REWRITING THE NATION
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WELSH AND SCOTTISH WOMEN’S FICTION FROM THE WILDERNESS YEARS TO POST-DEVOLUTION

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis has not been, nor is currently being, submitted for award of any other degree or similar qualification.

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ABSTRACT

Since devolution there has been a wealth of stimulating and exciting literary works by Welsh and Scottish women writers, produced as the boundaries of nationality were being dismantled and ideas of nationhood transformed. This comparative study brings together, for the first time, Scottish and Welsh women writers’ literary responses to these historic political and cultural developments.

Chapter one situates the thesis in a historical context and discusses some of the connections between Wales and Scotland in terms of their relationship with ‘Britain’ and England. Chapter two focuses on the theoretical context and argues that postcolonial and feminist theories are the most appropriate frameworks in which to understand both Welsh and Scottish women’s writing in English, and their preoccupations with gendered inequalities and language during the pre- and post-devolutionary period. The third chapter examines Welsh and Scottish women’s writing from the first failed referendum (1979) to the second successful one (1997) to provide a sense of progression towards devolution. Since the process of devolution began there has been an important repositioning of Scottish and Welsh people’s perception of their culture and their place within it; the subsequent chapters – four, five, six and seven – analyse a diverse body of work from the symbolic transference of powers in 1999 to 2008. The writers discussed range from established authors such as Stevie Davies to first-time novelists such as Leela Soma. Through close comparative readings focusing on a range of issues such as marginalised identities and the politics of home and belonging, these chapters uncover and assess Welsh and Scottish women writers’ shared literary assertions, strategies and concerns as well as local and national differences.

The conclusions drawn from this thesis suggest that, as a consequence of a history of sustained internal and external marginalization, post-devolution Welsh and Scottish women’s writing share important similarities regarding the politics of representation. The authors discussed in this study are resisting writers who textually illustrate the necessity of constantly rewriting national narratives and in so doing enable their audience to read the two nations and their peoples in fresh, innovative and divergent ways.
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# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1 Constructing a Nation, Creating a Narrative: Women, History, Culture and Society</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2 Theoretical Frameworks</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3 Towards Devolution: The Wilderness Years (1979 to 1997)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4 Desolation to Devolution: The Shifting Sense of Identity and Belonging (1999-2001)</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5 Reimagining the Family, Identity and Space (2002-2004)</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6 Voicing Differences and Defying Homogeny (2005-2007)</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7 What a Difference a Decade Makes: Devolution and Women’s Literature Ten Years on</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Interview with Rachel Trezise</td>
<td>392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Interview with Laura Hird</td>
<td>403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C: Interview with Zoe Strachan</td>
<td>414</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Autonomy has everything to do with how a society approaches its literature and its past. From autonomy comes not only a strengthened sense of identity and pride but also a gradual movement towards a critical unearthing and reappraisal.¹

The election of the Labour government in 1997 was a key moment in the politics of identity and belonging. The new government’s commitment to constitutional reform meant not only a re-drawing of the constitutional map but that geographies of belonging were beginning to be re-defined. The public vote in favour of devolution in Scotland, Wales and the Northern Ireland² symbolised a pivotal point in the history of these nations and the UK government’s symbolic motion towards a redistribution of power refocused attention on questions of nationhood and ideas of ‘Britishness’. These far reaching constitutional changes that the ‘modernisation’ of the UK state promised was borne out of the long history of the Celtic periphery’s discontent with their subjugated status and disempowerment.

In Scotland and Wales the cultural changes have been palpable as ‘the boundaries of nationality [were] dismantled and reconfigured’; writers started to re-
imagine a new world of possibilities for national and individual identities. ³ For as Jackie Kay reminds us,

Nothing matters more than who we are in the world, where we have been and where we are going. The issue of identity is at the heart of our society and involves everyone.⁴

Since devolution there has been a radical shift in how people in Wales and Scotland see their culture and their place within it and this thesis is a comparative analysis which brings together, for the first time, Scottish and Welsh women writers’ responses to these landmark political and cultural developments. There has been a remarkable output of new and exciting fiction from Scottish and Welsh women since the process of devolution began, yet literature by women is still critically under-discussed and comparatively neglected. The study discusses the work of established writers such as Stevie Davies and Ali Smith whose ‘return’ novels (after years of writing about elsewhere) symbolise Scotland’s and Wales’s cultural renewal; however, the majority of texts discussed are by newly published writers like Alison Miller and Catrin Dafydd who exemplify the range and complexity of new work being produced during this period.

The rationale for selecting the primary texts is to show that contemporary post-devolution Wales and Scotland are providing us with an exciting and diverse new generation of writers; these fresh voices are narrating the nation in their own distinct way from a multitude of different contexts and backgrounds. The study focuses primarily on long fiction, with some short stories included, as this reflects the

publishing trend during these early years of post-devolution where an exceptional number of novels by women came on to the market. This in itself shows a remarkable shift in the creation and production of literature, especially so in Wales, where historically poetry has been the principal writing medium. Furthermore, this major growth in literature by women, writing in English in broad variety of genres, illustrates the confidence and vitality of the writers and the culture over the last decade.

The writers examined all explore the politics and discourses of identity from a variety of perspectives and illustrate that through the performance of their respective narrations these nations can evolve into dynamic, diverse and kaleidoscopic places. The appendices provide three transcripts of interviews conducted with a small representation of these ‘new’ writers – Rachel Trezise from Wales and Laura Hird and Zoe Strachan from Scotland – which illustrate some of the ideas post-devolution writers were considering at the start of the new system of governments.

Since devolution there has been an increasing growth in theoretical and critical investigations on a range of issues relating to nation, postcolonialism and feminism; however, studies in Scotland and Wales within a comparative context have been limited. Critical connections have been made between Scotland and Ireland, and Ireland and Wales, but although there has been some comparative research into Scotland and Wales since devolution these studies have been almost exclusively within the political arena; there is no extensive comparative investigation and theoretical perspective linking Welsh and Scottish women’s fiction post-devolution. The reorganization of political paradigms which have reshaped Wales’s and Scotland’s relationship to

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England has connected these nations in a number of distinct ways and a study examining women’s literary reactions seems timely and imperative.

Scottish and Welsh women writers have started to question the dominant discourses and ideologies relating to nation building, national identities and states of belonging, ideas that have long been, arguably, the preserve of men. Anne McClintock argues that nations are historical traditions and systems through which ‘social difference is both invented and performed’; these sociocultural and political constructions have historically been tied to patriarchal structures of power. And indeed, in the past Welsh and Scottish national identities were seen as essentially masculine, ‘construed in terms of the recorded achievements by men’. For instance, in Wales it was claimed that ‘Rugby Union lies central to Welsh identity’ and the Welsh National Anthem, ‘Land of My Fathers’ obscures women’s presence within the nation. ‘Scotland the Brave’ similarly refers to male military values as the primary identifier of Scotland. There are obvious limitations to these dominant representations of the nation and nationhood, and this thesis argues that post-devolutionary women writers challenged the status quo and problematised ideologies of nation and nationhood.

The work created by post-devolutionary Scottish and Welsh women writers illustrates their extensive engagement with issues about social and cultural constructions within a transforming and transient world. All the writers examined remind us that

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6 Anne McClintock, “‘No Longer in a Future Heaven”: Gender, Race and Nationalism’ in Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti and Ella Shohat, eds., Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1997), pp.89-112, p.89.
being ‘British’, ‘Welsh’ or ‘Scottish’ are not ‘safe closed categories’\(^{10}\) and that the construction of the space we call ‘nation’ encompasses myriad conflicting and complementary transnational cultures and traditions. Thematically, the writers of this period reflect concerns with sexed and gendered identity formations, cultural differences, ideas of home and belonging; crucially, their work destabilises notions of centre and margin, and provide a counterdiscourse to dominant configurations of self and other. This thesis argues that the diversity of styles, genres and the degree of political engagement is indicative of Welsh and Scottish female writers’ growing self-assurance and maturity and enables us to read the nation and its people in new, innovative and divergent ways.

For this study a chronological approach has been employed, an appropriate structure given that my investigation spans a very particular time. This comparative investigation illustrates how the writers, many of whom have never before been discussed in literary criticism, understand individual identity and subjectivity, the community and the nation, and I argue that their perceptions of their imagined communities critically interrogate the standards and ethics of history, tradition and sociocultural representations. Key themes and issues to emerge relate to class, language and gendered subjectivities and how these intersect with notions of the familial, the nation and the global.

As this is a comparative study the connections and differences between Welsh and Scottish cultural history and the ways in which they manifest themselves in women’s writing necessarily have to be considered; these are, of course, two quite separate nations, with different histories and cultures, and different responses to

devolved government. Nevertheless, it is not only historical differences between these nations that the writers reflect but also the geographical diversity, political and cultural struggles and conflicts within each nation.

Chapter one situates the thesis in a historical context and discusses some of the connections between Wales and Scotland in terms of their relationship with ‘Britain’ and England, connections which suggest a contemporary comparative study is both valuable and meaningful given that within ‘Great Britain’ these nations have persevered in their culturally distinct ways despite domination from the hegemony. This chapter also provides an overview of the many and diverse difficulties and struggles Welsh and Scottish women have historically faced in order to articulate their voices in a way which authentically represents their experiences and their aspirations.

Chapter two focuses on the theoretical context and argues that postcolonial and feminist theories are the most appropriate frameworks through which to understand both Welsh and Scottish writing in English and women’s experiences during the pre- and post-devolutionary period. The use of postcolonial theory to examine writing from Wales and Scotland is a contentious issue not least because of the controversy surrounding the identification of these nations as colonies in view of their involvement in empire building and imperial projects. Nevertheless, I argue that the ‘British’ political, sociocultural and ideological structures and discourses have systematically subjugated both Wales and Scotland and that employing postcolonial theory enables an understanding of how that hegemonic dominance has led to both a private and public crisis. Both feminist and postcolonial theories deal with issues such as displacement, alienation and marginalisation – issues that are central to all of the texts examined in this thesis.
The third chapter examines Welsh and Scottish women’s writing from the first failed referendum to the second successful one (1979-1997) to provide a sense of progression and development, thereby making us conscious of a Scottish and Welsh modern female literary tradition and enabling a connection between ‘then’ and ‘now’. This period was seen by many as a watershed in terms of political disenfranchisement and writers’ impassioned response to sociocultural conditions. Although the referendum result of 1979 gave rise to quite different experiences in Wales and Scotland, the ensuing years of Conservative rule connected these nations in their despair at the iniquitous economic and political climate. The texts were selected to illustrate the diversity of narrative methods employed to examine stories of nation, identity and community. For instance, Mary Jones and Elspeth Barker employ the Gothic, Janice Galloway uses postmodernist techniques, Jackie Kay’s and Agnes Owens’s novels are realist texts, Sian James’s is a historical novel and Leonora Brito uses a combination of all these modes in her exploration into subjectivity and identity. The subject matter is also varied, yet they show a connecting concern with women’s experiences within political and cultural structures that have persistently privileged men and the masculine.

The writers’ representations of the world, unsurprisingly, differ from one another but they all explore personal, social and political spaces and gendered identities and investigate Scottish and Welsh women’s developing sense of subjectivity.

Chapter four examines texts from the period immediately following devolution and illustrates the scope and diversity of writing by women during this turning point in Welsh and Scottish politics. The writers’ representations of social reality reflect the embryonic confidence in being a woman writer in two small nations which traditionally looked to the male writer for ‘authentic’ depictions of the world. Laura Hird, Rachel
Trezise, Trezza Azzopardi and Janet Paisley all consider marginalised identities and subjectivities and the key themes to emerge concern ideas relating to ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ in the context of the national as well as the individual. Indeed, the writers in this chapter assert that the traditional (Western) institution of the family (the space where we learn, acquiesce to and support power struggles and oppressive behaviours) is the source of subjugation for both women and men. The politics of language and representation and how these intersect with class, ethnicity and gender also start to emerge as equally important considerations for the reappraisal of local and national cultures.

Women writers during 2002-2004 started to redefine what it meant to belong and to re-imagine national and cultural identity. Chapter five considers how writers problematised social divisions such as class, gender, ethnic and sexual identities and challenged hegemonic structures that attempted to contain and control. Sophie Cooke, Stevie Davies and Tiffany Murray show that the oppressive structures of the family and domestic sphere remain central to an examination of contemporary life. However, Erica Wooff, Zoe Strachan and Anne Donovan demonstrate that social and cultural progression and change meant that different modes of being and new possibilities were opening up for individuals and the ‘imagined community’.¹¹ The sexed/gendered structures which support and sustain the concept of family and marriage are examined and the theme of sexuality, which is investigated by all the writers in this chapter in a number of distinct ways, becomes central to that investigation.

Chapter six examines texts from 2005-2007 and illustrates the growing political and cultural maturity that has developed in both Wales and Scotland to differing degrees.

over the eight years of devolution. Language, gender and identity myths are all key concerns in this chapter and the writers consider these issues in a number of complex ways. Jackie Davies and Lesley McDowell interrogate the ‘historical’ national narrative and expose debilitating ideological conventions that annihilated the female subject. Nikita Lalwani and Alison Miller examine the political intersections between gender, ethnicity and nation and Ali Smith investigates gender performativity and the politics of representation in a globalised world. The writers in this chapter seek to illustrate the nation and culture as a place of socio-economic diversity and cultural heterogeneity.

The final chapter examines the state of affairs in women’s writing a decade after the implementation of the devolved governments and considers the work of Leela Soma and Fflur Dafydd who both produce key texts in terms of their engagement with the pre- and post-devolution climate. Soma and Dafydd deal directly with the atmosphere of fear and antipathy that the 1979 referendum defeat produced and the ensuing years of campaigning and hopeful imaginings of their respective communities. The writers reflect in quite distinct ways the historical, political, social and cultural developments of their devolved nations and the key debates concerning nationhood, identity and belonging.

In ‘Britain’ generally, there have been considerable transformations in the cultural and political situation since devolution and this thesis illustrates the exciting ways in which women writers are mapping these important changes in Welsh and Scottish cultures. Women in Wales and Scotland are becoming increasingly skilful (aesthetically and politically) at narrating their nations: this study shows women’s writing in the post-devolution era redefining and transforming what it means to belong in a local, national and transnational context. The thesis argues that representing the
nation differently is key to generating and transmitting an emergent cultural strength. The aim of this study is to put Scottish and Welsh post-devolution women writers into the domain of academic and critical analysis and illustrate that the work being produced in these newly devolved nations is significant in its diversity and stimulating in its range of ideas and willingness to explore. A study that brings Welsh and Scottish women writers together to explore some of the connections and relationships between the works is constructive and valuable as it allows us to uncover and assess similarities of experience as well as differences in two nations that have very recently altered the political climate and attempted to present a measure of gender parity in politics and cultural life. Furthermore, this study endeavours to prove that Welsh and Scottish women’s literature is limitless in its scope, exciting in its breadth and international in its subjects, themes and outlook.
Chapter 1

Constructing a Nation, Creating a Narrative: Women, History, Culture and Society

How could anyone think a culture stands still? Or that we can hand it over intact like a book? It’s more like the re-telling of a story. It changes every time we put our own spin on it and pass it on. We add our own little bits, forget others and get some of the story completely mixed up.¹

Devolution has united Wales and Scotland in a publicly and politically historic manner. Nevertheless, Scotland’s and Wales’s response to the process that brought these nations to this juncture – the 1979 and 1997 referenda – were not entirely similar. In 1979 Scotland voted for devolution, Wales did not² and in 1997, ‘Wales nearly vote[d] “no” when Scotland voted overwhelmingly “yes”’.³ Nevertheless, there are many aspects of Wales’s and Scotland’s historical, political and cultural circumstances that connect these two nations. Both nations’ relationship with England has long been problematic and complex and their ensuing socio-political situations have marked parallels. Although under very different circumstances, Wales and Scotland were incorporated into England by an Act of Union, in the sixteenth century and eighteenth century respectively, yet their exploitation in terms of the economic and political power and influence began much earlier.⁴ Jane Aaron argues that Wales was ‘conquered’ in the thirteenth century, ‘English settlers were established in existing townships with the

³ John Curtice, ‘Is Scotland a nation and Wales not? Why the two referendum results were so different’, ibid., p.119.
⁴ John Davies argues that in the Welsh context, the title Act of Union gives the wrong impression, suggesting as it does some agreement or consent to the union. Unlike the Scottish statute, which ‘were pieces of legislation passed by parliaments of both countries […] the Welsh Act of “Union” was passed solely by the parliament of England’. John Davies, A History of Wales (1993; London: Penguin, 2007) p.225.
Welsh inhabitants exiled outside the town walls, the Welsh were not permitted to testify against the English in law courts, they were not allowed to hold public office, an attempt was made to exterminate the Welsh language'. 5 Chris Williams also suggests that Wales was in a ‘colonial relationship to England [...] from the late thirteenth century’. 6 Scotland too was at the economic and political mercy of England long before the eventual Act of Union was implemented. As Michael Prestwich comments:

If the word ‘colony’ is taken in a broad sense of conquest, expropriation, exploitation and settlement and [...] the creation of a scheme of government dependent upon that of the colonising power, there was arguably much that was colonial about English policy towards Scotland under Edward I [i.e. in the thirteenth century]. 7

In these early years of colonisation both nations rebelled against English expansionism and tyranny, for instance, William Wallace’s revolt of 1296 in Scotland, and in Wales, Owain Glyndwr’s uprising in 1400-1415. Since the unions, both nations have experienced marginalisation: their political and cultural identities have been limited and defined by their relationship and their obligation to the English hegemony, although on the face of it, historically Scotland has enjoyed more cultural autonomy in terms of religion, education and the law than Wales. Nevertheless, at different periods both Welsh and Scottish middle and ruling classes were thoroughly assimilated into English culture and values; they acquiesced ‘willingly’ since supporting the dominant culture was the way forward in financial and professional terms. Nonetheless, at the same time the indigenous working-class populations suffered systematic discrimination.

After the union, Wales was a ‘deeply divided society’, split geographically on issues of ‘language and culture, and subsequently [...] religion.’ Likewise, in Scotland the aristocracy’s deal with the English resulted in a Union ‘accomplished [...] by the bribery of corrupt Scottish politicians greedy for English gold’; it too was a deeply divided country and, as in Wales, there was serious economic disparity. As Christopher Harvie argues: ‘the discontent of the two Scotlands [was] distinctive: trade and religion in the Lowlands; clan conflicts and subsistence for the third of the population that lived beyond the Highland line.’ Since incorporation into England, Scottish and Welsh communities have fought persistently and valiantly against political and economic inequality and subjugation, for instance, the 1820 ‘Scottish Insurrection’ was the result of ‘years of popular unrest and violence’. Likewise, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Wales was an ‘insurgent country’ ‘associated with riot and dissent’ and the 1830s large scale protests, including the infamous Rebecca Riots, saw the impoverished population retaliate against the ‘British state’. Throughout their problematic histories, Wales and Scotland have both fought a protracted battle to keep their cultural identities separate from that of their dominating neighbour and despite the many complexities, not least political and economic, both Scotland and Wales have survived culturally. Although there are clear historical differences, many similarities exist between Wales and Scotland:

Scotland and Wales have never been fully assimilated into the dominant political culture. In Scotland, identity has been preserved by a strong civil

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In Wales, the language issue introduces a peculiarly cultural element into political debate which is absent from British politics generally. In both Scotland and Wales, economic issues are being perceived increasingly in territorial terms. Both nations have historically exhibited distinct voting patterns.  

Furthermore, as well as constitutional change, more recent analysis argues that both nations have evolved ‘similar [...] attitudes to national identity [...] a broadly civic view of identity’.

In terms of culture, as the authors examined in this thesis show, Wales and Scotland are nations of diverse linguistic traditions; however, over the centuries their indigenous languages have been ridiculed, neglected and effectively outlawed. As Robert Dunbar argues, the Welsh Act of Union of 1536 maintained that ‘no one should hold public office unless he [sic] speaks English [and a] similar story could be told in Scotland [...] Gaelic [was] viewed with suspicion’: it was decreed dangerous and vulgar and was subsequently regarded as appropriate for abolition. Nevertheless, historically, both nations have produced and utilized distinct forms of cultural expression such as poetry and song. Yet women were by and large excluded from public creation as these traditions were, as Siân Reynolds argues in both a Welsh and Scottish context, ‘originally dominated by a bardic elite [who] were male.’ Nonetheless, in spite of the many obstacles women had to contend with, not least illiteracy, they created and

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16 Siân Reynolds, ‘Gender, the Arts and Culture’ in Abrams, Gordon, Simonton and Janes Yeo, eds, *Gender in Scottish History since 1700*, p.175.
succeeded in the arts, and ‘despite the bardic tradition an unusual number of individual women poets’ found their voices.¹⁷

Until fairly recently women’s cultural and historical narratives have been excluded from the story of the nation, notwithstanding the fact that women in Wales and Scotland have an enduring, extensive and important literary history going back several centuries into the early Middle Ages. Scottish and Welsh women’s marginalisation and invisibility has been a consequence of patriarchal cultural imperialism and the nature of the English literary canon: its elitism ignored writers who did not fit the prescribed definitions of important and valuable literature. Further, if it was deemed suitable for canonical inclusion, Welsh and Scottish literature would often have been subsumed under ‘English’ literature. Moreover, within their own nations, women writers were also systematically neglected because their writing did not correspond to literary trends or the dominant masculinist representations of the nation.¹⁸

Prior to the first ‘Scottish Renaissance’, which was said to mark the ‘re-entry of Scottish culture into the European mainstream, after a long period of provincial retreat’,¹⁹ Scotland was seen as having been so absolutely incorporated into English culture and values that it seemed probable its literature and traditions would ‘not survive as an independent cultural force’.²⁰ The revitalization of Scottish literature began during the 1920s and according to some critics it was launched ‘more or less single-

¹⁸ See for instance, Jane Aaron, ‘Introduction’, A View Across the Valley (Dinas Powys: Honno, 1999) and Carol Anderson and Aileen Christianson, Scottish Women’s Fiction 1920s to 1960s: Journeys into Being (East Linton: Tuckwell, 2000)
handedly’ by Hugh MacDiarmid.\textsuperscript{21} Crucially, according to many scholars the foremost writers in this period were male (Lewis Grassic Gibbon, Neil Gunn, Edwin Muir and MacDiarmid) thus suggesting there was a dearth of women writers and that the Renaissance was ‘exclusively a male creation’.\textsuperscript{22} Consequently, critical discussions regarding the inter-war years excluded from literary history, until recently, the fine writings of, for instance, Naomi Mitchison, Nan Shephard, Lorna Moon and Willa Muir. Likewise, Welsh women writers of the early twentieth century were also engaged in producing commendable creative works in English thus playing a key role in fostering and maintaining a distinctive Anglophone-Welsh culture.\textsuperscript{23} Nevertheless, discussions regarding this period tended to focus on male writers, for instance, Thomas Gwynn Jones and Caradoc Evans. Accordingly, women writers such as Dorothy Edwards and Margiad Evans have only come to wider public attention relatively recently.

