there is one, between national identities and political attitudes a stage further. His chapter has two main themes: first, that if nationalism is in essence political in nature, we might expect a close connection between the way people think of themselves in national terms and their views on how the country should be governed. We are dealing here not simply with which political party people support and identify with, but also their constitutional aspirations and beliefs, as well as how willing (or not) people are to trust the government of their choice. Bond's second set of issues concerns how much solidarity there is post-devolution across Scotland and England. If, for example, the peoples of the two countries have similar views about the best way of governing the other country, think both countries benefit in economic and social terms from Union, and have similar social and political values, then there is a *prima facie* case for saying that the state will survive. If, on the other hand, they diverge on how the state should be governed, considering there are grievances because one country or the other gets more than its fair share, as well as having different sets of values, then this would seem to be a much greater challenge to state cohesiveness.

The focus on the individual level was not confined to carrying out large-scale surveys. These are good at establishing benchmarks of public opinion, but less good at getting at what people mean by their responses. For that, we need more intensive interviews which allow people to explain in their own time and in their own ways what national identity means. Cross-sectional surveys also have their limitations because they are discrete surveys of different people, unlike the more powerful but extremely expensive longitudinal surveys which are of the same people surveyed at more than one time-point. There is also the issue of migrants who were born in one country and migrated to another. How do they manage issues of identity? Do they keep hold of, even intensify, their identity of birth and upbringing when they migrate, or do they seek to take on the new identity of their country of destination? Or, indeed, do they seek to find ways of accommodating both, by appealing to supranational identities, by saying, for example, that they are British, an identity which they assume is shared by the hosts? In their chapter 'Being Scottish', the editors, Bechhofer and

McCrone, use both quantitative survey material and qualitative interviews to make sense of what 'being Scottish' means both to people born and living in Scotland and also to those who have migrated to England. Is it in fact that important, and if so, to whom? Do people 'do Scottish' in particular situations? Can people born in England and now resident in Scotland become Scottish, and what is the impact of race and ethnicity? Are some people going to find their claims to be Scottish more readily accepted than others?

Thinking you won't be accepted if you go and live somewhere else can be a barrier to mobility, and in their chapter, Steve Reicher, Nick Hopkins and Kate Harrison report on social psychological studies in which participants are encouraged to think of themselves in different ways. In their experiments the salience of identities, notably Scottish and English, is measurably increased or decreased. These experiments allowed them to explore what happens when they vary the information they give to participants about identity, and to assess how likely they are to accept or reject claims from different people for inclusion. Such techniques permit the exploration of people's assumptions about inclusion and exclusion with a degree of subtlety which may cast doubts on some of the things people say in more overtly challenging situations. Their studies reveal how identities shape perception and action, including who is seen as a member of the national community and who is not, and on what basis. In other words, identity is less a matter of attitude and more a matter of action, if and when circumstances arise.

There is however more to identity than what individuals think and do. If we only focus on this aspect of identity, we miss important dimensions, as well as run foul of the charge that if we only ask people about identity, and they tell us about it, how can we be sure that it really matters as people go about their daily lives? That is the value of doing ethnographic research which is arguably a much more naturalistic research method than surveys and preferable in that regard even to qualitative interviews. Can we be sure, for example, that in work and organisational settings, matters of national identity will matter very much? How does national identity work, if at all, as people go about their daily business? Jonathan Hearn's chapter explores the nature, salience and consequences of national identity in the organisational setting of a bank, in this case, the Bank of Scotland, which quite fortuitously embarked on a merger with Halifax to form HBOS at the time of the study. The bank found itself becoming the vehicle for Scottish national identity at a time of major organisational and cultural change. As a major economic player, the bank became the carrier of national identity

values for many of its staff, and as such teaches us vital lessons in how changes in the modern capitalist economy impact upon issues of identity. In situations where 'rationalisation' and amalgamation occur in the banking and commercial sectors, how does the language of nationality and locality get used and mobilised, if at all? The point about studies such as these is that they illuminate in a naturalistic setting just how relevant or irrelevant national identity can become. In other words, organisations themselves are carriers of national identity, or sites where issues and conflicts of such identity are played out.

There is a related question: from where do individuals get their sense of identity? Stuart Hall's comment that identities are constituted within representations is relevant here. Just as there are private organisations, such as the bank, which might come to be carriers of identity, at least for some members of its staff, so public institutions are bearers of identity, *a priori* perhaps to a greater degree. In this book, we explore two such institutions: universities and the media. Lindsay Paterson explores the role of universities in Scotland, although they also have this role in England and Wales, in educating leaders of civil society. Indeed, a key component of governance in the United Kingdom in the twentieth century has been the informal division of power between the central state and the institutions of civil society. The relative autonomy of civil society in Scotland and Wales is one of the key reasons why there is a sense of distinct national identities, for a long time nested within but independent of British identity. Put simply, people in Scotland in particular long thought of themselves as Scottish because they were brought up and educated by Scottish institutions, governed and judged by a distinct legal system and, in the case of Presbyterians, worshipped in a Scottish way through a Scottish national church. The question then becomes not what has made Scots feel Scottish, but why they seem to have downgraded their sense of being British. Education systems, and in particular universities, have been central to nationalist movements not only in these islands (including Ireland) but in the rest of Europe. Paterson argues that the relationship between formally 'British' universities and nationalism is unusual in this respect. Each country, England, Scotland and Wales, developed distinctive features of university education which had a central role in forming the professional classes. This quasi-autonomy helped to shape the 'national' agendas in each country, and with it heightened the role of civic leadership, especially when universities came directly under the auspices of a devolved government at the end of the twentieth century. National identity is carried by education systems which instruct people in how to be 'national', partially