The second literary renaissance runs parallel with political developments in Wales and Scotland and many critics and scholars have convincingly argued that the cultural re-awakening was a direct result of Westminster’s political ideologies and its prejudiced and centralist arrogance. As Richard Weight argues ‘the more the English revelled in the benefits of Conservative rule, the more the Scots and Welsh saw them as a nation of callous, selfish individuals’.\textsuperscript{24} After the disaster of the 1979 referendum

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{23} Welsh-language women writers were also producing notable short stories and novels during this period, for instance, Kate Roberts, probably the most prominent, who won many accolades for her work. Nevertheless, as Katie Gramich argues, ‘Welsh women writers who have written in Welsh suffer a further burden of marginalisation, by virtue of the general ignorance of and lack of interest in minority languages’. Katie Gramich, \textit{Twentieth-Century Women’s Writing in Wales: Land, Gender, Belonging}, (Cradiff: University of wales Press, 2007), p.1.
\end{footnotesize}
Welsh literature started to engage with the new socio-political climate: as Jane Aaron and M. Wynn Thomas state ‘under a cover of desolation and seeming disarray [...] something resembling a new spring was in process.’ Likewise, in Scotland Angus Calder states, ‘the key to Scotland’s story in the last third of the twentieth century was a swelling sense of difference from England’. As some of the novels examined in this thesis illustrate, people felt deceived and angry by the government’s last minute amendments to the Devolution bill and exasperated by the lack of courage or commitment from the general populace. Of the Welsh situation, the poet John Tripp stated, ‘It’s a tragedy, what happened on March 1st’. Nonetheless, the 1980s proved to be a turning point in both Welsh and Scottish culture and politics; Cristie L March argues that around this time Scotland ceased being an acquiescent British colony and started developing into a defiant nation and this argument could be applied equally to Wales. As Jane Aaron and M. Wynn Thomas assert, ‘a change of attitude of major political significance took place in […] Wales during the 1980s and 1990s’. The Thatcher government and the implementation of that government’s policies which, on the whole, neglected, undervalued and exploited those outside middle England, especially those living in Scotland and Wales, acted as a catalyst for cultural and political activists. During this time, ‘Britain’ was a society in turmoil, shifting and divided. Thatcher’s Conservative party offered an alternative vision of society, one of

27 Aaron and Thomas, “‘Pulling you Through the Changes”: Welsh Writing in English Before, Between and After Two Referenda’, p.284.
29 Aaron and Thomas, “‘Pulling you Through the Changes”: Welsh Writing in English Before, Between and After Two Referenda’, p.286.
self-help and individual enterprise, which in reality meant dismantling the trade unions and the social security system. Welfare cuts and wage control were extensive. Conservative ideology also espoused a ‘One Nation’ principle which insisted on cultural conformity and homogenisation; in the great imperial sense there was to be a united British identity. During this period, women’s expectations had changed, but the dominant societal structures had not. Feminist politics increased and diversified women’s sense of potential and this is especially true in Wales and in Scotland. But Thatcher’s government appeared to have ‘a moralistic agenda tucked away behind the main business of economic reform.’

By the 1980s the government’s policies of privatization and de-industrialization ensured that vast areas of Wales and Scotland were left without their traditional industries and, with no substitutes on the government’s agenda, entire communities were plunged into unemployment and despair, consequently, Welsh and Scottish people felt mistreated and abandoned. As Siobhàn Kilfeather argued, during the last half of the twentieth century it became ‘a common perception among the Scottish [and] Welsh [...] populations that [...] they had been discriminated against en masse by the Westminster government’.

Initially, the ‘seismic shock’ which followed the election of Britain’s first women prime minister had a ‘symbolic meaning’ – apparently women ‘could do anything now’. However, there was no dramatic transformation in the majority of women’s lives; in fact, the new social structure was fundamentally detrimental to women. Feminists Jill Tweedie and Andrea Dworkin argued that under the

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Conservative government there was a good chance that feminism ‘would be eradicated’. It was during this era of fear, conflict and contradiction that many of Scotland’s and Wales’s important and influential women writers started to emerge.

During these pre-devolution years, entrenched androcentric practices and values started to be questioned and writers in both nations focused on the sociocultural, economic and political conditions of women; their protagonists often struggled to find a sense of self within their own society as well as the larger world. In both Scotland and Wales, but perhaps more markedly in Wales, women found their traditional communities under attack as a result of government policy and, consequently, writers re-discovered resilient and formidable voices agitating, fighting and campaigning in defence of their communities. In Wales, women writers were also particularly concerned with the seemingly imminent destruction of their environmental and ecological landscape; this is unsurprising considering it was ‘women from Wales who initially established the Greenham Common protest camp’. Although many exceptional women writers, some of whom, to be discussed in chapter three, started to became visible, the ‘second’ literary renaissance in Wales and Scotland, sixty years after the initial cultural revival, was publicity-wise still very much focused on white, heterosexual male writers.

It is argued, and to an extent the contention is accurate, that women’s writing, in terms of recognition and its acceptability into literary culture, has advanced considerably in the last thirty years. Yet women’s literature is still not sufficiently acclaimed in the mainstream, and hence its acceptance into ‘British’, Scottish and

Welsh ‘canons’ is still inadequate. Indeed, as Emma Parker points out in a UK-wide context, ‘despite the huge proliferation of women writers in the post-war period and several decades of feminist criticism [...] “feminine” is still a pejorative term when used in relation to fiction’.35 Parker, writing in 2004, argued that women writers still faced prejudice and disparagement as illustrated through the continuing hostile publicity the Orange Prize receives; ‘bad publicity’ she states, ‘works not only to embarrass and discredit the Orange Prize, but to hijack it by distracting attention from its primary purpose: to celebrate writing by women’.36 Needless to say, Scottish and Welsh women writers suffer especially: they are neglected because of their ‘fringe’ geographical location as well as their sex. They are, in fact, subjected to what Joy Hendry calls ‘the double knot on the peeny’.37 Serious academic attention and examination of Scottish and Welsh women’s writing, is still sparse and this is especially true in Wales. Jane Aaron has argued that the ‘lack of recognition’ afforded to Welsh women writers in English has meant ‘no acknowledged foundations have been laid for the development of a specifically female tradition in Welsh story-writing in English. But that tradition does exist’.38 Though Aaron and Katie Gramich have recently added to the critical canon there remains but a modest number of scholarly texts available.39 Similarly, in a Scottish context, Kirsteen McCue remarks, ‘published work about [...] women writers is a fairly recent phenomenon in the academy’.40

36 Ibid., p.4.
39 See for instance, Jane Aaron, Nineteenth-Century Women’s Writing in Wales: Nation, Gender and Identity (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007) and Katie Gramich, Twentieth-Century Women’s Writing in Wales: Land, Gender and Belonging (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007).
The complex, difficult and distinct histories of these nations have undoubtedly formed their cultural topography. As Ian Bell suggests, ‘in a climate where there are no formal arenas for debate and no institutions of national self-identity [...] literature takes on a greater importance.’ 41 Indeed, many critics in Scotland and Wales have argued that as a result of a lack of an indigenous, officially authorised and endorsed identity, a ‘colonised’ nation’s identity is necessarily shaped and articulated through its own literature. 42 Though feminist activity of the 1980s and 1990s undoubtedly resulted in women’s lives and experiences being more authentically represented, nevertheless, as Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan argued in 1997, it was not ‘enough to secure for women a more vestigial presence in whatever larger stories are being told either about the national or the female canon.’ 43 However, post-devolution Welsh and Scottish women writers are retaliating against centuries of suppression, elision or homogenisation of their voices and experiences. Edward Said has argued that an intrinsic part of the imperial project was the imposition of a national identity: 44 in this thesis, I wish to suggest that women in post-devolution Scotland and Wales are consciously unburdening themselves of the ‘synthetic image’ 45 and expressions of their cultures imposed upon them by the patriarchal and English/British hegemonic structures. Thus, hybrid identities mixed and multitudinous, are constant themes in the writing examined in this thesis. As well as entrenched gendered prejudices, one of the

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main reasons women’s contribution to the social, cultural and literary landscape still suffers from insufficient recognition is due to the fact that the publishing industry and the media focus are still by and large based in London – a patent indication of Wales’s and Scotland’s colonial legacy. In 2004, Ali Smith, the English-based Scottish writer, made an important point about the marginalisation of literature written outside the hegemonic hub:

How many thousands of books get published a year? […] the old charge holds true after all these years, that the London papers are naturally metrocentred, or at least England-centred, with little regard for what’s happening in the rest of the United Kingdom when it comes to what gets reviewed […] Many [articles and reviews in the new Scottish Review of Books] will […] indicate in a loud voice how uneven things still are’.  

More recently, Katy Guest has commented on the gender inequality in the industry and notes that for instance in 2010, 78% of reviewers for the London Review of Books were male and 74% of the books reviewed were by men, despite ‘women [writing] about as many books as men, [buying] about 68 per cent of books, read[ing] about 80 per cent of fiction’. And, of course, Guest’s analysis does not consider the geopolitical element.

Nevertheless, perhaps currently we are at the start of a literary transition, for as Catherine Kerrigan, editor of An Anthology of Scottish Women Poets, argues, ‘after many years of neglect, and sometimes outright derision, writing by women has begun to find its permanent place on the cultural map.’

In terms of devolution and its impact upon the creative arts there have been at least some advances: Francesca Rhydderch

points out that since the opening of the National Assembly there has been an 'increasing acceptance of Welsh fiction outside Wales.\textsuperscript{49} And certainly, some of the writers discussed in this thesis have at least gained a modicum of international recognition, for instance, Trezza Azzopardi, discussed in chapter four, has seen her work published into several languages, as has Ali Smith, examined in chapter six.\textsuperscript{50} The majority, however, have not, and the wider recognition and wide-ranging acceptance of women writers from Wales and Scotland remains crucial. For that reason, this thesis is valuable, urgent and timely. Indeed, as A.L Kennedy argues, the cultural space still remains in many aspects stubbornly male:

\begin{quote}
It is a boys’ club. Most of the bonding has to be done very quickly in publishing, and the quickest way is to get drunk together, according to the Dylan Thomas model. If you believe in that way and you are a woman, it is a completely different ball game – you would be that drunken slapper, not that magnificent Byronic figure.\textsuperscript{51}
\end{quote}

Yet, there has been a shift in perception: Scottish and Welsh women writers are now more often discussed in academic and literary journals and broadsheet newspapers. Indeed, Colin Waters goes as far as to say that Scottish literature, for instance, is ‘now as likely to be identified with Ali Smith or Jackie Kay as it is with Kelman.’\textsuperscript{52} Although this is significant, Waters is perhaps exaggerating the extent of change. Women authors are still not on equal footing with male writers; in fact, there is still much to be done in

terms of equality. Furthermore, although the new political institutions claimed that they would work to erase deep-seated gender bias in the social, cultural, economic and political environment, there is still gender disparity in all aspects of Welsh and Scottish society.

Politically, separation from Westminster meant, initially at least, that much ground was gained for women in terms of gender representation. In 2003 Sally Weale commented that

The Welsh Assembly […] has become the first legislative body in the world to be made up of equal numbers of men and women [...] And in Wales of all places, home of patriarchal old Labour, born out of the coal and steel industries, and steeped in male-dominated trade-union politics [...] Not only are there lots of women [...] but they are in senior positions, making decisions that will affect the lives of Wales’s three million people.  

These were exciting times and the statistics looked promising; after all female representation in the House of Commons stood at 18%. As Alice Brown states, in terms of gender representation, Scotland’s new government far surpassed female representation at Westminster:

the number of women elected in one day exceeded the total number of women elected to represent Scottish constituencies in general elections to the House of Commons over the last 80 years, that is since women were first eligible to stand for election.

However, as a more recent debate on political representation points out,

[A]t the 2007 elections there was a decline in the number of women elected to both legislatures and there are fears that the situation will worsen at the 2011 elections.  

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So while pledges were firmly given to achieve gender equality in both the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly, and while undoubtedly the reconfiguration of the political landscape has changed the face of politics and at some level Scottish and Welsh society in general, yet there is still much to be done to achieve and maintain political equality.

Scottish and Welsh women’s lives have seen many parallels over the centuries; as the following chapters illustrate Welsh and Scottish women writers from all backgrounds, in their own distinct yet comparable ways, are now demanding that their stories become part of the narratives of their respective nations. The new political landscape means that Welsh and Scottish literary culture has inevitably changed. The challenge now for Wales and Scotland as emerging autonomous nations is to show that writing about identity and national selfhood from a post-devolution perspective is still relevant and appropriate by making their fictions representative of cultural differences and tensions, for as Steve Blandford has said, ‘the real prison of a colonial […] situation is the sheer narrowness of the range of definitions of “being Welsh [or Scottish]” that have been made available.’

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Chapter 2

Theoretical Frameworks

The most formidable ally of economic and political control had long been the business of ‘knowing’ other peoples because this ‘knowing’ underpinned imperial dominance and became the mode by which they were increasingly persuaded to know themselves […] A consequence of this process of knowing became the export to the colonies of European language, literature and learning as part of a civilising mission which involved the suppression of a vast wealth of indigenous cultures beneath the weight of imperial control. 58

It is enormously important for women to write fiction as women, it is part of the slow process of decolonialising our language. We must work to develop a neutral language, without pain, shame or embarrassment. Language is power, life and the instrument of culture, the instrument of domination and liberation. 59

Feminist and postcolonial theories are both fundamentally concerned with oppression, subjugation and injustices brought about by hegemonic hierarchical systems of power. Welsh and Scottish literatures by women, within the context of the post-devolutionary landscape, are profoundly concerned with the politics of identity; their creative work engages with how gender, ethnicity, sexuality, geographical location and class intersect in complex ways with dominant structures and ideas relating to nation, nationhood and a sense of self and belonging. Narrating the nation differently, articulating experiences that have often been ignored or obscured, showing the myriad ways people are exploited politically, economically and culturally are key concerns of the writers examined in this thesis; accordingly the theoretical frameworks within which the thesis is placed are postcolonial and feminist.

Postcolonialism focuses on the impact and consequences of imperialism and argues that colonialism was not only military, economic and political domination of other people and their land but importantly it also included cultural subordination. However, it is a contentious subject with considerable debate concerning the definition of ‘postcolonialism’, its apparent de-politicisation when used as a method of literary analysis and its applicability in the British context to nations outside the Commonwealth. In terms of the work discussed in this thesis, arguments proliferate as to the validity of applying postcolonial theory to the circumstances of Wales and Scotland. In a 2004 review of Stephen Knight’s *A Hundred Years of Fiction* (the first full-length study examining Welsh writing in English within a postcolonial framework) the historian Dai Smith strongly argued against what he termed the ‘fashionable notion of internal colonialism.’ Smith accused Knight and other critics and historians, like Michael Hechter writer of *Internal Colonialism* (1975), of propagating a ‘beguiling simplification’ of history. The aim of Knight’s study was to read Welsh fiction in English in order to ‘understand [...] how literature of a colony, in the language of the colonizer, has been affected by its situation’. Knight argues that Wales and its people have suffered from ‘colonial treatment’ and ‘post-colonial theory is the best way of understanding the complexities [...] of those experiences.’ However, for Smith, Wales’s relationship with England has not been based on exploitation and subjugation.

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64 Ibid.
66 Ibid., p.xi.
67 Knight, *A Hundred Years of Fiction*, pp. xiii-xiv.
but rather it has been rewarding, affable and equitable, therefore applying postcolonial theory to read the nation’s literature creates a flawed understanding of the condition of the nation in terms of history, culture and politics.

Nevertheless, whilst Smith was criticising Knight’s work for being ‘not intellectually tenable’ 68 other studies had also been published which analysed Welsh writing and culture employing postcolonial paradigms. Kirsti Bohata’s Postcolonialism Revisited (2004) argued that the value of postcolonial theory is that it may be read as forming complex discourses which deconstruct and reimagine personal, cultural and national identities. The wide appeal of postcolonialism is [...] due [...] to this concern with shifting identity, with ‘re-membering’ the self, and is of immediate relevance to and for a nation such as Wales. 69

Jane Aaron’s and Chris Williams’s edited collection Postcolonial Wales (2005) engaged with ‘diverse responses to the issue of postcoloniality and its relation to Wales.’ 70 While acknowledging that the relationship between Wales and England is inherently complex, they argue that ‘the application of questions, hypotheses and concepts drawn from postcolonial thinking to such issues of Welsh culture and politics has the potential to be extremely fruitful.’ 71

In Scotland too postcolonial theory had its detractors and supporters. Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull’s The Eclipse of Scottish Culture (1989) employs Frantz Fanon’s concept of inferiorisation as it ‘yields valuable insights and perspectives on the Scottish predicament.’ 72 They argue that the portrayal of pre-Union Scotland as a dark, savage country awaiting England’s enlightenment, has ‘faithfully reflected

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68 Smith, ‘Psycho-colonialism’, p.28.
70 Jane Aaron and Chris Williams, eds, Postcolonial Wales (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005) p. xvii.
71 Ibid., p.xvi.
Fanon’s account of the imperial distortion of pre-colonial history [...] Scotland was a by-word for [...] social backwardness’. 73 They also suggest that modern metropolitan ideologies continued in the same vein: during the 1979 devolution debate ‘the cruder unionist ideologues’ argued that devolution was dangerous because Scotland ‘was an illiberal society, and the Scots a natively brutish and vicious people [still] requiring the civilising hand of [...] the English’. 74

Michael Gardiner’s curious argument against applying postcolonial theory when analysing Scottish culture rests on the idea that the concept is always destabilized because of ‘other types of subjective structuring such as class, ethnicity [and] sexual difference.’ 75 From a different perspective, Berthold Schoene also argues that while Scottish literature ‘does obviously qualify for inclusion in the postcolonial canon with its tradition of postcolonial writing reaching back to the fourteenth and fifteenth century’, postcolonial theory is an unconstructive means to analyse Scottish literature. 76 According to Schoene, postcolonialism is yet another method of control by the hegemony: ‘postcolonial theory is very much a post-imperial Anglo-Saxon invention, designed to maintain the ‘otherness’ of the formerly colonised nations.’ 77 Schoene argues that ‘in light of the potentially Orientalist nature’ 78 of postcolonial theory employing it as an investigative method would result in a ‘new phase of Scottish national stereotyping. Ironically, it would lead to further anglicisation, relating

73 Ibid, p.3.
74 Ibid.,p.6.
77 Ibid.,p.118.
78 Ibid.
Scotland’s cultural production once again to [...] the centre and thus distracting from the devolutionary achievements of contemporary Scottish writers’. 79

Published the same year as Beveridge’s and Turnbull’s text, Ashcroft’s, Griffith’s and Tiffin’s The Empire Writes Back (1989) contends that:

while it is possible to argue that [Scotland and Wales] were the first victims of English expansion, their subsequent complicity in the British imperial enterprise makes it difficult for colonized people outside Britain to accept their identity as post-colonial. 80

Of course, one of the problems when applying a postcolonial framework to the literatures, cultures and politics of Scotland and Wales is that the analyses of these countries are neither simple nor straightforward. As Alys Thomas remarks, the idea of what ‘constitutes a colony’ 81 is itself complex. Schoene reminds us that different nations responded to, and were influenced by imperialism differently. 82 And Ania Loomba points out that colonised people ‘were not all oppressed in the same way or to the same extent’. 83

Historically, Wales and Scotland have been, and still are, ambiguously placed as colonies/colonizers within the greater British Empire. Undoubtedly, a number of Scots and Welsh prospered under the British imperial state, ‘sometimes with [their] own specially prized colonial and religious enterprises’. 84 Further, their status within ‘Britain’ was far removed from the subjugated position of, for instance, the peoples of

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79 Ibid., p.120.
81 Alys Thomas, “Maîtres Chez Nous”? Awaiting the Quiet Revolution in Wales’, in Aaron and Williams, eds, Postcolonial Wales, pp.85-99, p.87.
83 Loomba, Colonialism/Postcolonialism, p.13.
Africa. As Chris Williams remarks, ‘Welsh people made money out of slavery: they were not slaves themselves.’

This is equally true of the Scots, who were highly visible in the ‘forging and expansion of the eighteenth-century empire’ and who, at times, gained ‘a quite indecent share of the spoils.’

However, there is a difference between being complicit and being compliant, and to suggest that the majority of the Welsh and Scottish population chose to join the Union or to participate in England’s overseas ventures overlooks the complexity of the situation and fails to take into consideration the power and authority of the political and economic hegemony. In fact, as Juliet Shields suggests in a Scottish context, the aristocracy were basically bought when they were guaranteed vast sums of money if they consented to specific conditions for Scotland laid down by the English parliament. The mass of the Scottish population profited little from these changes, as Shields goes on to argue

> even the Union’s strongest supporters could not ignore Scotland’s gratingly subordinate role in what was glossed as an egalitarian partnership [and the Culloden defeat] further “reduced” Scots’ liberties. Parliament enacted measures intended to bring the Highlanders under control [...] heritable jurisdictions were abolished [...] landowners forfeited their estates and weapons were prohibited along with traditional forms of dress and music [...] while Lowlanders suffered less dramatic consequences [...] English prejudice [...] and various forms of discrimination [increased].

Chris Williams argues that Wales has to be honest about its history in order to progress and develop as a newly devolved nation. Williams understands the past as an amalgamation of discourses, some of them nationalistic, some imperialistic, some oppressive to the indigenous people, some articulating anxiety concerning Wales’s alleged inferior status, some honouring and respecting the Empire. In other words,

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85 Chris Williams, ‘Problematising Wales: An Exploration in Historiography and Postcoloniality’ in Aaron and Williams, eds, Postcolonial Wales, pp.3-22, p.10.
Welsh people have been both colonisers and colonised; although they have been ‘active agents […] of imperial expansion’\(^88\), they have also endured much economic hardship and sociocultural adversity produced by inexorable negative stereotyping, derogative opinions and ‘Othering’. As Williams himself points out, the Welsh have been judged by the governing class as ‘poor, ill-educated, coarse, shifty, garrulous and untrustworthy people.’\(^89\) This pervasive denigration of Wales and the Welsh was actually reproduced in political tracts whose ideological motives and intentions were to control the supposedly unruly population. For instance, the now infamous *Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales (1847)* which I discuss in chapter three, passed judgement on not only the ‘education’ of the Welsh but also their apparent lack of ‘morals’. The persistent and systematic disparagement of the Welsh people, language and culture continues into the present; see, for instance, high profile English ‘entertainer’ Anne Robinson’s ‘light-hearted’ derision and the writer and critic A.A. Gill’s rather more aggressive and racialised comment referring to the Welsh as ‘immoral liars, stunted, bigoted, dark, ugly pugnacious trolls.’\(^90\) The representation of Scottish people and culture has hardly been less harsh; for instance, the historian David Starkey who recently referred to both Wales and Scotland as ‘feeble little countr[ies]’\(^91\)

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\(^89\) Ibid., p.5.


argued that Scotland’s largest city was a ‘backwater’ and that ‘Scotland matters for a single reason – its involvement with England from 1707 onwards’. Starkey’s contempt amounts to a modern day attempt at ‘othering’ the Scots as a ‘horde of barbarians’. As Murray Pittock points out, ‘Saxon’ and English scholars and creative writers have characterized the people of Wales and Scotland with ‘the vices of indolence, mendacity and subhuman violence [...] (in common with gypsies and black Africans). Indeed, the motif of the primitive Scots continues to the present day through filmic representations such as Rob Roy and Braveheart. As Pittock says, ‘the Noble Savage [is] one of the few legitimate discourses of Celtic difference [which] continues to be revisited.’

Cultural representations of Scotland and Wales by ‘English’ writers are highly suggestive of Edward Said’s argument in Orientalism (1978) and Culture and Imperialism (1993) in relation to the cultural construction of the ‘orient’ by Western imperialism as exotic but primitive. The way in which Welsh and Scottish people were imagined, politically and creatively, has had a profound effect on the psyches of the Scottish and Welsh populations. Moreover, it has also had an effect on how others see and relate to these nation-people for, as Benedict Anderson states, ‘communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are

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96 Ibid. p.4.
imagined’.⁹⁹ In terms of employing postcolonial theory as an analytical apparatus to read Scottish and Welsh women’s writing, therefore, we need only to examine the way in which Scottish and Welsh people have been eagerly and inexorably represented by the centre to reasonably justify the necessity to challenge and reconfigure systematic disruptive and unsettling depictions.

As well as investigating the politics of identity and subjectivity postcolonial theory seeks to analyse power structures and ‘relations of dominance.’¹⁰⁰ However, the argument concerning the validity of utilizing postcolonial theory to Welsh and Scottish literature appears to rest on crude binaries of colonised/coloniser and ‘finds its roots in the history of British Empire’.¹⁰¹ Nonetheless, other critics contend that postcolonialism should extend its scope; for instance, Willy Maley argues that Scotland’s relationship with England and its historic status should permit it ‘a postcolonial passport.’¹⁰² Yet as Stefanie Lehner asserts, ‘postcolonial readings have been opposed or overlooked in Scotland.’¹⁰³ Lehner suggests that applying Homi K. Bhabha’s idea of the ‘liminal space’ makes a postcolonial analysis of Scotland and its literature possible. This approach facilitates a deconstruction of the limiting binary structures and terminology of some postcolonial theories. She states that ‘instead of treating [Scotland] as [a] homogeneous entit[y] comprised entirely of oppressors or victims, [liminality] acknowledges their inner differences and specificities.’¹⁰⁴

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¹⁰⁰ Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, p.22.
¹⁰¹ Matt McGuire, *Contemporary Scottish Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p.120.
¹⁰⁴ Ibid.,
Certainly it cannot be denied, even by the fiercest opponents of Scotland’s and Wales’s status as colonised nations, that there have been very specific historical events that support the notion that England was the powerful, dominant, and at times, brutal powerhouse. Both Edward Said and Ania Loomba suggest that ‘at a basic level’ colonialism is ‘the control of other people’s land’ and certainly the geopolitical areas known as Wales and Scotland have both been exploited and neglected, in equal measure, by English hegemony. Consider, for instance, the Highland Clearances of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, a process which saw thousands of Scottish people forcibly evicted from their homes and shipped off to new colonies. This action illustrated the establishment’s power as well as its ruthlessness; it left the Highlands one of the most sparsely populated areas of Europe and it changed the political, economic and sociocultural landscape forever. As Kenneth MacKinnon argues, it also meant ‘the removal of its [Gaelic-speaking community’s] heartland’. This operation was more than just land appropriation and control: it almost annihilated an entire culture. Colonised people, as Frantz Fanon stated, are not just those who are exploited for labour but also those ‘in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality’. Needless to say, land exploitation also has social and economic consequences, for as Eric Richards states, the Highland Clearances ‘were not compatible with the welfare of the people’. The forced eviction of the

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population left ‘the country swept and desolate’;\textsuperscript{110} for the Highlanders ‘the clearances were nothing less than devastation [...] The foundation of their existence uprooted, the dispersed, disaffiliated peasantry met their fate without comprehension’.\textsuperscript{111} The Clearances left significant sections of the community in dire poverty; it benefited only the farmers, ‘many [...] of whom were outsiders’\textsuperscript{112} and is an obvious illustration of the exploitative and corrupt ideas emanating from the imperial centre and ruling class.

Similarly, in twentieth-century Wales, the flooding of the Welsh valleys, which saw entire communities flooded in order to provide water for English cities was an act of brutality by a fierce and powerful agency.\textsuperscript{113} As Iwan Bala comments in the Tryweryn case, this objectionable action went ‘against the wishes of its inhabitants and of the Welsh people as a whole’.\textsuperscript{114} Furthermore, the depopulation of the rural Welsh-speaking areas has also been a major problem in terms of cultural survival since the last half of the nineteenth century. And, in twentieth-century Scotland and Wales, the existence of poverty is still devastatingly pertinent, as David Adamson argued in 1996 in a Welsh context:

A generation of Welsh people are being born into social disadvantage which will ensure that they will under-perform in school, be unemployed or work in marginalized and low wage employment, will live in some of the poorest housing in Europe and be prone to disease and ill-health.’\textsuperscript{115}

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\textsuperscript{110} David Lawrie [1810] cited in Richards, ibid., p.428.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., p.3.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., p.428.
\textsuperscript{113} Jane Aaron, ‘Bardic Anti-colonialism’ in Aaron and Williams, eds, \textit{Postcolonial Wales}, p.143.
\textsuperscript{114} Iwan Bala, ‘Visual Art and the Postcolonial’ in Aaron and Williams, eds., \textit{Postcolonial Wales}, pp.234-250, p.236.
Scotland’s and Wales’s neglect and mistreatment by the hegemony can be read as the typical history of an internal colony for, as Michael Hechter argues, an internal colony is one that is both ‘economically disadvantaged and culturally distinct.’ Hechter states:

The lack of sovereignty characteristic of internal colonies fostered a dependent kind of development which limited their economic welfare and threatened their cultural integrity [...] The lack of sovereignty [had] economic consequences [...] in Wales and Scotland it promoted economic stagnation.116

However, it is not only economic dislocation that the Welsh and Scottish have endured but also linguistic dislocation and oppression. Language is one of the major areas in which struggles for domination and cultural survival compete; as Schoene states, ‘language more often than not exerts power’.117 The imposition of the coloniser’s language can have a profound effect on the culture of the colonised and can have devastating consequences on one’s sense of self, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o argues:

In my view language was the most important vehicle through which [colonial] power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation.118

Colonisation has meant systematically promoting the cultural superiority of the governing nation thus denying the value of cultural distinction and agency to the other. Moreover, colonisation and imperial oppression also meant the inferiorisation or obliteration of ‘regional’ or local languages and the imposition of the coloniser’s language.

Language is one of the most invasive and enduring issues concerning Scotland and Wales’s colonial legacy. As Ashcroft et al argue, language ‘provides the terms by which reality may be constituted’ and ‘the names by which the world may be “known”’ and therefore the effects of the coloniser’s language in Wales and Scotland ‘transcend the basic function of speech as communication and acquire a more cultural significance’. As Ngugi Wa Thiong'o asserts, language transmits culture, and culture transmits, particularly through literature, ‘the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world’. England’s political and economic power and influence meant that their ‘English’ language became the benchmark for progress and respectability, and thereby the Gaelic, Scots and Welsh languages, and thus cultures, were necessarily ridiculed as substandard and backward.

In terms of constructing identity, one’s indigenous language offers a sense of belonging and hence its use as an ideological apparatus in the colonial project of ‘native’ assimilation and intergration. As the writers discussed in this thesis show, there is a long history of colonial language employed as an method to control and suppress indigenous peoples and cultures, accomplished not only though prohibition but by the systematic inferiorisation of the local language to the extent that the indigenous

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119 See, for instance, the furor caused when James Kelman’s How Late It Was, How Late won Booker prize in 1994. As Amanda Muller points out, ‘One of the judges of the prize, Rabbi Julia Neuberger, stormed off of the panel and declared to the press that the book was ‘crap’’. Muller, Amanda. C, ‘How James Kelman Survived the Booker Prize’, Counterpoints, 2002, pp.47-52, p.47. See also Kelman’s response to his critics, ‘My culture and my language have the right to exist, and no one has the authority to dismiss that’, Robert Winder, ‘Highly literary and deeply vulgar: If James Kelman's Booker novel is rude, it is in good company’, The Independent [Online]. Available at: http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/highly-literary-and-deeply-vulgar-if-james-kelmans-booker-novel-is-rude-it-is-in-good-company-argues-robert-winder-1442639.html [Accessed 12 June 2012]


population often ‘colluded with the demise of [their own] language.’ So for instance, in chapter 5 one of Stevie Davies’s Welsh characters refers to the Welsh language as ‘the language of baboons’ (Davies, p.69). Consequently, in Wales and Scotland there was a conscious and as well as a subconscious move away from indigenous language, expression and representation by the native populations because of powerful psychological pressure. Likewise, colonial discourse endeavoured to create a cultural hierarchy, achieved through the assertion and dissemination of difference. So for instance, we need only to think of the myth that the Scots are less articulate than the English to understand how insidious and entrenched the dominant discourse is.

And although the colonial language (Standard English) continues to dominate our educational and political and economic systems, the writers in this study resist control from the metropolitan centre by appropriating the colonial language and employing ‘english’ as a strategy to articulate distinct social and cultural identities. In other words, the writers use language politically in order to construct a counter-discourse, so Standard English is frequently peripheral, and when it is employed it is used alongside non-standard variations. The writers use dialect, combined with untranslated Welsh, Gaelic and Scots and they use indigenous phrases, sentence structures and word order as a technique to express a sense of Welshness and Scottishness and to cultivate and support a sense of belonging to their own communities. However, that sense of belonging is also a complicated and contentious subject. The complexity of language issue, and its interconnection with culture and politics, means that language use and alliegence, is often a source of internal conflict. For instance, ‘national identity’ is frequently chosen or conferred in terms of our loyalty

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122 Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited*, p.20
to a particular language and this has been especially true in Wales. As I show in chapters three and seven in particular, because of colonisation the Welsh language became a key element in asserting a distinct Welsh identity. Nevertheless, this marker of national identity has until fairly recently been a divisive issue – the majority of the population in Wales, especially industrial south Wales, are monoglot English and have felt marginalised and excluded from ideas of ‘Welshness’ by the prominence nationalists tended to give to this issue. However, as I argue in the final chapter, postcolonial language identity in Wales has produced a rich, multifacted, multidimensional culture; so what the writers examined in this thesis show is a more inclusive, post-devolutionary society in which Welsh and English languages, in all their varieties, combine to have a positive and progressive impact on national identity.

Like Wales Scotland has a distinct and passionate sense of national identity (undoubtedly this is because it managed to maintain its own legal, educational and religious institutions) and its culture, like the Welsh culture, has ‘always lived under the shadow of its possible annihilation’.  

And although there is a well-defined and important link between language and identity, Scotland’s story of language allegiance and exclusions differs from Wales’s in that Scottish nationalists have not been predisposed to emphasise a link between a specific language allegiance and ‘Scottishness’.  

Indeed, in Scotland, and in the ‘Scottish’ texts studied in this thesis,  

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language, cultural imperialism and class politics are intrinsically intertwined, as Tom Leonard argues, the Scots dialect and its association with vulgarity and primitiveness is ‘not simply a matter of locality but of class. The proletariat [...] could [...] be seen as forming linguistically a colony within a colony’. By locating Scots dialects and urban vernacular at the centre of their texts, the writers examined in this thesis undermine the ideology that ‘Standard’ English is more cultured or refined and employ the technique of postcolonial appropriation of ‘English’ to re-define the meaning of cultural value.

The emphases and the strategies employed by Welsh and Scottish post-devolution writers discussed in this thesis may differ; nevertheless, their motivation and intentions are similar: to illustrate the objectionable centralist policy exercised to achieve cultural hegemony (and homogeneity) and to show how, despite near-obliteration, the diverse languages and cultures of these nations survive – though not without tensions. And this survival is quite an achievement. In the case of Wales, Norman Davies explains that

the 1536 Act of Union [...] sought to utterly extirpate all the singular sinister uses and customs by which Wales differed from England and decreed that “no person or persons that use Welsh speech or language shall have or enjoy an manner of office or fees”.

The fact that both Wales and Scotland experienced cultural and linguistic fracture and loss due to imperial imposition is, indubitably, a result of cultural colonisation. In Wales, according to Kirsti Bohata,

the legacy of centuries of denigration and institutional exclusion, of concerted attempts to render the language obsolete [...] was compounded by the

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widespread decisions of parents not to pass on the language to new generations for fear of hindering their progress. The effects of this cultural imperialism remain clearly visible today.\textsuperscript{128}

As Bohata also points out, it is not only the disparagement of Welsh that has suffered under Wales’s relationship with England but the inferior status accorded to Welsh writing in English, which ‘offers another perspective on how the Welsh situation may be seen as postcolonial’.\textsuperscript{129} Likewise, the situation in Scotland has seen Gaelic and Scots perilously oppressed and writers attempting to oppose ‘the inscribed value-system of a linguistic hegemony.’\textsuperscript{130} As Alan Riach argues, after the Union ‘English literature began to dominate Scottish literature as a measure of value just as the predominant language [...] English – dominated vernacular and local idiomatic forms of language – Scots.’\textsuperscript{131}

Cultural expression and self-representation are central to the survival of the imagined community. Without representation, the nation becomes a ‘people without History.’\textsuperscript{132} In this respect, Welsh and Scottish literatures have been frequently and persistently marginalised and ‘uncanonized.’\textsuperscript{133} Furthermore, because of these nations’ habitual neglect their writers have thus far been perceived by influential literary scholars as minor, inconsequential and unsophisticated. Or indeed, if they have been taken seriously, they have been subsumed under the all-pervasive term ‘English’.\textsuperscript{134} These exclusions are becoming increasingly debatable; as Dietmar Boehnke suggests the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[129] Ibid., p.12.
\item[130] Lehner, ‘Towards a subaltern aesthetics’, p.7
\item[133] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, \textit{The Empire Writes Back}, p.3.
\end{footnotes}
‘English’ canon is ‘one of the most controversially discussed topics [...] over the past few years.’

Scottish literature, Boehnke states, has a national tradition reaching back several centuries into the Middle Ages. However, since the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, Scottish writers have commonly been subsumed under the great tradition of English Literature – a category, by the way, which was invented by the Scots.

Indeed, Stephen Knight and Kirsti Bohata both argue that ‘Anglocentric editorial policies and markers of English’ have resulted in cultural imperialism and a lack of authentic Welsh cultural representations, an argument that can be equally applied to Scotland. In fact, when Welsh and Scottish writers have attempted authentically to imagine their nations they have been either disregarded as irrelevant or as in the case of Scottish writer James Kelman, for example, called ‘illiterate savages’. As Stephen Knight points out, historically there has been a critical deficiency in the English-language publishing industry in Wales, and consequently this position has led to Welsh writers being dependent upon ‘the constraining, redirecting, damaging influences of London publishers [which] is one of the most striking colonial features of Welsh writing in English, at least in the past’. The ways in which Welsh and Scottish writing has been treated by the London-based publishing establishment are ‘characteristic instances of the encounter between colonizing power and colonized writers.’

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136 Ibid., p.54.
139 Stephen Knight, ‘Welsh Fiction in English as Postcolonial Literature’ in Aaron and Williams, eds., Postcolonial Wales, p.159.
140 Ibid.,p.159.
Dai Smith, although vehemently opposed to Knight’s hypothesis in *One Hundred Years of Fiction*, laments ‘the unjust neglect’\(^{141}\) of Welsh texts simply because they are Welsh.

Although power relations within the United Kingdom have undoubtedly changed the political and cultural landscape, it has been argued that devolution has an in-built democratic deficit.\(^{142}\) For instance, the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly have for the last decade functioned on the Westminster model and both institutions are funded directly by Westminster. While the Scottish institution has responsibility for ‘most’ aspects of domestic economic and social policy, London retains control of all foreign affairs, defence and national security, macro-economics, fiscal matters, employment and social security. Moreover, the Welsh Assembly until 2011 did not have the power to make primary legislation, and still has no responsibility for the legal system or the Welsh police force, and, importantly in terms of political autonomy, no power of taxation.\(^{143}\) Hence, Westminster still has significant (and strategic) political and economic influence over the affairs of the Welsh and Scottish people. Yet, the withdrawal of some political control and a modicum of autonomy from central government through devolution suggest some of the historical tensions have eased. However, there still remains the complexity of history and culture and the way in which past power relations have distorted people’s sense of identity as well as political and economic factors.

\(^{141}\) Bohata, citing Dai Smith, ‘Psycho-colonialism Revisited’, p.38.


Nevertheless, the transformation of the political framework has led to re-examination and analysis of the politics of cultural identity and nationhood. And, as illustrated throughout this thesis much of the new creative work emerging from Wales and Scotland interrogates ideas relating to subjectivity and identity and ‘re/negotiat[e] issues of gender, class, ethnicity, and national/regional identity.’

Postcolonial readings of these contemporary texts is a valuable approach to an analysis of ‘Scottish’ and ‘Welsh’ ‘women’ writers because this critical method foregrounds and examines myriad identity markers which denote elements of marginality and exclusion from the dominant discourses of white, male, “British” writers.

Literature is the voice of a culture and of a time; it is an influential and compelling interpreter of human experiences and it can reflect, ignore or potentially change the diversity of our sociocultural identities. Identity, as I argue throughout this thesis, is socially constructed and culturally defined and imperialist and patriarchal constructions, which have hitherto constructed and represented cultural ‘others’, require interrogation. Postcolonial theory problematises the concepts of identity, nation and nationality and serves to remind us of the positive possibilities of difference and diversity within these newly devolved nations. As Homi Bhabha argues:

The very concepts of homogeneous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or “organic” ethnic communities – as grounds of cultural comparativism – are in a profound process of redefinition.

Indeed, just as the concept of a ‘United’ Kingdom of Britain or a homogenous British national identity is fundamentally problematic, so is ‘the idea of a united

146 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, p.5.
Scotland [and] the idea of a uniform Scottish identity is an illusion.147 And, of course, this is a premise that is shown in the material illustrated throughout this thesis: post-devolution Welsh and Scottish writers are articulating multiplicity in terms of ideas of identity and belonging. As Schoene, Chris Williams, Bohata and Christianson amongst others, point out, ‘communal difference’—be it ethnicity, sex, gender, sexuality or class—is key to understanding these diversified nations. Examining contemporary Scottish and Welsh women’s writing from a postcolonial theoretical perspective will facilitate and make visible the multiplicity of experience in their nations as well as emphasising individuality, intercultural discourse and ‘intracommunal difference’.148

Postcolonial theory may well be challenging and multifaceted, but it is not, as Russell Jacoby would have it, confused and incoherent.149 The central concerns of postcolonialism, which include concepts such as the predicament of the subaltern, hybrid identity, mimicry and assimilation, have significance for the critical analysis of and constitute an interesting starting-point for, the examination of contemporary literatures of Wales and Scotland. The shifting power relations within ‘Britain’ and the fractures of the historical, cultural and political need to be comprehensively scrutinized and for that reason examining post-devolution women’s writing from a postcolonial perspective seems appropriate. Kirsti Bohata states why a postcolonial position succeeds when analysing Welsh literature:

Welsh writers [...] engage with the existential, the psychological and of course a myriad of social and personal constructs, such as gender and categories of sexuality not to mention an engagement with literary forms and traditions [...] postcolonialism as a branch of literary criticism can illuminate many of these issues.150

150 Bohata, ‘Psycho-colonialism Revisited’, p.35.
As Bohata rightly suggests, postcolonial theory is a helpful and constructive apparatus with which to elucidate many of the concerns raised by Welsh and Scottish women writers. However, at times, postcolonial theories can neglect or obscure gendered issues such as sexuality, gendered violence and violation. So although Said, Bhabha and Fanon, for instance, are useful in terms of understanding the tyranny of imperial representations, history, subjectivity and the ‘nation’, in terms of analysing women’s socioeconomic and cultural position within patriarchal-based structures many postcolonial frameworks are inadequate. Hence, the necessity for feminist theory as an equally important framework with which to analyse Welsh and Scottish women writers.

Like postcolonialism, feminist theory is not without conflicts and tensions. In fact, with regard to Western feminism there has been much opposition to its inference that women throughout the world experience oppression in a similar way. Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues that western feminism is ‘ethnocentric’ and that it can ‘discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the Third World.’\(^{151}\) She suggests that the phrase ‘women as a category of analysis’ refers to the assumption that all women, across classes and cultures are somehow socially constituted as a homogenous group [...] This is an assumption that characterizes much feminist discourse.\(^{152}\)

Mohanty’s argument identifies one of the main problems with some aspects of ‘second wave’ feminism: that it did not consider in any meaningful way the significance of cultural and geographical difference in terms of domination and marginalisation, which

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\(^{152}\) Ibid., p. 259.
has obvious implications for women in Wales and Scotland. Take, for instance, Elaine Showalter’s *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977) which endeavoured to trace a female literary history of neglected and forgotten writers. Whilst the importance of Showalter’s work cannot be dismissed, her analysis failed at a very fundamental level because her examination of ‘lost’ or ‘minor’ writers was an examination of white, middle-class writers and she did little to draw attention to those writers who had been persistently excluded from literary history; in fact, she implies that British women writers were not ‘black, ethnic, and Marxist’.153 And it would appear that they were not Scottish or Welsh either. Although Showalter’s study was groundbreaking, she irritatingly conflates English and British by stating ‘this book is an attempt […] to explore the achievements of English women novelists.’154 So, according to Showalter, the nineteenth-century novelist Margaret Oliphant, who was born in East Lothian, Scotland, is an ‘English’ writer, though many of her novels have very specific Scottish themes. Language, geographical location, class and ethnicity, significant characteristics of female subjectivity, are overlooked or dismissed by Showalter as inconsequential factors. Yet though its presence is thus obscured, Scottish representation in Showalter’s book is better than Welsh representation: of the 213 ‘forgotten’ writers in her ‘Bibliographic Appendix’, only two are Welsh while nine are Scottish.155

Nevertheless, the political, social and cultural energy and influence of second wave feminism as an international movement has, without question, changed lives and

154 Ibid., p.vii.
155 Catherine Sinclair, Margaret Oliphant, Jane Cross Simpson, Eliza Brightwen, Lucy Bethia Walford, Mary Elizabeth Hawker, Mrs Desmond Humphries, Helen Bannerman, Naomi Mitchison (Scottish); Penelope Mortimer and Anne Adaliza Puddicombe (Welsh).
laid the groundwork for more diverse and challenging feminisms. Western feminist theories have had a tremendous impact on the cultural landscape over the last three decades: in both Wales and Scotland feminist scholars have been at the forefront of discovering and re-discovering women writers and women’s histories, significantly altering elements of the literary canon. Feminist critics have worked tirelessly to correct the substantial inequality, brutal derision and enforced invisibility women writers have endured for many centuries and this has undoubtedly had a considerable impact upon contemporary Scottish and Welsh women writers. Furthermore, the ‘global’ feminist movement, political and theoretical, has enabled us to ‘understand the assumptions in which we are drenched’ and facilitated the ‘right for women to exist historically’.