forging the link between identity and culture, as well as shaping the relationship between universalistic values embedded in education, and those deemed to be attached to a particular nation.

If education systems, and universities in particular, are important institutional carriers of national identities, then the same can be said for the broadcasting and print media. News media in particular are assumed to reproduce 'national' culture, reporting 'home' events to a 'domestic' audience. The media help to frame what it means to be 'national' by reporting, or not, events in a particular way and using key descriptors. In their chapter 'Drifting Apart?', Michael Rosie and Pille Petersoo focus on how news is 'framed' and the degree to which it flags a national readership or audience. They examine the content of the news and its national 'habits', as well as the production of news agendas and contents. What seems to be happening post-devolution, they argue, is that news agendas within the United Kingdom are fragmenting. Thus, Scots can read and watch and listen to news about Scotland, but receive less information about Welsh, English and Northern Irish current affairs through their media. The same seems true for people in England. One might ask: if there is no unified public media space, can the United Kingdom cohere in any meaningful way? Public institutions like the universities and the media have the power to refract social and political processes through a 'national' prism, and in an increasingly diverse United Kingdom, have the capacity not simply to reflect national identity but to amplify it. The key point is that public institutions themselves are crucially involved in the process of producing and negotiating national identity, and refract these back to the population as a whole.

In conclusion

We live in times of heightened awareness of 'national identity' in the United Kingdom. Politicians and the media judge it to be of such social and political consequence that they give speeches, write lengthy articles and pronounce *ex cathedra*, and generally in the absence of hard data, on the future of being British, Scottish or English in the light of social and political change. The tercentenary in 2007 of the union between Scotland and England provided commentators with a suitable peg on which to hang debates about whether the United Kingdom in its present form will continue. The decade between 1997 and 2007 in particular was a period of major social and political change in the United Kingdom, with pressure in Scotland as well as Wales to devolve

political control away from Westminster and towards the two national capitals of Edinburgh and Cardiff. The ramifications and implications of these changes are still being worked through the system, and no one can say where they might end. The general assumption is that the rise in nationalism in its broadest sense is fuelled by changing national identities. It is widely accepted that devolution was driven by people in Scotland and Wales thinking of themselves in 'national' terms (i.e. as Scottish or Welsh) rather than in 'state' terms, that is, as British. There is also the possibility that setting up a Scottish parliament, albeit one within the United Kingdom, has itself in turn made people feel more Scottish.

This book, then, reports on some of the key findings of the major and unique research programme funded by The Leverhulme Trust just at the point at which devolution in Scotland (and Wales) became a fact of political life. The programme continued until the middle of the first decade of the new century, thus covering the first crucial years of devolution on the British mainland. The book focuses on some of the key issues of our day: how people in Scotland and England 'do' national identity; whether devolution has had much impact on how they see themselves in national terms; the relationship between national identities and the rise of nationalism; whether any of these changes challenge the British state by undermining what it means to be British. It also examines how devolution is related to changes in education and the media, and how changes in the economy have impacted on national identity.

The book has two related aims. It seeks to make a significant contribution to understanding the impact of major constitutional change in these islands. Whether or not the United Kingdom will continue in anything like its current form is an open question; no one can be sure where any of these changes will lead. It seems to us just as plausible to say that the United Kingdom will continue in an amended form, as it is to say that it will cease to exist. No one can say what shape it will be in, say, in ten years', never mind 50 years' time. The aim of the book, however, is not simply to make a contribution to a current political debate. It also seeks to make much better sense of 'national identity' as a concept. Richard Jenkins (1996) commented that the study of national identity is 'perhaps the best device that I know for bringing together "public issues" and "private troubles", and encouraging us to use one to make sense of the other'. We acknowledge this allusion to C. Wright Mills as being one of the central tasks for social scientists, and intend that our work on national identity makes a critical and informed contribution to one of the most important issues of our times.

Note

1. The research programme 'Constitutional Change and National Identity' was funded by The Leverhulme Trust from 1999 to 2005, involving studies of national identity by an interdisciplinary group of social scientists using a variety of research methods. Full details and findings are available at <http://www.institute-of-governance.org/forum/Leverhulme/TOC.html#ident>.

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