The urge to understand, identify and illustrate those ‘assumptions’ within which we are immersed makes the employment of feminist theory central to my reading of women writers in Scotland and Wales. Undoubtedly, feminists campaigning during the devolutionary in-between years (1979-1997) changed the political landscape in Scotland and Wales and in the new post-devolution climate it is more relevant than ever to understand the changing sense of self and belonging, nation and nationhood, from a feminist perspective enabling us to comprehend how these experiences are always gendered. Of course, for women, ideas of nation and nationhood have frequently been fraught; as Anne McClintock reminds us: ‘all nationalisms are gendered [...] No nation

156 See for instance Katie Gramich, Jane Aaron, Aileen Christianson and Dorothy McMillan.
158 Abrams, ‘Introduction: Gendering the Agenda’ in Abrams, Gordon, Simonton and Janes Yeo, eds, Gender in Scottish History since 1700, p.3.
in the world grants women and men the same access to the rights and resources of the nation-state.\textsuperscript{160} Indeed, Virginia Woolf’s assertion that ‘as a woman, I have no country’\textsuperscript{161} and her focus on the issue of women and patriotism in \textit{Three Guineas} (1938) still has relevance in its analysis of the construction of social and public space and women’s condition and status as citizens. Undoubtedly, women’s social, educational, economic, and cultural status in Scotland and Wales has changed much since the 1930s; however, women and the concepts of womanhood and femininity are still, to a large degree, structured, judged and evaluated by white, heterosexual, male ideology, perspectives and values, a point raised by a number of the writers examined in this thesis. Consequently, women’s writing to a large degree has been regarded as insignificant and trifling because of differences in style, themes, issues and genres; as Catherine Kerrigan notes, ‘significantly, in any contemporary histories of the movement [of Scottish literature], the role of women writers has been consistently underplayed and undervalued.’\textsuperscript{162}

Definitions regarding nationhood are still stereotypically masculine descriptions and ‘authentic’ representations of Wales, for instance, offer a very limited and white masculine subjectivity: miners, rugby players and male voice choirs. Likewise, representations of Scotland largely consist of tough, urban working-class (white and heterosexual) males. As Aileen Christianson argues, James Kelman’s male characters are seen as ‘emblematic of nationhood [...] their essential “maleness” intrinsically [seen as] a comment on the “Scottish” condition’ thereby rendering the female invisible in her

\textsuperscript{160} Anne McClintock, ‘“No Longer in a Future Heaven”: Gender, Race and Nationalism’ in McClintock, Aamir and Shohat, eds, \textit{Dangerous Liaisons. Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives}, pp.89-112, p.89.


own nation’. Obviously these identities have been challenged and contested over the years; however, to an extent, they still dominate. Nevertheless, since the implementation of the new political institutions in Wales and Scotland, the concept of identity and in particular national identity is being de-constructed, re-examined and re-imagined. Ed Thomas, in a Welsh context, comments on this post-devolutionary break from archaic and obsolete essentialist views of identity:

Old Wales is dead. The Wales of stereotype, leeks, daffodils, look-you-now boyo rugby supporters singing Max Boyce songs in three-part harmony while phoning mam to tell her they’ll be home for tea and Welsh cakes has gone [We are now] free to make-up, re-invent, redefine our own version of Wales, all three million definitions if necessary. Furthermore, feminists and female historians have frequently questioned and argued against entrenched constructions of national identity. For example, Deirdre Beddoe has asserted that despite the valuable contributions women in Wales have made to their country they are culturally invisible, hidden behind masculine symbols and representations of Wales. Welsh women, as Beddoe argues, have left important legacies in Welsh social, cultural and political life. Similarly, Esther Breitenbach states:

Women’s lack of visibility in Scottish historical narratives [...] results from their active exclusion from these, or at best their incorporation and containment. This is not to deny that a hierarchy of power relations exists now and existed historically, a hierarchy based on sex, class, religion, race. But even within this hierarchy there is a non-recognition of the place of women. They are screened from view.

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166 Ibid.
In terms of women’s exclusion from the literary canon, Senay Boztas’s article ‘Meet the great Scottish writers forgotten because they’re female’ states that women were ‘unfairly written out of history’ and that it is only in recent years that ‘lost’ women novelists have started to be rediscovered. Likewise, in Wales, women writers in the past, although popular in their time, have often been consigned to oblivion. As Katie Gramich argues, ‘it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that female writers’ exclusion [from the literary canon] is a direct result of a patriarchal bias against the supposedly inferior literary productions of women’. The feminist publisher Honno has not only opened the door for contemporary women writers but has almost single-handedly re-written the Welsh literary canon, their Honno Classic’s series reprinting many neglected women writers and reminding us of the rich tradition of Welsh women writers producing in English.

Marilyn Reizbaum has argued that women’s voices in marginalised cultures are often neglected and silenced as a result of that culture’s need to detach and separate itself from the ‘feminine’ and hence ideas of subjugation and inferiority. Consequently, Scottish and Welsh history has been gendered masculine and literary icons in both nations over the centuries have tended to be male: in Scotland, Robert Burns and Walter Scott and in Wales, Caradoc Evans and Dylan Thomas. Moreover, because women’s lived experiences and perspectives have been ignored or discounted

literary representations from the mainstream canon have been reductive, sexist and destructive. The Scottish poet and playwright Liz Lochhead has called her culture ‘repressed, violent and colonized’. She argues that when writers endeavour to create alternative representations of Scotland, they are excluded from the mainstream: Scottish dramatists, she argues, face ‘exclusion from either the BBC or STV of plays which are about any element of Scottishness other than sentimentalized, violent, self-perpetuating Glasgow and West of Scotland male machismo’. Similarly, the representation of Welsh culture in the English media, prior to the feminist movement, focused largely on the male working class of the industrialised valleys.

As this thesis illustrates, over the last decade there has been a profusion of new Scottish and Welsh women writers; however, even in the twenty-first century, both Welsh and Scottish women are still culturally excluded. Academic research and media interest has been predisposed to examine the new spate of ‘Welsh’ and ‘Scottish’ fiction by men. So once again images concerning Wales and Scotland have been represented largely from white, heterosexual, male perspectives. For instance, contemporary Scottish fiction has frequently meant work by Irvine Welsh and James Kelman, and Welsh fiction has been characterized as fiction by John Williams and Niall Griffiths. As the Scottish writer Zoe Strachan (discussed in chapter four of this thesis) argues, in writing ‘the dominant perception of the creative art [is seen] as originally masculine [...] and the dominant context remains heterosexual.’ Notwithstanding the success of the 1997 devolution referendum and women’s central involvement in the political changes,

172 Liz Lochhead cited in Marilyn Reizbaum, ibid., p.182.
173 Ibid. p.182.
Scottish and Welsh women writers still by and large suffer twofold: firstly from their geographical location, and secondly, from the fact that they are female. Hence, given women’s continued cultural and spatial marginalisation, the employment of feminist theory as a means of understanding and evaluating writing by Welsh and Scottish contemporary female writers is a useful and valuable tool.

Clearly writers do not produce their work in a vacuum: they are influenced by the sociocultural and political landscapes that surround them. Devolution in both these nations changed that landscape: the Scottish Parliament’s and the Welsh Assembly’s founding principles of power sharing, accountability and social justice meant that women, and other traditionally marginalised people, were to be granted greater power and influence and that women’s position in society would, as a result of the promotion of gendered equality across social, economic and political spectrums, change. Nevertheless, as the writers in this thesis illustrate, there is still some way to go before parity is achieved. Indeed, many of the writers examined interrogate the ensuing changes in the sociocultural and political milieu; their work suggests that the new status afforded to Wales and Scotland means it is necessary to re-examine and re-evaluate Scottish and Welsh cultures from a feminist perspective. And certainly, many of the writers overtly question the gendered definition of ‘nationhood’ in the pre- and post-devolution era. Undoubtedly, the political transformations are affecting perceptions of national and gendered identity, and the writers examined all consider the rich diversity (geographical, political, cultural and social) within Wales and Scotland which gives rise

to fluidity of identity and ethnic multiplicity. Consequently, a feminist reading of these texts is constructive as it will enable an analysis of the effect these new political developments have in terms of the writers’ engagement with issues relating to invisible or concealed identities, spatiality and the politics of location, gender, class and cultural imagery.

Like postcolonialism, feminism has endured internal and external controversies over the years. As a historical movement, feminism suffered a hostile backlash during the ‘in-between years’: for instance, the 1980s saw a reactionary response concerning sexism and gendered oppression and inequality reflecting the conservative political climate, and the 1990s witnessed an apparent ‘post-feminism’ era. Although detractors argued feminism ‘had failed’, these decades still saw a great deal of feminist activity, politically, socially and culturally, and this is especially true in Wales and Scotland. As Aileen Christianson and Alison Lumsden in a Scottish context and Katie Gramich in a Welsh context argue, this period was marked by ‘vigorous political vision[s]’.

More recently, Third Wave feminism ensured that feminist and female perspectives remained relevant for the next generation of women. As a movement Third Wave feminism contains elements of second wave critique of the beauty culture, sexual abuse, and power structures while it also acknowledges and makes use of the pleasures, dangers and defining power of those structures.

As well as building on a feminist tradition, like many of the authors discussed in this thesis, third wave feminism also insists on articulating and celebrating difference.

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and exposing polarizing ideologies of sex, gender, class, ethnicity and sexuality. Many of the writers examined explicitly interrogate these reductive determinants of identity arguing that women’s subjugation is multifaceted and tied to other forms of oppression, including economic and imperial domination. Furthermore, not only are ideologies of femininity explored by the writers examined in this thesis, but like Third Wave feminism, many also argue that because gender is a social construct it can be exploited, played with and performed as a way of negotiating a sense of self as well as challenging the status quo. So for instance, in chapters five and six, modes of femininity and masculinity are not only deconstructed but are then re-constructed to be used as political weapons against prevailing ideologies. The vast majority of writers considered herein advocate and endorse many ways of being: culturally, sexually and politically, and their work challenges and problematises notions of an ‘essentialist’ self, nation and nationhood. Likewise, Third Wave feminists, as Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake state, seek ‘language and images that account for multiplicity and difference, that negotiate contradiction in affirmative ways and that gives voice to hybridity and coalition.’

Nevertheless, like Second Wave feminists who argued against gender oppression and ‘ideological abuse’, the women writers examined also consider the dominant structures which contain and constrain female subjectivity and agency.

Like postcolonialism, feminism and feminist literary theory have changed the ways in which we have come to understand the ideology of representation. It is through the sustained analysis of the everyday that theoretical discourses enable us to question binary structures and gendered and racial constructions. The focus on understanding ‘man-made’ social categories and divisions, power relations and exploitative

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180 Ibid., p.9.
configurations has allowed us to expose, challenge and counter ideologies of oppression. Feminist theories (and women’s creative writing) centre the marginalised and recover the complex and multifaceted narratives of these nations. As the writers considered in this thesis illustrate, diversity and ambiguity, even within small nations like Wales and Scotland, has to be central to any critical debate and investigation into literature and culture. As Jane Aaron comments: ‘cultural difference affects gender identity, and gives the lie to any attempt to universalize the female subject [...] “Woman” is constructed differently in different cultures’.\textsuperscript{182} Moreover, as Alison Lumsden and Aileen Christianson argue women writers ‘cut across patriarchal constructions of Scotland’ thus giving alternative creative readings and constructions of gender and nationhood.\textsuperscript{183}

Undoubtedly, the first action for feminist literary theorists has to be to resist and reject rather than acquiesce to the hegemonic order that understands literature from a naturalised male viewpoint. Feminist criticism has to be political: it has to challenge the perception of readers, reject patriarchal perspectives and analyse the various forms of discourse and ideological positions which oppress through false cultural construction and representation. My analysis throughout this thesis questions the logic, values, and relevancy of white heterophallocentric assumptions; drawing upon feminist criticism allows me to investigate key issues regarding gender, identity, sexuality and subjectivity. As illustrated throughout the following chapters, Scottish and Welsh women writers interrogate a range of disparate social and cultural conflicts of contemporary society and show how the fictions of the ‘ideal’ women imposed from

white, centralist, patriarchal and capitalist paradigms are negative and dangerous. Indeed, over the last century women writers in both Scotland and Wales, overtly feminist or otherwise, have foregrounded women’s experience; women’s writing has frequently deconstructed the grand narratives of our culture enabling a reflection and evaluation of the material and social conditions. Much current feminist analytical theory is concerned with questioning monolithic ways of living and being: it is engaged in creating frameworks of thought which encapsulate diversity, while not forgetting the fundamental power interactions and structures directing that diversity.¹⁸⁴

Feminists’ concern with how power is constructed and orchestrated provides a shared basis with postcolonial theory. Both discourses are inherently political: both are fundamentally concerned with domination, subjugation and socioeconomic and cultural inequalities brought about by hegemonic hierarchal systems of power. Both theoretical frameworks are therefore useful and appropriate tools for an investigation into Welsh and Scottish women writers post-devolution.

Chapter 3

Towards Devolution: The Wilderness Years (1979 to 1997)

National histories [...] act to reaffirm a sense of identity, they have a place in nation-building and they serve to fix particular narratives as representations of the nation’s past in popular memory.¹

Although women writers have, historically, endured persistent omission from scholarly criticisms and canons, Scottish and Welsh women writers in the post-devolution years were not, of course, working in a historical vacuum and this chapter focuses on the women writers who came immediately before them. The post-1979 referendum climate became known as the ‘wilderness years’, an inauspicious and demoralizing period which began on March 1st when the people of Scotland and Wales voted against political self-determination² and became increasingly more desolate after a Conservative government with an ultra-right wing agenda and middle-England bias was elected in May of that year. Scotland and Wales were now having to contend with a ‘double whammy’³: devolution rejection and a government distanced from them both geographically and ideologically. Economically, socially and culturally, these years were bleak for the peripheral nations; many academic and social commentators were forewarning the end to any sort of separate identity that Scotland and Wales may have had as both countries were being increasingly assimilated into the dominant English

² Scotland voted yes by a small majority (51.6%) but because of last minute amendments this was insufficient to win the vote which required that 40% of the electorate vote yes (the yes vote represented 32.9% of the registered electorate). Wales voted overwhelmingly against devolution.
³ Duncan Petrie, Contemporary Scottish Fictions: Film, TV and the Novel, p.6.
However, although the chance of becoming autonomous nations seemed to have been missed, and Wales and Scotland appeared to have accepted their ‘subnational status’, Scottish and Welsh novelists were, in fact, finding strategies to contend with the sociocultural and political situation – and ensuring the continuation of their own distinct cultural identities. Indeed, these years, paradoxically, produced a flourishing of new literary talent, although one that was perhaps more visible in Scotland than in Wales, with writers intent on asserting cultural difference from the ‘centre’. The publication of Alasdair Gray’s *Lanark* (1981) marked a pivotal moment in Scotland’s cultural renaissance. As well as being a brilliant piece of socio-political commentary combining realism, surrealism and dystopian landscapes, *Lanark* is widely recognised as the first contemporary novel that authentically imagines Glasgow. The writer Janice Galloway explains why Gray’s first novel was crucial to Scottish cultural confidence:

Gray spoke using the words, syntax and places of home, yet he did it without the tang of apology or rude-mechanical humour, the Brigadoon tartanry or long-dead warrior chieftain stuff I had grown used to thinking were the options for how my nation appeared in print [...] I had barely encountered any of my country’s writers at all, let alone one this engaged with the present tense, this bravely alive. Scotland, my schooling had [...] at times openly professed, was a small, cold, bitter place that had no political clout, not much cultural heritage, joyless people and writers who were all male and all dead. As modern Scots, we were unfit to offer Art, politics or philosophy to the world, we were fit only for losing at football games.

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In Wales, the trauma and anger at the political situation wrought by the ‘no’ vote and the ensuing Thatcher years manifested itself in the form of new radicalised writing by women. Although Ned Thomas has suggested that Welsh writing in English after 1979 was not politically led and ‘could no longer feel it was central to a national movement nor to the social issues of the time,’ Welsh women’s writing during the ‘wilderness years’ was certainly politically engaged, as Katie Gramich argues:

[The referendum rejection] did not appear to attenuate Welsh women writers’ sense of Wales as a separate entity; on the contrary, the writers [...] tended to speak up for Wales against Thatcherism, the Falklands War, the closure of the mines and the proliferation of nuclear weapons.\(^\text{11}\)

Clearly Welsh and Scottish women have diverse perspectives and experiences based on their different cultures and histories.\(^\text{12}\) However, feminism had a considerable impact on both these nations and during this period women’s writing was remarkable and exciting, dealing with a wide range of issues depicting working-class women, lesbian women, single mothers, women involved in green politics; women were writing the nation as inclusive, heterogeneous and conflicting and importantly they were conveying stories that had hitherto been obscured. This Scottish and Welsh literary and cultural explosion occurred at a time of other feminist activity; politically-focused women were becoming involved in the publishing industry and setting up their own dance, music, film and theatre collectives – and this is especially true in Wales. For instance, Honno, the feminist publishing press, was established in 1986 and in the same year Red Flannel Films was set up by women in South Wales frustrated by women’s


\(^{11}\) Katie Gramich, *Twentieth-Century Women’s Writing in Wales, Land, Gender, Belonging* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), p.146.

marginalisation within the film industry. Red Flannel’s work documented and unearthed Welsh women’s public and private histories and they narrated women’s lives in the Valleys in new and positive ways.\textsuperscript{13}

In terms of scholarship, feminist academics were developing women’s history and literature courses throughout UK universities. The 1980s saw a proliferation of women and gender-oriented academic courses in England,\textsuperscript{14} and Wales and Scotland followed suit in the 1990s with Glasgow University establishing a Centre for Women’s Studies and Bangor, Swansea and Glamorgan Universities founding BAs or MAs in Women’s Studies. As Caroline Gonda stated in 1992, ‘feminists have fought to get into the academy, and fought again to get women’s issues onto the academic agenda [...] and the fight is not over yet.’\textsuperscript{15} During this period, female academics in Scotland and Wales were unearthing work by writers previously neglected and creating new and more inclusive models of literature, history and culture. Both Elspeth King’s\textsuperscript{16} and Leah Leneman’s\textsuperscript{17} research into the women’s suffrage movement in Scotland revealed significant information relating to women and politics in the last century. These discoveries were crucial given that women’s political history had been neglected and the suffrage movement had hitherto been seen as an association entirely located in metropolitan England.\textsuperscript{18} In Wales, Ursula Masson and Deirdre Beddoe were also discovering Welsh women’s political, social and cultural histories, asserting that

\textsuperscript{14} The University of Kent introduced an MA in Women’s Studies, Hull University set up MAs in both Women, Literature and Gender and Women and Gender Studies and the University of York established a Centre for Women’s Studies.
\textsuperscript{16} Elspeth King, \textit{The Scottish Women’s Suffrage Movement} (Glasgow: Glasgow Museums, 1978).
\textsuperscript{17} Leah Leneman, \textit{A Guid Cause: The Women’s Suffrage Movement in Scotland} (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1995).
\textsuperscript{18} Elspeth King, \textit{The Scottish Women’s Suffrage Movement} (Glasgow: Glasgow Museums, 1978).
although Welsh women had been central to Welsh life they had been thus far ‘culturally invisible’. And Angela John’s edited volume *Our Mothers’ Land: Chapters in Welsh Women’s History 1830-1939* (1991) regendered the nation by exploring women’s social, cultural and political experiences.

Contemporary political writing also enabled women to vent their anger at the untenable social and economic situation communities had been plunged into as a consequence of Conservative policies. Jill Miller produced an inspiring account of women’s vanguard involvement in the South Wales mining towns during the 1984-85 miners’ strike, *You Can’t Kill the Spirit: Women in a Welsh Mining Valley.* And in 1994, Jane Aaron, Teresa Rees, Sandra Betts and Moira Vincentelli edited *Our Sisters’ Land: The Changing Identities of Women in Wales* which gave fresh perspectives on Welsh women’s diverse experiences in contemporary Wales. In 1987 Women in Profile, an arts-orientated collective was established in Glasgow to ‘ensure the visibility of women in the programming of the Glasgow, European City of Culture year’, in 1991 the Glasgow Women’s Library was established, and in 1992 *Harpies and Quines*, the first Scottish feminist magazine, was launched. In 1997, the year of the second devolution referendum, Edinburgh University Press published *A History of Scottish Women’s Writing* edited by Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan. This substantial text opened the way for further research into Scottish women’s writing. And in 1998,

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one year after the ‘yes’ vote for devolution, steps were taken to save Welsh women’s history with the foundation of the Women’s Archive of Wales, and likewise in Scotland, Women’s History Scotland was launched.

In direct response to the political situation writers in Wales and Scotland were endeavouring to construct and represent themselves and their lives asserting both national and personal identities. Through the 1980s and 1990s, Emma Tennant was rewriting narratives of prominent male Scottish authors, reimagining from a feminist perspective the work of R.L. Stevenson and James Hogg. Her fiction critically analysed the contemporary socio-cultural and political circumstances and conditions in which women live. Liz Lochhead was gaining an international reputation as a playwright and poet and asserting both her Scottish and feminist identities through works such as Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off (1989), her re-writing of Scottish political and religious history from a female perspective.\textsuperscript{25} A.L. Kennedy also started writing in the late 1980s and her work has included poetry, literary criticism and non-fiction as well as novels. Although Kennedy has commented that her ‘female characters are always individuals before they are women’\textsuperscript{26} much of her work explores women’s gendered inequality as well as the ways in which ideologies of national identity seem to be intrinsically connected to the masculine. Iris Gower and Catrin Collier, both prolific and internationally well-known, have been placing Wales firmly on the historical romance map for over three decades. Although their writings have been dismissed as popularist romance sagas Gower’s and Collier’s novels put women into history and give voice to their gruelling, and at times torturous, experiences in industrial Wales. In North

\textsuperscript{25} Performed at the Edinburgh Festival in 1987.
Wales Glenda Beagan was writing her landscape into short stories and poetry; her texts examined identity, memory, collapse of selfhood and its devastating effects. During these years Cardiff–born Bernice Rubens’ work was being read throughout the world. Her psychological thriller *Yesterday in the Back Lane* (1995) vividly depicted the Welsh capital and its inhabitants long before it became fashionable with publishers.

Of the many Welsh and Scottish women writers who were creating valuable and stimulating works of fiction during the ‘wilderness years’, I will because of space restraints, focus my discussion on Mary Jones, Siân James, Catherine Merriman and Leonora Brito from Wales; and the Scottish writers, Agnes Owens, Janice Galloway, Elspeth Barker and Jackie Kay. Rather than direct comparisons with one another, the texts have been chosen to show the sheer variety of the linguistic and narrative styles employed during these politically bleak years to communicate ideas relating to power structures, gendered oppression and developing subjectivities and the ways in which these intersect with nation, space and class. These writers’ representations of the world differ from one another but they are all very much engaged with their cultural and political milieu.

For many in Wales the St David’s Day defeat painfully exposed the ‘complexities of Welsh history’ by unearthing the fractures, scars and conflicts in its political and cultural landscape. Mary Jones’s *Resistance* (1985), a Gothic tale of a lost soul endeavouring to escape from a crisis of self in the middle of a Welsh landscape that is both familiar and unfamiliar, brilliantly encapsulates the fraught mood and

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temperament of a unnerved and historically burdened nation. The main protagonist and first-person narrator, Ann Thomas, has recently been informed by her doctor that she has cancer of the jaw, ‘a time-bomb ticking away inside’ (79) and, attempting to flee to a space beyond the present, she finds herself at a ‘large […] empty’ (5) gloomy hotel in Mid Wales. This is a space where ‘subhuman scamperings’ and (20) ‘interminable passages […] with hole[s] in the wall [which look like] the perfect “o” of a mouth stretched in pain or ecstasy or the pain of death’ (15) mirror Ann’s angst. The hotel, symbolic of the nation, is the site of conflict and tension between different versions of Wales – political, cultural, gendered, linguistic; it is where ‘everything, and all of us – faces, walls, everything – looked pitted and dented and battered’ (131). Jones’s representation of the uneasiness these divisions create is clear from the outset: alienated and bewildered Ann is spewed into the hotel by ‘revolving doors’ that make her ‘giddy’ (1); she is greeted in Welsh, a language she neither speaks nor understands. She is then asked for her ‘passport?’ by the hotel manager, and Ann replies: ‘I thought I was still in Britain. Free country and so on’ (2). The territorial gatekeeper of this hotel (nation) oversees this space and consigns Ann to the role of outsider, who is almost the same, but because of her linguistic difference, not quite: ‘He looked up grimly: “One might have thought you were Welsh”’(3).

It is through the linguistic aspect of Wales’s culture that social and political frictions are played out. In the subterranean bar, ‘a sealed-off cavern’ (43) where Ann spends most of her time drinking whiskey as a way of easing the physical and emotional pain caused by her tumour, the local nationalists converge; Ann observes, ‘heavens knows what kind of bribery and corruption was going on down there’ (72). The Welsh

Mary Jones, *Resistance* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1985). All subsequent references will be to this edition and appear in parenthesis in the main body of the text.
language and the survival of a separate cultural identity are vitally important to the shambolic band of seemingly unemployed men (this is Thatcherite Britain after all). They believe that the ability to converse in their indigenous language provides an inalienable right to claim Welsh national identity, as Ann’s conversation with Ceri Griff, one of the ‘gang’, illustrates. Ann argues

‘You can be Welsh without speaking it.’
‘No.’
‘There’s no “no” about it. You just can, and I am. And that’s that.’
‘How many English people do you know who can’t speak English? [...] Be a bit funny, somebody who could only speak French telling you he was English wouldn’t it.’ (55)

As well as linguistic estrangement, Ann is also alienated because of her gender: ‘I was not aware of any other woman in the hotel [...] For all the evidence of life outside the walls of my room, it was always male life.’ (52) It is here that she loses her identity and indeed, fails to exist: ‘my existence was no longer continuous [...] I had no sense of being anyone [...] I don’t really exist.’ (13, 17, 69) So, although in many ways Ann is culpable of employing colonial language to ‘Other’ the locals (she refers to them as ‘weak stock produced by in-breeding’ (77)) it is she who is marginalised and threatened because of her precarious position as a woman. Several incidents put Ann under siege in this male-dominated ‘nation’. One particularly disturbing incident occurs in the bar (traditionally, a predominantly male space) when she is left alone with the ‘gang’ while the manager tends to a local policeman. Firstly, she is sexually menaced with ‘wolf whistles [...] smirking [...] pester ing shocking words [...] and lewd suggestions’ (77-8) and then ‘all hell broke loose’. The young men who ‘stared contemptuously’ started to walk towards her ‘like stalking cats’. (79) Then Ann recalls, ‘Shooting, they’re shooting [...] Glass shattered around my ears as one after another of the bullets came at
me’ (79). And although Ann quickly establishes that it was darts being launched and noisily shattering glass panels rather than bullets, there is no doubt nevertheless that their violence is gendered: ‘picking off choice portions of my anatomy in mirrors behind me’ (79). Clearly, at this historical juncture women’s relationship with nation and nationalism is fraught with danger and this scene is highly suggestive of the patriarchal characteristic of nationalism which marginalises women, and ‘justifies their oppression while inflating male pride and political authority’.

As Anne McClintock argues:

All nations depend on powerful constructions of gender [...] nations have historically amounted to the sanctioned institutionalisation of gender difference. No nation in the world grants women and men the same access to the rights and resources of the nation-state.

Jones’s text illustrates, emphatically, that women’s position within the nation is insecure, uncertain, and at times dangerous; however, through Ann’s embryonic relationship with Aled, the ‘leader’ of the nationalists, any straightforward reading of this text as anti-nationalist is complicated and it is here the complex relationship between gender and nation is illustrated. After Aled has ‘rescued’ Ann from a nightmare their friendship develops in the ‘liminal space’ of Ann’s room as their conversation negotiates Wales and its disparate selves, manifested through its languages, cultures and histories. This space provides the environment for negotiating ideas of self, nation and identity. According to Irene Gilsenan Nordin and Elin Holmsten, the liminal space is a

31 Anne McClintock, “No Longer in a Future Heaven”: Gender, Race, and Nationalism’, p.89.
transitional place of becoming, a state of flux between two different states of being [...] a [place of] ambiguity and indeterminacy [...] characterised by a certain openness and relaxation of the rules [offering] new perspectives and possibilities.33

It was in Ann’s room that Aled, who spoke in the ‘tongue of the conquered’ and Ann, who spoke in ‘the tongue of occupation’ (85) connect as people of the same place and space. Ann reminds us of the grand narratives that construct and reconstruct the nation, national identity and subjectivity as she considers Wales’s apparently incongruent histories: ‘While Aled had learned to look on Llywelyn as the last Prince of Wales, I had been taught to see his successor, Edward, as the first’ (85). This signalling towards a critique of imperial ideological forces which have produced the ‘state of the nation’ – when ‘Llywelyn’s death [...] lost us our nationhood’ (94) – serves to remind us of the colonially-produced constructions and divisions that are still apparent in this modern Wales.

The depressing atmosphere that hangs around Aled’s shoulders manifested in his ‘permanently dejected air’ (84) encapsulates the mood of Wales and the Welsh nationalists in particular. The ‘deeply troubled spirit of the undevolved Wales’34 is also illustrated through the sombre and forbidding atmosphere; it is an ‘oppressive summer (27) which ‘blast[s] [musty] hot air’ that subdues and causes ‘lethargy’ (29). The ‘fate of the nation’ (90), decided by those unwilling to vote for an autonomous Wales because they were persuaded by dominant ideologies,35 is foreshadowed by the ‘fatalistic note’ (47) of the protagonists in a place that was anticipating catastrophe, for,

35 Ibid.
as Ann remarks, ‘the entire hotel seemed rigged up for fire’. (33) Indeed, the Gothic undertones which pervade the novel are indicative of the dread that the Welsh language and its culture is dying and that those who cling to it are being sucked into the black hole of the dying star, their lives slowly emptied of meaning, with no future and therefore no past that will live.36

However, it is the connection between Ann’s health crisis – apparent in her ‘exploding’ cancer of the mouth – and the cultural crisis which marks this text as an exemplar of Welsh Female Gothic.37 Consistent and overt associations between Ann’s cancerous condition and the condition of the Welsh language are made:

He must watch the state of the language like I watched the state of my jaw, noticing here a little improvement, there an alarming set-back, and pledging himself to make more effort. For an unhealthy language, like an unhealthy body, needed to be watched and cosseted and self-consciously cared for. (88)

If we gender the nation female (which, of course, is problematic in terms of Ann’s subjectivity and agency but is nevertheless suggestive of her political powerlessness) Ann’s body is symbolic of Welsh culture: the cancer cells that inhabit Ann’s mouth (which will presumably render her speechless at some point) represent a part of the body that is out of control; alienated against itself and no longer able to communicate with the rest of the body. As Kirsti Bohata argues, ‘Ann’s own diseased body […] represents aspects of the national condition, particularly the sense of imminent cultural catastrophe [and her] cancer of the jaw and mouth is repeatedly linked metaphorically with the English language in Wales.’38 Political tensions and internal

38 Ibid., p.188-9
schisms are symbolised by (the dying) Ann, the English speaker who represents Aled’s ‘descendants who would no longer talk in the same tongue or read his books or sing his songs or share his beliefs’ (90).

Nevertheless, despite the gendered dangers associated with nationalism that Ann’s experience reveals and the fact that her stay in the hotel suggests ‘nationalism [is] constitutive of people’s identities through social contests that are frequently violent and always gendered,’ this is not an anti-nationalist text. Though both Ann’s alienation and Aled’s death (foreshadowed in a conversation he has with Ann concerning the death of the Welsh language in which she recognises he has ‘steeled himself for sacrifice’ (124)), superficially imply that nationalism and the Welsh-language movement is a ‘dead-end’, Aled is sympathetically drawn. He is intelligent, empathetic and thoughtful and his arguments are valid and honest: ‘people [...] thought they should have the right to use their own language in their own country’ (73). When he explains his political motivations, it is the cultural loss he emphasises:

It’s the tragedy of nobody being able to read great books – marvellous books by people who have thought deeply and created imaginatively – books that have made a lot of us what we are – only the death of a language does that. (125)

Furthermore, for Ann, who is adrift with a ‘familiar helpless frustration’ (79), Aled ‘convey[s] a sense of respect’ (83); he enables her to ‘confess [...] fears [she] was only half aware had taken root’ (84). His arms ‘stretching [...] towards me’ (87) suggest an attempt at bonding, a connection despite the dichotomy of ‘our cultural and political poles’ (100). Nevertheless, Aled accidentally blows himself up with a home-made bomb

40 Anne McClintock, “‘No Longer in a Future Heaven’: Gender, Race, and Nationalism’, p.89.
ending Ann’s relationship with Welsh-speaking Wales and signifying its imminent demise. Her ‘desertion’ (148) at the end of the novel suggests fear and a sense of the irresolvable. The novel’s final sentences convey both a feeling of impeding death as well as the strength of the innate desire to survive: ‘I prayed to cling. Not for any future, for there is none [...] dear God, oh let me be alright [...] It is a base instinct, the will to survive’ (149).

It has been argued that ‘culture is the primary means through which a transformation of the ways of being and thinking can be achieved’ and literary representation can challenge the nation’s symbolic signification and its production of meaning. This is particularly important for women because, as Cynthia Enloe argues, the ‘nation’ emerged ‘from masculine memory, masculinised humiliation and masculinised hope.’ Like Jones’s *Resistance*, Elspeth Barker’s *O Caledonia* (1991) also examines gender and nation through the Gothic mode. Although there are marked differences between these texts (for instance, Jones’s text is contemporaneously set whilst Barker’s is located in the 1940s and 1950s and Jones’s main concern is language and the divisions it creates) nevertheless, like Jones, Barker makes apparent, from the very beginning of her novel, the precariously dangerous situation women face within the ideology of the nation and nationhood. Indeed, Barker’s text is unequivocal: *O Caledonia* begins with the death of its young female protagonist. Lying lifeless at the bottom of the stairs ‘oddly attired in her mother’s black lace evening dress, twisted and slumped in bloody, murderous death’ (1) sixteen-year-old Janet is held responsible for

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her own violent demise. As the omniscient narrator says, amongst the villagers ‘there was grim assent’: “The lass had only herself to blame” (3). Thus starts the story of Janet, an upper middle-class girl growing up (or attempting to) in the wild and desolate landscape of the north east of Scotland with her parents, four siblings and a ‘mad’ aunt in the attic. Unlike much of the fiction (and the ensuing media interest) emerging from Scotland during this period – urban, gritty, working-class and male – Barker’s narrative is located in the rural ancestral home of ‘Auchnasaugh’, ‘a gaunt place’ (32) which ‘took its name from the winds which lamented around it almost all of the year’. (32)

Perhaps as a consequence of its divergence from the (mostly male) literary trend, Barker’s impressive novel has received little scholarly attention. Indeed, its upper-middle-class protagonist and its location has even led to one male critic suggesting that it is unrepresentative of Scotland and therefore critically insignificant. A classic example of a male critic dismissing the work of a women writer because it does not represent his Scotland, Douglas Gifford comments: ‘I don’t [...] recognise Scotland here’.

The novel’s title and epigraph – O Caledonia! stern and wild, Meet nurse for a poetic child! – is a reference to one of Scotland most iconic male writers, Walter Scott. Scott’s narrative poem The Lay of the Last Minstrel (1805), from which this couplet is taken, is a lyrically romantic vision of an unspoiled and untamed Scotland, seen as a

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44 The notable exceptions to this are three relatively recent studies on Barker by feminists: Carol Anderson, ‘Emma Tennant, Elspeth Barker, Alice Thompson: Gothic Revisited’ in Christianson and Lumsden, eds, Contemporary Scottish Women Writers; Christianson, ‘Imagined Corners To Debatable Land: Passable Boundaries’, Scottish Affairs, 1996 and more recently Monica Germanà, Scottish Women’s Gothic and Fantastic Writing, Fiction since 1978 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010)

'poetical fusion of landscape with the sentiment of nationality'. Indeed, the topography of this area is beautifully rendered by Barker:

It was [...] a rare, most exquisite summer. The honeysuckle which drooped down the terrace wall scented the air all day [...] the azaleas lingered on and on, wood pigeons throbbed and cooed, and only the softest of breezes stirred the pines. Janet [...] rose before light to ride bareback [...] to the moors. She watched the sun rise over the far hills, the mist float in steamy filaments off the glen and the silent golden day bring glory to the sombre pines. (60)

Nevertheless, this is an ironic, feminist revision of Scott’s poetic musing and although Janet, like Scott, adores and romanticises the Scottish landscape – for her this is a place of ‘high romance and magic’ (55) – there is a malicious, menacing and foreboding atmosphere that underlies the ethereal beauty. So, the rhododendrons ‘stood withdrawn and spectral, parched like skeletons drained of their venom’ (41) as through the ‘dead landscape, imprisoned beneath a colourless sky [...] the water moved wearily [...] the glen was drained and exhausted’ (121) suggesting a more ominous reading of the nation. Furthermore, the landscape frequently and persistently prefigures the demise of the young protagonist: this is a place where the ‘puddles looked like pools of blood’ (52) and Jim, the pornography-reading masturbating gardener who lurks in shadowy corners, has a ‘face [which] is darkly murderous’ (36) and ‘spends most of his life involved in blood, guts, dung and effluvia’ (57), his ‘hands ingrained [...] with blood and death’ (37).

Like Jones, Barker questions ideas relating to nation and national belonging and suggests contemporary ideologies are damaging for women, especially those who do not fit into prescribed roles. O Caledonia writes back against Scott’s version of Scotland for, as Kirsten Stirling argues, his romantic gendered personification of

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Scotland and its landscape means there is ‘no place for women. Women are the landscape, just as they are the nation but they do not inhabit the landscape [...] while women are seen as receptacles of nationhood, they do not fully participate in that nationhood’. And it is this lack of agency and subjecthood that Barker conveys. Needless to say, Janet’s main predicament is that she does not fit in: ‘an outcast’ (30) from the moment of her birth, her femaleness renders her problematic. The baby girl does not belong in the place and space in which she is located and hence her identity is obliterated: ‘Her father [Hector] came home from leave and looked into the blue wicker basket [...] “It’s about the size of a cat”, he said’ (5). Janet’s short life is a series of incidents recalling the culture which positions her as a ‘problem’ because as Hector asserts, ‘a girl was an inferior form of a boy’ (47). Like Jones’s Ann, Janet feels dislocated and ‘deprived of her identity’ (79) and often envisions her own death: ‘she mused upon her own remote and unalarming death’ (124). It is, of course, noteworthy that Barker and Jones were writing during an ultra conservative period which saw a backlash against feminism from both political and media channels; feminists were feeling estranged and dispirited hence the disconsolate nature of their writing and subject matter. Barker’s novel, unlike Jones’s, is however lightened by irony and humour.

Nevertheless, Barker illustrates an uncompromising, Calvinist world where ‘retribution and exile’ (19) are customary and a ‘floozy wee student’s’ accidental drowning is divine justice for failing to heed ‘the words of Knox’ (89). Janet has to learn to negotiate and acquiesce or the consequence, as we know, is death. This was a place and time when girls’ and women’s actions and activities were rigidly controlled

and curtailed: even during St Andrew’s Day celebrations as a six year old, ‘Nanny was bearing down on her with a face like the North Sea [for] showing off. Talking to men’ (13). As she grows older, Janet spends her time reading poetry and novels because Hector believed that the ‘regrettable condition [of being a girl] could be remedied, or improved upon, by education’ (47). Her poetic world allowed her to ‘visualize herself as a heroine’ (47) rather than ‘a tragic dwindling figure soon to be seen no more’ (30). But her isolated primary education at home serves to further exile her when she is eventually removed from Auchnasaugh, her ‘place of delight and absolute beauty’ (35) and sent to St Uncumba, the boarding school at ‘the end of the world’ (72). Here Janet’s ‘unfeminine’ habits result in her being displaced and detached: ‘the girls were interested in clothes and their families and games. When Janet used words which had delighted or amused her they fell silent and stared and moved away muttering to each other. First they thought she was showing off; then they thought she was mad’ (72).

Janet dreams of living eternally at Auchnasaugh, ‘a bookish spinster attended by cats and parrots until the time came when she would be ethereal, pure spirit untainted by the woes of the flesh, a phantom drifting with the winds’ (60). As a young child she did not adhere to the conventions of early femininity: ‘she had [...] been given a doll’s pram which she knew she was expected to trundle about like a little mother. She had seen the grown-ups smiling in approving complicity at other small girls as they tucked up their celluloid infants’ (21). Defiantly she decided it made an ‘acceptable chariot’ for her cat and ‘[b]y the time that Nanny and Vera decided that since Janet never played with the pram properly it should be given to Rhona, it had become a stinking ossuary of parched bones mingled with fur, feather and the sullen reptilian sheen of rat’s tails’ (21). The ‘grown-ups’ marked approval at certain modes of behaviour reminds us of the
constructed and managed nature of femininity for, as Judith Butler argues, ‘gender requires and institutes its own distinctive regulatory and disciplinary regime. A norm operates within social practices as the implicit standard of normalisation’.48

That standard model of femininity, her ‘lack [of] some essential quality of girlishness’ (128) means that Janet has to be moulded into an acceptable representation of womanhood: so she is ‘bought [...] a good tweed suit, a badge of the grown Scottish female’ (Barker is clearly having fun here with the stereotypical conventions of the ‘Highland Lady’) and is taken to a hair salon which reminds her ‘of the lunatic asylum’ (130) to which her aunt has been removed. Entering into womanhood is fraught with danger, and her mother’s attempt to ‘launch Janet into society’ (136) not only appals her but exposes her to sexual assault and harassment. Raymond Dibdin, the son of a family friend, attempts to rape her (and she retaliates with a brilliantly appropriate text):

‘have a look at this then Janet [...]’ He was panting; he brandished and twirled a dreadful dark pink baton out of the front of his shorts [...] He pushed his face against hers [...] His clammy mouth moved across her cheek. With all her strength Janet jerked her head back and smashed the corner of Ars Amatoria into his eye; at the same time she kneed him [...] ‘you bitch, you dirty little bitch,’ he hissed. (69)

And during a Hogmanay visit to an elderly neighbour, the old man ‘stared at her with unfocused eyes [...] Suddenly he was pinching her left bosom [...] Janet stood there [...] she did not know what to do. If she kept very still [...] perhaps she would cease to exist’ (144). For women, Barker suggests, Scott’s wild beautiful landscape is laden with gendered menace. Janet’s perception of female maturity is that of relinquishing identity to participate in a sacrificial ritual: ‘the dim, blood-boultered altar of womanhood’

Barker’s vision of Scottish female subjectivity is unambiguous: left alone one evening in Auchnasaugh Janet plays with the idea of femininity,

she found lipstick and rouge and mascara [which] she applied liberally. Then she hung her head upside down and brushed her hair hard [...] She felt strong and bright and beautiful. Perhaps it was worth being female after all (150).

Moments later Janet has been stabbed to death by Jim, the gardener, in a frenzy of gendered violence: ‘There was a dreadful cry of outrage and disgust; she heard a voice hiss “You filthy wee whore”, but she did not see the knife as it stabbed again and again and again’ (152). A female cannot be allowed even to begin to feel energetic and strong in this landscape.

Barker’s literary representation serves to reminds us that gender, sexuality and the nation are all socioculturally constructed and are all implicated in power relations.

As Tamar Mayer argues:

Despite its rhetoric of equality for all who partake in the “national project”, nation remains like other feminized entities – emphatically, historically and globally – the property of men [...] control over access to the benefits of belonging to the nation is virtually always gendered [...] through control over reproduction, sexuality and the means of representation the authority to define the nation lies mainly with men.49

A totally different perspective on the social and cultural landscape but one still concerned with women’s subjectivity and the gendered nature of home and belonging characterizes Siân James’s historical novel, A Small Country (1979).50 The story is set in the run up to the First World War and narrates the lives of a well-respected farming family in west Wales, the Evanses, whose life changes after Josi Evans abandons his wife Rachel for his lover and their newly-born child. Rachel confines herself to bed,

50 Siân James, A Small Country (1979; Bridgend: Seren, 1999). All subsequent references will be to this edition and appear in parenthesis in the main body of the text.
shattered by heartbreak, dishonour and humiliation (though we later come to learn that she is actually dying of cancer) and the adult children, Tom and Catrin, become responsible for her care, with Catrin bearing the heavier part of the burden.

Through the female characters James’s text stresses the oppressive condition of Welsh femininity and female subjectivity; this is a place and era where ‘girls stay at home’ (31) abiding by ‘colonially imposed values’ while in England women were beginning to challenge dominant cultural and political discourses. James’s examination of female subjectivity analyses the repressive ideologies of patriarchy, asserting that women’s socio-cultural confinement through the expectations of femininity allows no articulation for women’s development, or indeed their despair or anxiety. Catrin ‘couldn’t bear to think that she had nothing to hope from life but the early “good” marriage which everyone seemed to predict for her’ (75) and believed ‘all her most deeply felt experiences had come from books, she had hardly lived at all, at first hand’ (76). Catrin is tethered to regulatory conventions and as such she is fearful she will lose all sense of selfhood if she remains in the traditional rural community and domestic sphere: ‘I’ll be swallowed up alive if I stay on here’ (35).

James’s historical setting allows for an examination of remnants of Victorian discourse and ideologies such as the notion of the ‘Angel in the House’. This gendered ideology was disseminated in Wales through a variety of practices and discourses especially after the publication of the Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales (1847). There can be little doubt about the rationale behind this report and the consequences of it: the enquiry was carried out by colonial

henchmen and its purpose was to control and further oppress the nation. It ideologically constructed the Welsh and Welsh women in particular, as vulgar, wayward, wild people in need of cultivation.\textsuperscript{52} The effect of this report for Welsh women, particularly middle-class women, was continued confinement within the domestic sphere years after women in the metropolitan centre had started to experience more ‘freedom’. This obstinate adherence to outmoded ideologies was, as Jane Aaron argues, not unusual:

In colonised and post-colonised societies this type of conservative retention of repressive behaviour patterns inculcated by the colonising culture, after that culture has itself abandoned them, is, apparently, a common trait.\textsuperscript{53}

Catrin’s life is contrasted with that of Rose, the English girlfriend of Tom’s friend Edward, who is ‘dedicated […] to the cause’ (106) of women’s suffrage in London and has ‘volunteered for […] disruptive work’ (32). Written at a time when Welsh women were fighting for their political and cultural voices, James’s historical novel reminds us of the struggle and suffering women endured for a modicum of gender equality; we learn, for instance, that in prison ‘women [were] seized and bound and forcibly fed’ (107).

James is clearly concerned about acts of violence and trauma perpetrated against women, not only when they are fighting for their political and social freedom but also in the domestic setting. This concern is illustrated in two quite different incidents: firstly, through Catrin whose sense of self and ability to self-express is restricted. In a moment of despair and defiance she shatters her bedroom mirror: ‘she picked up her heavy silver hairbrush and struck the mirror and for a second, while it cracked and splintered,


she saw herself smashing into fragments. She screamed in terror (131). In Lacanian terms, the mirror recalls the inevitability of a split female subject in a phallocentric system, and James illustrates the tensions and fractures experienced by women in a hostile patriarchal culture. Secondly, the cultural and social oppression placed upon women through psychological and physical violence and pressures are examined in the character of Miriam, Josi’s lover. An ‘outcast’ for being both a mistress and an unmarried mother, Miriam, abandoned by Josi to care for his dying wife, is alienated and isolated and consequently kills herself, thus depicting the complete violent elimination of female subjectivity. According to the patriarchal values which dictated correct ‘feminine’ behaviour, discussed above in connection with Catrin, society did not allow Miriam an alternative to suicide since she was ‘a shameless hussy [...] a man’s whore’ (119). She had gone against the colonially-imposed regulations and seemed to accept her fate as the embodiment of ‘the libidinous hoyden of primitive Wild Wales.’

James’s text is explicitly feminist, especially in its depiction of the brutality of a colonised and patriarchal culture which objectifies, degrades and ultimately destroys women.

*A Small Country* was published the same year as the 1979 failed referendum and would have been written during the years of Westminster discussions leading up to the implementation of the *Devolution Bill for Scotland and Wales* (1978). Thus pertinent contemporary issues such as British ‘national’ identity and nationhood would have been at the forefront of political and cultural debates; they are concerns with which James clearly engages. The politics of identity and difference are first illustrated near

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54 Jane Aaron, ‘Gender and Colonization’, pp.183-198, p.188.
55 Tom Nairn’s influential text, *The Break-Up of Britain* (Edinburgh: Big Thinking, 1993) was first published in 1977. This was one of the first works to theorize on ideas of nation and nationhood within Britain.
the beginning of the novel when the reader is introduced to Edward, Tom’s university friend, an Englishman. Catrin thinks of him as

a visitor from a distant, untroubled world […] Assured, self-confident […] never on the look-out for insult […] victorious somehow, blessed. That’s what it’s like to be English. (25)

Although James portrays Edward as a pleasant character, the disparity between him and Tom is clear. Edward’s subject-position as an English upper middle-class male ensures his pre-eminence; he is secure, confident and exudes an air of success. He is a good friend to Tom and even encourages Catrin to acquire an education; however, when the war breaks out James shows conflict and difference between the Welsh characters and the English man. Edward believes this imperial war is a glorious opportunity for a young man: ‘the modern version of fighting the dragon; winning one’s spurs. He thinks death for one’s country is a privilege and an honour’ (139). Conversely, Josi pronounces: ‘my family fight against the bloody English not for them’ (181). Furthermore, the reality of war has given Tom a different sense of identity. Writing to his sister, he says:

I had hardly thought of myself as Welsh before – except at the International rugby matches…Now, I think of myself as the product of a different society [than his Oxford friends] completely different, with a completely different history. Our grandparents […] spoke only Welsh […] How well worth preserving these differences seem to be. (172)

Indeed, it is in France that Tom’s sense of difference is brought to the fore; he grows to appreciate his indigenous culture and starts to question his connection with England, and by extension its imperial projects, as he begins to deliberate on the value of his own nation’s culture, history and language:
It seemed so strange that in this place, with all hell’s forces of destruction let loose about me, I should be concerned with things like the language and the culture of our unimportant small country. (180)

Tom’s character situates James’s text in a specific Welsh context as the writer engages with debates surrounding nationhood and identity which were being disseminated at the time of publication; Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg, Plaid Cymru and the campaigns in favour of the 1979 referendum proposal were all vociferous in their concerns regarding the preservation of the Welsh language.

A Small Country is a complex novel and its importance lies in its commitment to exploring many of the key contemporary issues developing in the late 1970s. The devolution agenda meant ideas of nation and nationhood were being discussed and feminist debates started to challenge the political and sociocultural ideologies relating to gender inequality. Important feminist publishers and publications such as Virago, Women’s Press and the Feminist Review came into being ensuring that debates concerning subjectivity and identity were put into discourse through academia and the media. Feminists in the 1970s and the 1980s employed realist, fantasy, sci-fi, romance and historical modes to explore the extensive and prolonged difficulties facing women in a political and social structure set up by and for men. James was writing at a time of Welsh women’s political awaking. As Katie Gramich notes, there ‘was a new awareness of the international feminist movement, which was beginning to demand changes in gender roles and expectations’ and James strongly argues for women’s right to direct their own course in life.

As the 1980s advanced the population of Wales and Scotland were starting to feel the impact of a Conservative government’s right-wing and centralist policies and

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56 Katie Gramich, Twentieth-Century Women’s Writing in Wales, Land, Gender and Belonging, p.145.
women’s writing reflected these difficult times. Although *Gentlemen of the West* (1984) is ostensibly a very different text from James’s historical novel, the Scottish writer Agnes Owens is, like James, occupied with examining gender roles and political and sociocultural ideologies, though she does so in a contemporary realist form which allows her to confront directly the inequitable and at times ruthless behaviour of the Westminster powerhouse. Owens’s novel was published five years into the Conservative government’s leadership and the aftermath of the referendum debacle; both episodes were pertinent to the reinstating of the imbalance between Scotland and its dominant neighbour, but also ironically to the re-invigorating and radicalising of the country’s artists.

Owens has been writing since the late 1970s and has published five novels, two novellas and many short stories. Chitra Ramaswamy referred to Owens as ‘part of a Golden Age in Scottish literature,’ a Golden Age brought about by Scottish writers assertion of identity and their creative and robust responses to the post-1979 referendum and Thatcher’s strong unionist principles. However, Owens has remained for the most part critically overlooked. Alasdair Gray, the internationally renowned Scottish writer, has described her as ‘the most unfairly neglected of all living Scottish authors. I do not know why’. I offer an explanation: Agnes Owens is Scottish, working-class and female. In 1987, three years after Owens’s debut novel, *Gentlemen of the West*, was published, Joy Hendry described the difficulty facing the Scottish woman writer:

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57 Agnes Owens, *Gentlemen of the West* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984). All subsequent references will be to this edition and appear in parenthesis in the main body of the text.
58 For instance, writers such as Rona Munro, Kathleen Jamie and A.L Kennedy not only reflected the society they inhabited but challenged its fundamental structures and ideologies.
Writing is a claim to power [...] Scottish culture as a whole is a neglected area, lacking in status and prestige. A Scottish woman writer shares this neglect with her male colleagues, as well as being overlooked and underestimated because she is a woman. Thus, the woman writer, rare enough anywhere, is even rarer in Scotland.61

Owens’s writing explores Scottish culture and the socio-political and economic anxieties and challenges experienced by those living in the margins. Like many of the Scottish and Welsh women writing in the 1980s her work explores notions of national identity, self-expression and self-determination. However, what is different and most interesting about Owens’s work is that she is a woman giving voice to socioculturally and economically excluded men while examining the social production of masculinity. This was a time when the exploration of women’s perspectives and experiences in socio-politically gendered structures were, necessarily, at the forefront of feminist creative writing and the constraining ideologies of femininity and masculinity were seen as widely divergent; hence, it was rare for a woman to write specifically about men’s experiences. Consequently, women writing about men tended to be even more ignored than women writing about women.

*Gentlemen of the West* is a humorous and spirited narrative about poverty and how it impinges upon the male community in the west of Scotland. Told through the eyes of a young bricklayer Mac, Owens’s first-person narrative gives life and voice to the mistreated and disregarded: the working class, the unemployed and the underclass. The story follows 22 year-old Mac who lives with his mother in a council house: he goes to work, he goes to the pub, gets drunk, smokes, swears, steals, lies, has petty arguments, gets into fights – in other words, nothing seemingly profound happens.

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Yet, Owens’s sparse prose is challenging and radical: her male protagonist is flawed and the secondary characters are rough-edged and malfunctioning. Her analysis of the construction of Scottish masculinity offers a divergent examination into the tensions and strains such gendered constructions produce. Owens’s narrative contrasts with much of the working-class fiction coming out of Scotland – produced commonly by male writers – in which masculine cultural practices such as drinking and fighting are decidedly idealised.  

Life for Mac revolves around the Paxon Arms public house and a diverse collection of men: unemployed, labourers and ‘derelicts’ (98). The novel is structured through a series of episodes: for example, chapter one concerns a dog getting knocked down and chapter three is about the Rag and Bone man; it is through these short stories we learn about both Mac and his culture. Owens’s novel is more than just a dryly witty narrative of working-class Glasgow; it is a novel that deals with key issues concerning economic and political inequality experienced by most of the Scottish population in the 1980s (this can be equally applied to Wales). Owens depicts a world in which the ‘folk’ are living in a colonised condition, where power, wealth and possibility are both external and unattainable. This is a place where people live on the extreme margins as one of the characters, Paddy, painfully illustrates: ‘Ye could say that ma dug [dog] has kept me body and soul when I hudny a penny left.’ As Mac explains, ‘Paddy’s dole money was often augmented by rabbits, hares and pheasants’ (10).

Gentlemen of the West depicts a world in which the proletariat and especially the underclass do not expect much in life or in death: as one of Mac’s acquaintances says of

a friend: ‘He’ll jist have tae go intae a pauper’s grave […] It’ll no’ dae him ony harm. He’ll have plenty company’ (19). During one section of the narrative the reader gets a sense of both Mac’s working life and Owens’s sardonic humour:

My hands were stiff and my feet numb. It was a damp freezing morning. My jacket [...] was as warm as a piece of net and my year-old boots were as sturdy as a pair of sandshoes [...] who would work on a building site, the worst trade in the world in the winter? Talk about the miners. At least they had Mick McGahey. The nearest we ever got to a strike was one from a winey’s spade. (73)

Although this is a bleak novel, Owens’s dark humour allows her to address contemporary political concerns and authentically portray the absurdity of the socioeconomic situation: she reminds the reader of the precarious nature of the working-class, here specifically the builder and labourer without union support to help defend against an employer’s tyranny. Moreover, through her reference to the miners and their union leader, McGahey, Owens reminds us of the political milieu she is writing out of: Thatcher’s Britain, an era which saw the power of the trade unions destroyed and the mining and steel industries in both Scotland and Wales decimated.

By chapter eight, Owens’s narrative starts to show the despair that accompanies poverty and becomes an overt critique of the political ideology and socioeconomic structures and values that dominated the 1980s. A sense of ‘foreboding’ (78) engulfs Mac: ‘I’m only twenty-two [...] but [...] I could see myself winding up on the river bank like the wineys, with all my possessions in a plastic bag’ (78). This was a period of enormous social and economic transformations, and those changes saw an increasingly divided society: high-income families prospered while low-waged families were made increasingly vulnerable (through de-unionisation and the part abolition of
the Wage Council). As Mac says, it was ‘a vicious circle’ (74) of trying to get by and ‘money prospects [...] were bitter’ (73).

By the penultimate chapter Mac is disappointed and frustrated with his life: his friend has died of frostbite and hopelessness, he has himself been arrested for a pointless and unproductive burglary and he is unemployed: ‘Redundancy was the order of times for the building worker’ (109). As his community disintegrates around him Mac reflects on his childhood, revisiting the abandoned Douglas Estate, the ‘last place to be inhabited by the gentry’ where ‘we used to pinch green apples’ (109). He sees his life mirrored in its neglect: the ‘trees were black and gaunt like monuments to the passing […] of my youth’ (81). The energy and excitement of his youth, when ‘we had very fine ideas about our future [...] I was going to be a veterinary surgeon’ (81) has vanished; life now means ‘all grind, booze or trying to get by on the dole’ (115). Mac is ultimately looking for himself among the wreckage: ‘Just anything to give me a hint of something beyond’ (116). By the concluding chapter Mac, in a final act of self-determination and agency, leaves the ‘bloody hopeless’ situation and moves North \(^63\) to find ‘a better way of passing the time than slugging away on beer and whisky’ (52). Here Owens’s conclusion differs markedly from Scottish men’s writing during the same period in which male protagonists frequently died, were in the process of dying, or were wishing themselves dead.\(^64\)

The political climate during these years produced a sense of profound crisis and alienation. Scottish and Welsh people were not only up against a government which was

\(^63\) During the 1980s oil and gas production in the North Sea was huge consequently people moved to the northern ‘oil’ city of Aberdeen looking for employment. And as a consequence of the oil boom, the Scottish National Party came to the fore arguing that Scotland should have Scotland’s oil and this revenue would sustain an independent nation.

indifferently dismantling indigenous industries and leaving entire communities socially and economically devastated but also one that was intent on homogenising the peripheral populations into a manageable oneness: a ‘United Kingdom’, an expression of union that would suppress revolutionary dissent. Indeed, Thatcher was ‘the most Unionist politician in Downing Street since the war’ and therefore imagining the nation from diverse perspectives to enable challenges to misrepresentations, exclusions and uniformity became crucial. Nevertheless, as well as raising pertinent questions concerning ‘Britishness’ and writing to assert a sense of cultural difference, women of this period, including writers, were also becoming involved in green politics and environmental issues. These myriad issues are represented in Catherine Merriman’s *State of Desire* (1996) a novel set in south Wales which examines cultural constructions of identity and developing subjectivity through the story of a woman coming to terms with her husband’s death and rediscovering her sexual self.

Merriman’s exploration of female sexual desire and reclamation of selfhood is paralleled with the protagonist’s political (re)awakening. After the death of her husband, Jenny is struggling to maintain a sense of self in a society that sees her primarily as a wife; writing letters to the deceased Michael, she says to him, ‘I’m still having problems trusting who I am’ (4). Overcome one day with a ‘state of desire’ while a plumber friend, Gareth, is fixing her shower, she is both ashamed and exhilarated by her powerful sexual needs. Guilt-ridden about her liaison she asks her friend Sal for advice, and Sal responds by reminding Jenny of the urgency for political action to save their community and their environment from the Coal Board’s plans for an open cast

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mine: ‘if you’re coming to life at last, get stuck in there, the [opencast mining] inquiry’s in two months’ (22). Jenny’s awakened sexual desire re-energises her and enables her to re-engage with the world. This is the start of Merriman’s exploration of women’s political and sexual identity and the way in which the female position is legitimated (or de-legitimated) through phallocentric discourses and systems of power.

Merriman responds to and challenges the prevailing hegemonic power formations, bringing together key contemporary issues: the continuing imperial exploitation and political, social and gendered inequality. She highlights the dual calamity and repercussions of the 1980s and 1990s situation and, through Jenny, she suggests that the discourses of domesticity and femininity do not allow for female sexual fulfilment or serious political activity. Jenny struggles against sexual oppression and injustice: her subsequent affair with Mark is socially and culturally dangerous because of her position as an older woman and a mother.

As an ‘unattached’ woman within the patriarchal system Jenny is public property, as demonstrated by Frank, her colleague and wannabe husband’s behaviour: Frank has ‘taken to touching [Jenny] Just in small ways: his arm had brushed her on her way out, steering her through the office doorway […] his palm pushed at the underside of her bare elbow’ (80). This gendered invasion of space and body is a clear indication of Frank’s desire to have power over Jenny. When he discovers her relationship with Mark, a young car mechanic, he re-constructs Jenny’s identity from potential wife to ‘harlot’, and tells her son: ‘Your mother, Alex, is behaving like a whore’ (211).

Frank is a dangerous controlling bigot who has an obdurate belief in what is considered appropriate ‘feminine’ behaviour. Hence, Sal is disliked by Frank because she is ‘loud and assertive’ (35) and had he ‘known that Sal was a lesbian’ (35), he
presumably would have been morally outraged. Unlike Sal, Jenny is sexually desirable because according to Frank she is ‘fragile-faced. So feminine’ (65). Frank’s manipulation and need to control Jenny has similarities to the way in which the dominant powers Jenny fights in court are attempting to occupy and exploit the (mother) land and natural resources. Possession is the desired outcome in both cases reminding us of the way in which power functions and intersects with gender. Indeed, Merriman shows how ‘patriarchal oppression and colonial domination conceptually and historically’ interrelate and connect to one and other.67

As the novel progresses Jenny becomes intrinsically connected to the Welsh landscape; her growing sense of responsibility to her environment is tied up with her emerging sense of self. Becoming increasingly angry at the powerfully dominant British Coal and its plans for the Blaen Dyar land, Jenny reflects:

Who had the right to demolish mountains? What arrogance to suppose you could apply, with any hope of success, for permission to hollow out a mountain. Who had the authority, assuming you did have the arrogance, to grant that permission? How deep into a planet could the earth be owned? How awesomely powerful must be the force that was capable of destroying, and consuming, a mountain. (42)

Through Jenny’s distress at the monstrous nature of capitalist ownership Merriman illustrates the economical and political power Britain has over this geographical area known as Wales. This is the point that Owens also emphatically raises: the metropolitan-based and biased government subjugates the indigenous population, ignoring their concerns in pursuit of wealth. Merriman’s novel also reminds us that this domination has been systematic and persistent. As Mrs Meredith, Frank’s mother, explains to Jenny, during the 1940s,

67 Loomba, Colonialism/Postcolonialism, p. xvii.
they evicted people from the land, farmers, villagers. Quite ruthlessly [...] The houses were demolished and the land dug up. They promised to restore the area and let the people back when the war was over but I don’t think it ever happened. (61)

Merriman’s text is situated within the tradition of women’s writing, engaging with landscape, the environment and space, a common focus specifically associated with Welsh women, as Jane Aaron argues: ‘Fear at the threat to the fragile balance of natural life is an omnipresent theme in Welsh women’s creative writing.’ Jenny’s increasing connection to the land feminises the environment and suggests Hélène Cixous’s jouissance as the natural world becomes corporeal: ‘The water was intensely cold. It felt not like rainwater but like some deep visceral fluid, welled up from the saturated heart of the hill’ (125). However, the threat of the opencast mine becomes the threat of rape; an act of male aggression and control: ‘Man’s insatiable desire to ram powerful machines into large black holes’ (24). The wild untamed mountain represents Jenny’s sexual self: she had long forgotten and ignored her sexual needs as she did the mountain – until crisis point. Further, the threat of cavernous dark voids that will be exposed by the mine symbolises the void within Jenny – a void that her lover Mark temporarily satisfies: ‘Her body strained for him [...] the hollowness inside her filled’ (123).

Like many of the other writers discussed in this thesis, Merriman writes back to the centre and relocates to the core those who have been historically marginalised. So while Jenny and Sal are at the centre of the community and the centre of political life, the male characters, by contrast, tend to be peripheral to the political activities, ignorant

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or apathetic. Their reluctance to fight for their land is highlighted in a conversation between Sal, Jenny, Gareth and the village’s pub landlord Roy:

‘Tell you now,’ said Gareth [...] ‘If the opencast gets the thumbs down, it won’t be because of anything you or I says. It’ll be because it’s overlooking nobland. There’s votes to lose there.’ [...] ‘[Y]ou won’t stop [th]em.’ Roy shook his head emphatically. ‘They get their way, those Coal boys. Always do. Always have. You’ll see.’ (185)

Despite the rigid structures and sociocultural obstacles, Merriman’s women are independent and socially and politically articulate: they are ‘fluent and impassioned’ (175) and what is more they are fighters who help to prevent the dominant force from further exploiting indigenous resources. As Sal says, their stand against British Coal has proven ‘that idealistic political action is not a dinosaur activity’ (274).

Merriman’s novel is representative of some of the social, political and cultural issues women writers were concerned with during this period. Through her use of landscape, topography and at times vivid sexual writing, it is a convincing exploration of female subjectivity and sexuality as well as the political climate. Importantly for a writer who is producing work between the period of the failed and the successful devolution referendums, Merriman also questions notions of national identity, nationhood and the imagined community. Her main female protagonist is English-born, however, Jenny is idealistic and ideologically distanced from colonial incomers:

Pete [her first partner] and she had been young, undomesticated, and had seen themselves as adventurers, not settlers. Back then the Welsh hills were full of young people like themselves: English drop-outs, playing at self-sufficiency or self-enlightenment, or, like Pete [...] just playing. (13)

Unlike Pete, Jenny is not ‘playing’: she ‘began to feel pride. Began to feel a resident’ in the location (14). During a time of frequent (and at times compelling) political and
cultural debates pertaining to unionism, national identity and nationalisms, Merriman draws our attention to the fact that Wales has many heterogeneous cultural elements by offering a hybrid Welsh identity that suggests inclusiveness. As Chris Williams points out, debates concerning contemporary identities in Wales are fruitful and rewarding and enable the nation to develop and grow:

Our preoccupation with cultural identity has gradually been relaxed from seeing identity in the singular (Welsh, English, Irish [...] to being prepared to view identity as hybridized or hyphenated [...] and has moved on to embrace concepts of situational or multiple identities.

Also concerned with the discursive and cultural production of gendered identity and how these impact upon a sense of self is Scottish writer Janice Galloway. Galloway emerged in the 1980s, and like other writers of the period, she was set on challenging the prevailing and unrepresentative images of Scotland. She has actively endeavoured to represent Scotland and Scottish identity in her own terms and to give voice to women in a culture that has persistently and systemically obscured female experience. Like both Merriman’s and James’s texts, her first novel The Trick is to Keep Breathing (1989) explores the cultural and discursive constructions of female identity and how these produce conflicts and anxieties for female subjectivity and a sense of selfhood. It is a haunting book, chronicling the emotional and mental collapse and subsequent re-emerging of its ironically named protagonist, Joy. Galloway’s text explores fragmentation of identity, crisis and the oppressive nature of culturally enforced gender roles through the use of experimental typography. The textual form mimics Joy and the

70 See for instance, Nairn, Break-up of Britain and Anderson Imagined Communities.
71 Chris Williams, ‘Problematising Wales’, p.15.
72 For instance, A.L. Kennedy, Maud Saultcr, Duncan McLean, Jackie Kay, Liz Lochhead, James Kelman.
73 Janice Galloway, The Trick is to Keep Breathing (1989; London: Minerva, 1991). All subsequent references will be to this edition and appear in parenthesis in the main body of the text.
world around her: there are blank/white spaces, lists, repetitions, omissions, unfinished (or perhaps unutterable) sentences and sentences plunging off the page, as Joy’s despair intensifies.

*The Trick is to Keep Breathing* is an indictment of patriarchal institutions which construct subjectivity, or a sense of self, and then annihilate it when it does not correspond to the socially approved role. Joy Stone is a woman left in sociocultural, emotional and psychological limbo by the death of her married lover. And much like James’s peripheral figure Miriam, Joy is abandoned and isolated. She was the ‘other’ woman and as such has no place in the patriarchal institutions that control and regulate female behaviour. As Margery Metzstein states:

> legitimised institutions [...] operate to [...] label Joy Stone [...] The assigned name, *mistress*, finds its closest synonym in the word *prostitute*, and these terms confer on a woman a role limited to a degraded sexuality. They also simultaneously convey a horror of the sexually active woman.\(^{74}\)

In other words, the symbolic system which expresses our culture and enables us to understand ourselves and the world around us is not neutral. In other words, language is a political tool and as Catherine Belsey argues, the subject is ‘constructed through language and in discourse’.\(^{75}\) As in *State of Desire*, language in *The Trick* is an ideological apparatus that has linguistically denigrated and misrepresented Joy and since language is given credence and authority through the dominant power, sexism is encoded into language. Foucault argued that there is no meaning outside discourse: all


social constructions are an ‘effect of discourse’\textsuperscript{76} and therefore by name-assigning, meaning is imposed which subsequently enables social manipulation and control. The discourses that impinge upon Joy take many forms, including for instance, women’s magazine ideas about how to be the perfect woman:

\begin{verbatim}
Diet for a firmer you!
Kiss me quick lips - we show you how! [...]
Magazines told me to work on my awareness
I would wake up and this is my One Shot at Today,
I am Young, Dynamic, Today’s Woman. I’m Multi-Orgasmic.
(27, 193)
\end{verbatim}

Like James, Galloway considers the fragmentation, tensions and factures of female subjectivity – and in fact, Galloway demonstrates the issues James raises with her historical depiction of inequalities, emphasising the fissures still experienced by women in the late twentieth century. Without the required societal attributes Joy’s ability to function becomes tenuous. Consequently she is isolated and dislocated; her sense of self is disintegrating, becoming detached. When attempting to move, she has to ‘redistribut[e] pieces of myself. Hands are bastards: so many separate pieces’ (8). At the root of her disintegration is her powerlessness in society (a society that is increasingly fragmented, aloof and remote) and a lack of available space in which to mourn her partner and legitimise her sense of self. The first person narration is interrupted throughout by an interior voice that pieces together the moments leading to and immediately after Michael’s death.

Joy’s malady, what she reasons is ‘wrong’ with her, is internalised: ‘I am the problem,’ she says (12), and ‘I forgot I always do the wrong thing’ (74). She blames

\textsuperscript{76} Michel Foucault, \textit{The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge} (1976; London: Penguin, 1998), p.11.
herself for being unable to cope instead of criticizing the hostile system that is at variance with her needs. As Ann Oakley suggests:

Women’s problems are constantly individualized: it is the individual woman who has the problem, and even if many individual women have the same problem, the explanation of a defective psychology rather than that of a defective social structure is usually preferred.\footnote{Ann Oakley, \textit{Essays on Women, Medicine and Health} (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), p.8.}

Joy’s life is controlled and regulated by a string of men who all hold positions of power over her: the headmaster, her boss at the bookmakers, the council officer, the numerous doctors she encounters, the hospital’s group therapist, the ex-boyfriend. Galloway’s experimental typography plays with the notion of male superiority by placing the conversations that Joy has with MEN in capital letters and they are often arranged as a play script, a sardonic nod to the performance of our cultural roles. She undermines gender stereotypes and exposes identities as social constructs. This subversive aspect of Galloway’s text owes much to \textit{écriture feminine}. According to Hélène Cixous:

The use of the upper-case consists above all in expressing forces in the text: it is a kind of vectoring, lines of variable intensity where \textit{current} passes...in such a way that putting an upper- or lower-case letter on a word gives it a different resistance.\footnote{Hélène Cixous cited in Glenda Norquay, ‘Janice Galloway Novels: Fraudulent Mooching’, in Christianson and Lumsden, eds, \textit{Contemporary Scottish Women Writers}, pp.131-143, p.135.}

In other words, Galloway defies the authoritative forces that condescend, govern, order, and almost erase Joy’s life by loading what they say with mockery.

Like Agnes Owens, Galloway employs a distinctly Glaswegian dialect thereby situating her text in a specific Scottish context (and distancing it from ‘English’ literature), although, of course, the gendered problems and threats Joy faces are of
international concern. Her text also uses postmodern techniques: language is there to be played with. For instance, throughout the novel Galloway’s sarcastic observations, often in parenthesis, remind us of the hostile culture Joy inhabits; she situates words in speech bubbles, catalogues, dramatic monologues, illustrating the multiple and conflicting discourses which manipulate and restrain Scottish women. She ridicules Scottish Presbyterianism, which as Joy Hendry points out, ‘has taken on an exaggeratedly masculine form, and has been historically anti-female, blaming on the female all the sins of the flesh.’

Galloway’s protagonist’s interior discussion (with the headmaster of her school) deliberates on her work life:

Blaze through work by all means but be circumspect. You’d be surprised how much cumuppance tends to follow even little mistakes. Scottish Education: apportion blame that ye have not blame apportioned unto you. It wisny me, it was you/him/her/a wee man and he ran away.’

And later Joy reflects on her absenteeism from work:

I can’t think how I fell into this unProtestant habit. I used to be so conscientious. I used to be so good all the time. [where good = productive/hardworking/wouldn’t say boo] […] [where good = value for money]. (81, square brackets in original)

Galloway’s engagement with narrating the nation critiques male-orientated ideas of Scotland where women have been socially, culturally and politically invisible. She attacks the ideologically reinforced contradictions and the double standards which affect women’s understanding of themselves and she reminds us how women have to constantly struggle ‘to keep breathing’. Describing her mother’s funeral and her ‘good’ behaviour ‘[where good = not putting anyone out by feeling too much, blank, unobtrusive]’ (82), Joy mockingly explains the gendered nature of her performance. She

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pretends her mother is alive, thereby remaining composed and detached from the proceedings:

Love/Emotion = embarrassment: Scots equation. Exceptions are when roaring drunk or watching football. Men do rather better out of this loophole. (82)

The Trick is to Keep Breathing is defiant and rebellious; Galloway uses irony, humour and unconventional typography to give voice to women’s experience of alienation and grief, and exposes the inadequacy and absurdity of phallocentric traditions, values and institutions. Significantly, Galloway’s novel is not about failure and collapse but about endurance and survival. Like James and Merriman, Galloway emanates from a very specific historical period and as such she ‘attempts to offer a refashioning of concepts of identity, linked to those material shapers of subjectivity: gender, class and nation’. 80

The social and political situation in the 1980s and 1990s was marked with economic despair, political disaffection and myriad cultural tensions. 81 And while Scottish and Welsh writers reflected these conditions, uncertainty and alienation also brought to the fore ideas relating to nationhood and multiculturalism. The hierarchies and ideologies of binary thinking prevalent in white, patriarchal Western cultures started to be challenged by both women writers and cultural theorists. For instance, Bhabha argued that the ‘artifice of identity’ 82 divides humanity:

The construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference - racial and sexual. Such an articulation becomes crucial if it is held that the body is always simultaneously (if conflictually) inscribed in both the

80 Glenda Norquay, ‘Fraudulent Moochings’, p.133.
82 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, p.44.
Bhabha suggests that to speak up, to challenge, to enunciate ‘denies an “original” identity or “singularity” to objects of difference – sexual or racial’ and this is a strategy employed by the two authors whose work I discuss next: Jackie Kay in Trumpet (1998) and Leonora Brito in dat’s love (1995).

As argued earlier in this chapter, Welsh and Scottish women are doubly disadvantaged, marginalised and kept silent because of their gender and their nationality. However, for ethnic minority women the ‘double knot on the peeny’ becomes tripled. For, if we consider notions of nation and nationhood to be gendered, then we must also consider them to be racialised. Commenting on her experiences as a black Welsh woman, Isabel Adonis remarks:

This is what it means to be black and Welsh; to be denied one’s Welshness, then one’s blackness, and finally the very experience of that denial.

"Where are you from?"
"Bethesda."
"No, I mean originally?"
"Oh, I was brought up in Llandudno."
"But I mean [...]"

What everyone wants to know, but no one can quite say is ‘where does the blackness come from?’ because in their eyes I am the blackness. In fact I have about as much connection with Africa as the average person with a Roman nose has with Rome. But unlike a Roman nose or freckles, blackness is a difference that makes a difference; it dominates the minds of the people around me [...] ‘Black Welsh’ is not an identity; on the contrary, it is a duality and a contradiction [...] If I claim to be Welsh when everyone can plainly see that I am ‘foreign’, I must be mad. But if I claim to be black, that has no significance, it’s just like having freckles, and if I claim to be oppressed, I’m playing the race card, demanding special treatment.

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83 Ibid., p.67.
84 Ibid.
85 Hendry, ’The Double Knot on the Peeny’, p.38.
Adonis’s discussion of the difficulties faced by women of colour addresses an important argument: race is, and has been, an essential feature in national ideology. In other words, being ‘British’, ‘Welsh’ and/or ‘Scottish’ has been synonymous with whiteness.87 The literary voices of ethnic minority women in Wales and Scotland may have been rarely heard88 but they have long existed. Like feminist authors and scholars, Scottish and Welsh women writers in the 1980s and 1990s concerned themselves with exploring issues surrounding gendered identity, subjectivity and nationhood. During those in-between years resistance to dominant ideologies and the depiction of multiplicity and diversity became key concerns in writing coming out of Scotland and Wales; this was true also in terms of genre and style, and importantly, who was writing. Jackie Kay, who was born in Edinburgh to a Scottish mother and a Nigerian father and adopted by a Glaswegian couple, frequently writes about the fluidity of cultural and social identity. Leonora Brito is a fourth-generation Black Cardiffian raised in flat with ‘a Malayan landlord’ and has family ‘memories of the Spanish enclave in Butetown’;89 she conveys the need for us to ‘breakdown national narratives’, and expose and make public a ‘space for different stories of belonging’.90 Both Kay’s and Brito’s work, although very different in genre, style and expression, challenge ideas of nationhood and homogeneity and articulate the positive possibilities of difference and diversity.

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Addressing cross-cultural forms of national connectivity Brito’s first book of short stories, *dat’s love* (1995) is varied in terms of style and tone; however, throughout *dat’s love* the theme of identity recurs. The opening story, ‘Dat’s Love’, concerns the funeral of the famous singer Dooley Wilson in Cardiff. The first-person narrator is Mrs Silva who spends the story reminiscing about her past and her connection with ‘the coloured fellow in the white suit. The one who rolls his eyes when he plays the piano in that famous film and sings that famous song’ (9). Mrs Silva, who has the honour of singing at his funeral, explains that she knew Dooley ‘before he was Dooley’ (8): when he was a nightclub singer living in her father’s boarding house. In this story Brito’s exploration into identity, belonging and ethnicity is divided into three elements. Firstly, Dooley’s character suggests identity is not an essential feature, rather it is fluid and performative. As Mrs Silva explains, Dooley altered his identity:

We’d never heard of anyone changing their name before, my father said something about the leopard not changing his spots; the Ethiopian, his skin. The singer was once renowned worldwide but was destined to be forgotten. Except in our dockland part of the city. (9)

As well as demonstrating the constructed nature of identity, Brito also articulates Cardiff’s multiculturalism and in particular, she effectively portrays the dockland area as the heart of the Welsh African diaspora. Further, she introduces the idea of social solidarity based on more than territory alone.

Identity, and in particular Welsh identity and difference, is also examined through the character Sarah Vaughan. Vaughan is Mrs Silva’s old singing rival who became a star ‘in a London show’ (14). Mrs Silva explains that in London the young Welsh woman became the exotic foreigner: ‘Sarah Vaughan, the Celtic Siren’ (14).

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91 Leonora Brito, *dat’s love* (Bridgend: Seren, 1995). All subsequent references will be to this edition and appear in parenthesis in the main body of the text.
This exotic ‘Oriental’ marks and constructs Vaughan’s Otherness in relation to the Londoners. However, Vaughan’s identity is further complicated, for as Mrs Silva tells us, Vaughan became known as ‘the coloured young lady with the Welsh name: The Sepia, Celtic Siren’ (14). Thus, Vaughan is not black-Welsh but a ‘coloured [...] lady’ who has appropriated a Welsh name. This is the crux. As Charlotte Williams, the Welsh Guyanese writer of *Sugar and Slate* has stated, being black and Welsh seems oxymoronic: ‘Colour didn’t exist in Wales [...] the idea of black Welsh wasn’t really lodged in the cultural memory.’

By placing Vaughan outside her immediate community Brito enables a dialogue on the issue of cultural and racial dislocation as well as on the ideology of nationality and belonging. Both of these key issues materialize in the characters of Dooley and Vaughan. For instance, Mrs Silva comments on Dooley that he was ‘stepping into someone else’s shoes and trying to make them fit [...] not that anyone seemed to notice; and after a while, I don’t think he noticed himself’ (9).

Brito also illustrates racial stereotyping and the exploitation of black culture through Vaughan, who had to ‘black her face up and act [...] comical [...] if Al Johnson’d had an illegitimate daughter, the paper said, she’d have been it’ (14). These two characters perform their blackness or Otherness for the (presumably) white audience. Nevertheless, while the comic act presents an apparent intellectual inferiority, Vaughan’s performance challenges the fixed categories of both national and ethnic identity, and furthermore, it deconstructs otherness. Yet it also serves to remind us of the ways in which people of colour have been consciously and subconsciously

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92 Williams, *Sugar and Slate*, p.177.
93 Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature*. The idea of dislocation refers to the conscious and unconscious oppression of individuality and culture by an allegedly superior racial and cultural model.
understood; they have been people ‘whose very presence is both ‘overlooked’ - in the double sense of social surveillance and psychic disavowal [and] overdetermined – psychically projected, made stereotypical and symptomatic.’

Another story from *dat’s love* with a different tone but still dealing with perceptions of identity is ‘Dido Elizabeth Belle: A Narrative of Her Life (extant)’. Like ‘Dat’s Love’, the story of Dido relates an episode in the life of a young black woman, Dido, who has seemingly run away from her uncle’s grand estate after discovering he denied her true biological origins. Dido subsequently meets a ‘lowly man’ (50) who sees this ‘poor negro slave-girl’ (50) as a business opportunity and insists she accompanies him to London. Although Brito is making a serious point throughout this short story about identity, belonging and historical narrative she is also having fun disrupting the binary oppositions in which whiteness is a metonym for culture, purity and decorum. Brito does this through the grandly named character George Augustus Hercules Adams who is described by Dido as animalistic, ‘he clambered after [a fish] wildly on all fours. His long armed body was thinly furred’ (49). Brito’s use of animal imagery cleverly inverts colonial ideology and discourse which frequently employed vocabulary like ‘savage’, and ‘beast’ to describe black people: as Dido says ‘he calls me. Chirrup-eek, eek eek [...] as if I were a wild thing in the woods’ (50). Unlike, the ‘base ignorance [...] servile heart, and low down native cunning’ (51) of Hercules Adams, Dido is ‘a learned negro-girl [...] a scholard, no less [...] A phee-nom-enon!’ (52).

Central to Brito’s parody of Western civilisation is the colonisation of history and black people’s subjectivity. Narrative history is ideologically produced and it

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94 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.236.
positions, shapes and can ultimately deny an entire people’s voice and experience. Michelle M. Wright makes a very interesting point regarding this when she states:

G.W.E. Hegel famously posits [in his *Philosophie der Geschichte*] that the “Negro” stands outside analytical history – namely that history of intellectual, technological, moral, and cultural progress guided by the Absolute of reason.95

In other words, Black history was non-existent or classified as insignificant, or indeed, an impossibility. In Brito’s narrative, the young Dido is profoundly perceptive when she suggests her story and origins are constructed; the reasons for her flight are because of ‘falsehoods concerning my history and birth’ (56). History as a metanarrative has been exposed as an instrument of oppression and coercion: as Siân Reynolds argues, history is ‘a site of memory which possess[es] tremendous power, to be used (and [...] abused) by those who construct and pass on the sense of the past’.96 Brito asserts Dido’s autonomy and her subjectivity: Dido ‘on the cusp of a new way of life, a new beginning’ (55) tells us her own story in her own voice; her ‘objective in setting down this history, has been in the way of an attempt to possess, rather than be possessed by it’ (55). The story ends with Dido constructing her own identity: ‘I am what I am...I’m smart as a carrot, newly scraped!’ (57)

The final short story in Brito’s collection is ‘Digging for Victory’, which like ‘Dat’s Love’, is engaged with ideas exploring notions of identity, nationhood and community solidarity. Set in the 1950s dockland area of Cardiff, the first-person story concerns a community’s response, and the protagonist Kay’s disillusionment, after a call for help from ‘Mr Churchill’s war-ship’ (67) following its collision with the gates of the sea-lock, which resulted in the emptying of a canal into the sea. Again, Brito is

affirming the diversity of Welsh ethnicities; nevertheless, through the characters’
diverse response to Churchill’s command she also complicates the sense of nation and
nationhood. Addressing ‘this island race’ (68) through a pre-recorded message,
Churchill informs the people of Cardiff that the task of reclamation of waste material
left exposed by the draining of the canal was,

a test of national character [...] You should come prepared to toil, sweat [...] His voice echoed in the streets [...] right up as far as the green domed mosque
in Sophia Street where the words came out in Arabic. (71)

Through ‘Digging for Victory’ Brito is clearly illustrating the multicultural
nature of Cardiff. Yet she is also illustrating the contradictory nature of Whitehall’s
rhetoric and its racialised notion of Great Britain. And at one and the same time, ‘Great
Britain’ is referred to as an ethnically and linguistically homogenous and essentialist
unit, ‘we English-speaking peoples, bound by the crimson thread of kinship’ (68).

Churchill’s oratory regarding a united nation at first mobilises the Cardiffians;
Kay experiences ‘a moment of happiness and contentment’ as she watches the ‘coloured
people, Docks people like myself, helping with the task in hand’ (73). However, it is
Kay’s younger sister, Teeny, who suggests that Kay and the community’s labour have
been exploited: ‘The more fool you [...] Fancy handing over all the scrap iron [...] You
were entitled to it. It was a treasure trove’ (74). Brito suggests that the people were
betrayed and manipulated; as Jane Aaron puts it, they were ‘once again hoodwinked and
stripped of their rightful property, their mineral assets, in the name of the British
national character’. 97

97 Jane Aaron, ‘Women in a Wales without Miners’ in Eberhard Bort and Neil Evans, eds, Networking
Europe: Essays on Regionalism and Social Democracy (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000),
Like Dido in Brito’s story, Jackie Kay’s novel *Trumpet* (1998) also exposes the arbitrary nature of white ideology and its construction of black subjectivity and history. Kay’s first novel revolves around the ‘discovery’ of Joss Moody, a fictitious jazz musician, who in death is revealed to have the body of a ‘woman’ rather than his own lived identity as a ‘man’. The story of Moody is told in the first and third person and the narrative deals with a variety of people’s perceptions and their prejudices in terms of race, identity, sexuality and gender. At the centre of the text are Joss’s grieving widow, Millie, and their adopted son Colman, both attempting to deal with Moody’s death and its subsequent repercussions: Millie, heartbroken, has moved to rural Scotland and Colman, angry and confused, appears to be collaborating with the devious and manipulative London tabloid journalist Sophie Stones to write a sensationalist account of his father’s life.

The story begins with Millie being continuously harassed by the London press: ‘My husband died and now I am a widow. Why can they not understand how ordinary that is?’ (295). The invasion of her private world and grief threatens and destabilises Millie; a false identity imposed upon her makes her ‘look unreal. I look unlike the memory of myself […] It used to be such a certain thing, just being myself. It was so easy, so painless’ (1). The events that have changed her life from contented wife and mother to hounded widow are revealed halfway through the text in the chapter titled ‘The Funeral Director’. Having been ‘our secret’ (10) Joss and Millie’s private affairs abruptly and devastatingly become very public. Narrated in the third person, this chapter

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98 Jackie Kay, *Trumpet* (London: Picador, 1998) p.1. All subsequent references will be from this edition and appear in parenthesis in the main body of the text. Kay’s text was published in 1998 and therefore after the ‘Wilderness years’ of 1979-1997 which this chapter focuses on. Nevertheless, it was published during that ‘in-between year’– just after the political settlement was agreed but prior to the symbolic reopening of the Scottish parliament in 1999 which the following chapter examines; as such I have placed this ‘borderline’ text in this chapter.
conveys events at Albert Holding’s funeral parlour when the undertaker discovers Moody ‘does not possess the male body parts’ (114). Employing the third person has the effect of distancing the ‘officials’ from Moody and his family and emphasises how the subject is constructed through a variety of sociocultural and political discourses thus creating a lack of perception and empathetic understanding from bureaucrats and administrators.

In death, Moody’s essence is being eradicated by the ‘heteropatriarchal structures’ which insist on the necessity of conforming to rigid binary formations. The ‘whole absence made Holding feel terribly anxious’ (109) as his hitherto controlled environment becomes unfamiliar and disorderly. Holding’s emphasis on the ‘absence’ of male body parts rather than the presence of female parts suggests Freud’s concept of castration and is symbolic of a patriarchal system in which ‘woman’ is null and void. As Luce Irigaray argues, in a phallic economy ‘the penis [is] the only sexual organ of recognised value’. Joss challenges Holding’s presumptions and disrupts gendered binaries before his very eyes, thereby engendering a feeling of hostility and aggression: ‘with his very red pen […] he could have the satisfaction of brutally and violently obliterating male and inserting female in bold, unequivocal red’ (112). The violence of the authoritative red pen also makes its mark earlier on in the novel when Dr Krishnamurty, writing the death certificate, employs her ‘emergency red pen’ to ‘cross […] out “male”’ (44). So when confronted with the constructed and performative nature of gender, the officials, the ‘phallocratic order’ react with hostility and aggression. Through these episodes, Kay illustrates how the state apparatus, in this case

101 Ibid., p.68.
the repressive as well as the ideological, force people into particular subject positions, formulate them as problematic Other if they fail to conform to the idealised ‘norm’. As Matthew Brown comments, Kay ‘show[s] how various institutions function to return Joss to his “natural” state in order to re-codify, retroactively, his lived identity’.

Many of the novel’s concerns can be drawn from the above episodes: the construction of subjectivity and the complex and multifarious issues contiguous to identity – ethnic, cultural, personal, public, national. Through Trumpet, Kay illustrates the dangers of regulatory discourses, shaping cultural concepts of gender into a material and innate reality which conveniently divides human beings into opposing categories. Although Colman’s ‘head was […] done in’ (72) by his parents’ apparent betrayal, he consistently refers to his father as ‘he’ throughout the novel thus implying that regardless of shock and anger Colman also understands that gender is not a system governed by the body and its organ arrangement but a more complex set of internalised images, a set of signs one wears. This is contrary to Sophie Stones’s practice; she insists on calling Moody her/she and persistently refers to him as a ‘transvestite […] tranny […] perv’ (128). Kay’s text stresses that gender is not only a sociocultural concept but that gendered subjectivity is a lived fantasy rather than an innate core characteristic of identity. In other words, it is acted out by ‘corporeal styles that constitute bodily significations’.

As well as gendered identity, Kay also explores the problematic concerns surrounding notions of an ‘authentic’ nationhood. As Kay has commented: ‘I still have Scottish people asking me where I’m from […] They won’t actually hear my voice,

\[103\] Judith Butler, Gender Trouble, Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990; London: Routledge, 1999).
\[104\] Ibid., p.139.
because they’re too busy seeing my face’.

Through Colman and Joss, Kay explores the notion of belonging, cultural identities and the borders and boundaries of ethnicity and nationality. Colman, a child of many cultures, represents the shifting and hybrid nature of identity: ‘when I came home with a Cockney accent, my father got all cut up […] My father kept telling me I was Scottish. Born there. But I didn’t feel Scottish. Don’t feel English either’ (51). Colman’s perception of belonging diverges from his father’s, who on arrival in London emphasised his accent ‘determined that everyone would know he was Scottish’ (51). For Joss, national affiliation is straightforward: ‘you are Scottish, you were born in Scotland and that makes you Scottish’ (190).

Nevertheless, for Colman nationhood is more complex and his national ambiguity has resonance with the frequent motif of the divided self in Scottish literature of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Colman’s alienation manifests itself as he struggles to find a coherent identity especially in terms of his linguistic registers. He explains the conflicts thus:

> when we moved to London I still called an ice cream a pokey hat when I was with my parents and called it an ice cream with my mates. There were lot of words like that that I used because it cheered them up. I was practically schizophrenic. (53)

Nonetheless, Colman’s ‘split’ can also be read positively, especially in terms of subverting the dominant power and deconstructing ideas of nation and nationhood. Colman inhabits the ‘in-between space’; his liminality allows him to deviate from the hierarchal structures of identity. As Bhabha puts it,

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It is in the emergence of the interstices - the overlap and displacement of domains of difference - that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated. 107

Like many of the other writers discussed in this thesis, Kay illustrates how space, place and identity intersect with power structures and relations. For the family, the metropolitan centre becomes the site of oppression, manipulation and misrepresentation. Colman sees London as ‘seething, racist’ (51). It is the place where he is constructed as Other and his ‘Scottishness’ ridiculed: ‘It was a fucking nightmare moving down here with that accent’ (51). It is also in London that Millie feels her ‘soul [...] has been stolen [...] the core of myself, being eaten away’ (2). Going back to his roots, to ‘Scotland, his father’s country, the country where Colman is born’ (181) is Colman’s defining moment. Although he was originally ‘going to Scotland to do [the] book’ (195) it seems that going beyond the centrality of the controlling structures and institutions offers him a space to rediscover himself. Coleman ‘doesn’t feel as if he has a history’ (190) but travelling to Scotland is his ‘journey into Being’.108

His father was always telling him you are Scottish, you were born in Scotland and that makes you Scottish. But he doesn’t feel Scottish. He doesn’t speak with a Scottish accent [...] what is he? This is what he has been asking himself (190).

It is in the periphery that Colman is ready to accept his father and recover his family’s history. Throughout his journey north, memories stubbornly return; his ‘father keeps coming back to him [...] he won’t let him alone. Coorie in. Coorie in, he says [...] He likes the sounds of the words his father makes’ (256).109 In the final chapters

107 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. p.2.
109 ‘Coorie in’ (Scots) means to cuddle or snuggle in.
Colman rejects Stones and articulates his sense of self: in answer to Stones’s enraged retort, ‘who do you think you are?’ Colman replies: ‘Who do I think I am? I am Colman Moody, the son of Joss Moody, the famous trumpet player’ (259). On the second part of his journey – from Glasgow to the family holiday home on the coast – Colman is eventually ready to read his father’s posthumous letter which narrates ‘the story of my [grand] father’ (276) and endeavours to give Colman a sense of self, place and history. However, it is more than just a story of politics and place, the black diaspora and history within the nation – Moody is entrusting his very being and spirit, as well as future possibilities to his son:

I’m leaving myself to you [...] Everything I’ve got. All the letters I have kept hidden [...] It is quite simple: all of this is my past. This is the sum of my parts; you are my future [...] You will understand or you won’t. You will keep me or lose me. You will hate me or love me. You will change me or hold me dear. (276)

In these final words, Kay offers hope for Scotland;\(^{110}\) it is the place where there is a possibility that difference can be articulated and history can act as a means to understanding the future as well as the past; as Charlotte Williams says ‘history matters. History has come to matter’.\(^{111}\)

This chapter has shown the diversity and multiplicity of the writing coming out of Wales and Scotland during the in-between years after the first referendum but prior to devolution and the new systems of government. The women writing during this period were concerned with analysing the construction of gender and notions of belonging, each writer employing different approaches to discuss sociocultural, economic and personal empowerment and disempowerment. Language has been an important strategy

\(^{110}\) Trumpet was published one year into the New Labour government and one year after the ‘yes’ vote for the reinstatement of the Scottish Parliament, so perhaps Kay had plenty of reason to be optimistic.

\(^{111}\) Williams, Sugar and Slate, p.173.
in marking out cultural difference as well as illustrating how place, ethnicity, gender and class intersect in relations of power. There lies a commonality between the Welsh and Scottish writers in this chapter, despite broadly different styles and genres – they all explore different ways of being and their texts unravel essentialist ideas relating to nation and gender. Identity is depicted as unstable in order to shatter dichotomies and fallacious oppositions and all writers discuss the arbitrary nature of nationhood and belonging. Notwithstanding the political and economic misery of these devolutionary years, the women writers in Wales and Scotland show resistance to the totalizing structures and ideologies which attempt to contain the spirit; they emerge defiant, revealing a world of possibilities for future writers.

Despite ‘the hangover of [19]79’ 112 this chapter maps an exciting time in Wales and Scotland; Kay, Brito, Merriman, James, Owens, Galloway, Barker and Jones all in different ways broaden definitions of ‘Scottishness’ and ‘Welshness’ by constructing new discourses of nationhood and breaking up old limiting stereotypes. Eighteen years of Conservative government served further to distance the people of these nations from Westminster and there was a joint resistance within both Wales and Scotland and a new determination to fight and unite in opposition to the inequitable and undemocratic power structures. The writers in this chapter show that there can be an inclusive and progressive alternative to the vagueness of ‘Britishness’ and their fiction reflect an affirmative move towards self-determination and devolution. The following chapters will examine the literature being produced following the reinstatement of the Scottish parliament and the establishment of the Welsh National Assembly.

Chapter 4

Desolation to Devolution:
The Shifting Sense of Identity and Belonging (1999-2001)

Language is the culture – if you lose your language you’ve lost your culture, so if you’ve lost the way your family talk, the way your friends talk, then you’ve lost your culture, and you’re divorced from it. That’s what happens with all these stupid fucking books by bad average writers because they’ve lost their culture, they’ve given it away. Not only that, what they’re saying is it’s inferior, because they make anybody who comes from that culture speak in a hybrid language, whereas they speak standard English. And their language is the superior one. So what they are doing, in effect, is castrating their parents, and their whole culture.¹

Following devolution there was ‘a remarkable explosion of creative confidence’² and a ‘surge of creativity’³ with writers in Scotland and Wales exploring cultural, social and national identities, and experimenting with narrative styles, genres and techniques. In Wales, this revitalised scene, according to John Williams, was related to the larger renaissance of Welsh culture.

At the arse end of 2001 we unexpectedly found ourselves in the middle of a literary movement […] which is one hell of a difference from the way things were a couple of years ago […] in 1998 […] I found that, as a Welsh novelist using contemporary Wales as a setting, I was writing in a vacuum.⁴

Williams’s assertion indicates a remarkable cultural shift in Wales: the moment when things started to change. Prior to devolution, English publishers positively discouraged

the idea of a Welsh-set novel, because ‘a Welsh location “did not sell abroad”’.\(^5\) This ‘ethnic’ problem also affected Scottish writers, as Toni Davison states, authors (gay and lesbian specifically) sending their manuscripts to London ‘out of necessity [...] always had anxiously to restrain themselves from being not only too “gay” but also too Scottish.’\(^6\) Devolution altered those situations and a ‘new wave’ of creatively confident Scottish and Welsh writers started to assert that their culture and their language ‘have the right to exist’.\(^7\) Stephen Knight has suggested, in a Welsh context, that post-devolution enthusiasm and energy meant an international interest in Welsh writing. Consequently, London publishers [are] again taking up local authors, but it seems that by now Welsh fiction can hold its own, and authors are writing what they choose to say, not what a leisured imperial reading class might feel quaintly diverting.\(^8\)

Likewise, Katherine Ashley argues that the profile of Scottish ‘post-1997 fiction’ outside Scotland was ‘in a healthy state in both English-speaking and non-English-speaking markets.’\(^9\) Although it had often been argued that the renaissance of Scottish culture began in the pre-devolution era of Thatcherism (and this also is true of Wales, see for instance Katie Gramich)\(^10\), the aftermath of devolution brought with it ‘post-devolution novels [...] brimming with linguistic experimentation in the various Scottish tongues’ and ‘an exponential increase in the number of cultural [...] and literary

\(^5\) Ibid., p.301.
\(^10\) Gramich, *Twentieth-Century Women’s Writing in Wales: Land, Gender, Belonging*, pp.146-182.
festivals.’ These creative events indicated the variety and energy of post-devolution Scottish culture. It is this exciting and vital period in both Welsh and Scottish politics and culture that this chapter considers.

The Scottish writer A.L Kennedy has argued that ‘the cultural history of Scotland has been a lot about having no identity’ and, indeed, women in Wales and Scotland have had to struggle for a sense of belonging in respect to both ‘Britain’ and their respective nations. Nevertheless, the pre-devolution ‘wilderness years’ changed the perspectives of many people living in these countries, and as indicated in the previous chapter, women writers consequently started to problematize ideas pertaining to the politics of identity and challenge the cultural construction of nation, nationhood and subjectivity. The texts discussed in this chapter raise some fundamental questions concerning what it means to belong, and identity, we are reminded, is not an innate essence; it is fluid and adaptable as people geographically move and mentally migrate. We are reminded that there is a multitude of images and depictions relating to identity markers – gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality – which require contestation and resistance because representations are often politically ideological and never neutral.

Interestingly, the majority of novels discussed in this chapter were published by small independent companies housed outside London. Undoubtedly, for small nations that have been culturally as well as politically marginalised, having a sense of self-expression and identity separate from the dominant neighbour is invaluable, for as Cristie March notes, ‘many contemporary writers see [...] national history lost in the

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Laura Hird’s first novel, *Born Free* (1999) was published by Rebel Inc Publishing, a small Edinburgh-based imprint started in 1992 by writer Kevin Williamson to promote young Scottish writers. Although it has since been acquired by Canongate, the imprint remains committed to the company’s ethos of publishing challenging writers who defy the mainly London-based literary mainstream. For Hird, publishing through an independent and indigenous organization was a conscious decision:

I was a great admirer of Canongate and with what editor Kevin Williamson had done with Rebel Inc magazine [...] I was delighted to be one of his earliest publishing projects as far as the imprint was concerned. I have had offers to jump ship from several London publishers over the years but prefer to stay with Canongate through pride that it is a thriving and adventurous Scottish company.

Comparable to Rebel Inc, Wales’s Parthian Books asserts similar reasons for its creation as well as a similar philosophy. Parthian was set up in 1993 by the writer Lewis Davies with the sole purpose of publishing his own novel, *Work, Sex and Rugby* (1993) which had been turned down by London publishers. Parthian is now one of the most important publishers in Wales, with the Library of Wales series included in its portfolio.

Indeed, developing and maintaining cultural independence, distinction and control is important for, as bell hooks has argued (albeit in a different context), the

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14 Canongate, which was set up in 1973, is an independent Edinburgh-based company.
15 Rebel Inc’s motto was, ”Fuck the mainstream!” Its philosophy was ‘continued and extended by rejecting the traditional perception of what constitutes a classic’. Joseph Ridgwell, ‘A Different Kind of Classic’, *The Guardian* [Online]. Available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/booksblog/2007/oct/18/adifferentkindofclassic [Accessed 21 October 2010]
16 Laura Hird interview, see Appendix B, p.401
18 Listed in its lengthy and diverse catalogue are Caryl Lewis, Catherine Merriman, Jo Mazelis, Sonia Edwards and Hayley Long.
publishing industry plays an active and extremely influential role in determining the values and character of literature.\footnote{bell hooks, ‘Postmodern Blackness’ in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, eds, \textit{Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader} (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), pp.421-427, p.422.} Certainly, in the past hooks’s concern regarding cultural control could have been applied to Scottish and Welsh writing for these nations were often represented by London-based publishers selling to London-based audiences, a situation which often produced limited and stereotypical portrayals.\footnote{Knight, \textit{A Hundred Years of Fiction}, p.xi.} So, as well as providing a space with which to authentically imagine the self as centre and not ‘other’ indigenous publishers provide a literary infrastructure. As this chapter shows, writers in Wales and Scotland no longer have to operate solely in or be contained by earlier English-based cultural ideologies. And they can no longer be described as nations who have ‘lost much of [their] original culture and invented or romanticised more’\footnote{Peter Kravitz, ‘As it never was’, \textit{Variant}, Issue13 [Online]. Available from: http://www.variant.org.uk/13texts/Peter_Kravitz.html} rather, as this chapter shows, Scottish and Welsh writers are autonomous, assertive and forthright.

While the texts examined here show the complexity of voices and experiences in Wales and Scotland there are a range of key issues and cross-cultural reference points that connect the work discussed. Laura Hird’s \textit{Born Free} (1999)\footnote{Laura Hird, \textit{Born Free} (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1999). All subsequent references will be to this edition and appear in parenthesis in the main body of the text.} Rachel Trezise’s \textit{In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl} (2000)\footnote{Rachel Trezise, \textit{In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl} (Cardigan: Parthian, 2000) All subsequent references will be to this edition and appear in parenthesis in the main body of the text.} and Trezza Azzopardi’s \textit{The Hiding Place} (2000)\footnote{Trezza Azzopardi, \textit{The Hiding Place} (London: Picador, 2000). All subsequent references will be to this edition and appear in parenthesis in the main body of the text.} examine working-class lives and the implications for socioeconomically disadvantaged women of developing subjectivity in a society that is both class and
gender inequitable. Janet Paisley’s *Not for Glory* (2001), like Azzopardi’s and Hird’s novels, is especially engaged in representing the post-devolution landscape; her novel considers the conflicts and tensions in one small nameless community and how lives intersect and deviate in the performance of power. Identities are plural, divergent and unstable in all of the novels discussed; nevertheless, each writer deals with the politics of this somewhat differently. Hird examines how the ideology of Scottish masculinity can limit and oppress while Trezise examines how Wales has been ideologically deluded or misled into believing in an essential ‘national characteristic’. Azzopardi’s novel reminds us of Wales’s multicultural communities, whilst Paisley’s novel is a linguistically political means of asserting a forceful Scottish cultural identity and expression. The writers discussed also illustrate the many ways in which we can think of ‘home’ and belonging. For Trezise’s young protagonist, ‘home’ is not necessarily the domestic setting but when it is, as with Hird’s protagonists, it is a place to escape from. For Azzopardi’s characters, ‘home’ is a haunted past and for Paisley it is both a place of dreadful cruelty and a space offering freedom and security.

Laura Hird’s *Born Free* resists both English and Scottish spurious representations of the nation. Although her work has been categorised as characteristic of urban Scottish fiction what makes Hird’s text untypical is that *Born Free* makes visible the ideology of Scottish masculinity which has largely been either invisible or idealised, and this is especially true within the genre of ‘gritty’ fiction of the last three decades. Yet, Hird is not writing out of a literary vacuum, for as I argued in the previous chapter, Agnes Owen also went against both male and feminist fictional

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25 Janet Paisley, *Not For Glory* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2001). All subsequent references will be to this edition and appear in parenthesis in the main body of the text.
conventions. So, although Hird’s text is very much an urban fiction, it narrates a more complex world of socio-political and gendered relationships than, say, James Kelman or Robin Jenkins novels.

*Born Free* is set in contemporary Edinburgh and tells the story of a working-class family struggling to live together. Hird’s narrative gives an individual voice to each of the four protagonists with alternate chapters for Joni, Vic, Angie and Jake Scott. The employment of a multi-vocal narrative provides heterogeneous versions of the world in a non-hierarchal mode whilst showing the complexities of the family unit. As the surname suggests, the Scott family can also be read as representative of Scotland itself, a microcosm through which Hird scrutinizes and disrupts the idea of Scotland as a homogeneous, monolithic nation. As Hird states, the Scott family

> has a tendency to fight against themselves, have low self esteem and keep themselves going through a mix of black humour and alcohol abuse, I suppose they have certain things in common with Scotland itself.27

Although devolution is not referred to overtly, the family name and the struggles and tensions could be read as a dialogue on the ‘renewed concern with relationships’28 in the former ‘United Kingdom’.

Hird’s representation of contemporary Scotland, and Edinburgh in particular, is both humorous and unsettling from the outset. This is a disenfranchised Scotland where socially marginalised children truant, drink alcohol, take drugs and shoplift to order. The narrative begins with Joni, the fifteen-year-old, who spends much of her free time attempting to fit in, and in some way, to define who she is. She steals, smokes, drinks and is desperate to have sex before she turns sixteen. What is interesting concerning

27 Hird interview, see Appendix B, p.403.
Jodi’s articulation of her sexual desires is the fact she spends most of the narrative masturbating whilst fantasising about sex, something that has been generally understood as ‘typical’ adolescent male behaviour. In fact, this is a text that consistently questions and contests pervasive stereotypical images and representations. Joni symbolises a Scotland disdainful of romanticised cultural depictions: as she tells the reader, ‘a wee lassie in a tartan dress falls flat on her face [...] I laughed so much [...] I ended up peeing myself a wee bit’ (1). Joni’s reaction to the tartan-clad child’s accident is suggestive of the tensions and conflicts over ‘tartan discourse’ which produces limiting myths that have written Scotland as an unchanging, pre-industrial, kilt-wearing nation, images which ‘easily mystify the lived material contradictions of gender, class and racial inequalities within a modern democratic state.’

The politics of identity is a key concern in Hird’s text and she explores how gendered and sexed identities and subjectivities are culturally and socially produced and articulated; in fact, all her characters long to be somewhere/someone else beyond the discourses that construct, define and contain them. Through Vic, in particular, the ideology of masculinity is problematized. Vic is a bored bus driver and a father who prefers ‘total submission’ (9) rather than discipline or debate as these may antagonise his children. As well as lacking authority Vic is depressed at the thought of ageing; he winces as the radio DJ announces a song is from 1980:

Jesus, it cannae be nearly 20 years. Surely he got it wrong…The whole thing makes me queasy. I feel absolutely ancient and churny and have to take another Rennies. (10)

Vic’s character is at odds with traditional models of white Scottish masculinity in which the male subject is self-assured, tough and above all emotionally contained. Vic is indicative of the ‘cultural discourses around male anxiety’,\(^{31}\) one of the key issues which emerged in Scottish writing during the ‘devolutionary years’. According to Carole Jones, the years 1979-1999

created a mood suffused by a consciousness of decline in men’s authority and a lack of conviction in patriarchal values [...] a moment of lingering cultural uncertainty when a patriarchal conception of masculinity is experiencing a process of dislocation, becoming disconnected from its traditional discursive moorings and separated from its historic social location.\(^{32}\)

Vic is dislocated and disconnected and he turns his anxiety inwards and consequently his (psychosomatic) illness becomes his focal point. He is in crisis, almost to the point of disintegration: he believes he is ‘obviously riddled with infection’ (109) and consequently his ‘hair’s coming out in chunks’ (243). Vic’s symptoms can be read as the failure and collapse of patriarchy and its gendered modes of being. He uses anti-depressants to help him manage emotionally:

the doctor checked me over several times, you know, the full works, and says there’s nothing wrong, just keep taking the happy pills. But there is. There definitely is. (12)

Like his daughter, Vic is attempting to determine a sense of agency and selfhood: ‘What sort of dull bastard have I become?’ (108). Shackled to his work and sense of family duty, Vic’s favourite song ‘Born Free’ seems like a cruel irony, as his son Jake comments:

\(^{32}\)Ibid., pp.12 and 14.
He’s about as free as a goldfish […] I’m still wondering what could possibly have been going through Dad’s mind when he was singing that song. It’s probably easier to be born free when you live on a massive nature reserve in the middle of Africa. (88)

Contrary to powerful and pervasive images of the Scottish male, Hird’s characterisation provides an alternative to the imposing and dominant characters depicted in, for instance, William McIlvanney’s novels. As Eleanor Bell and Gavin Miller assert, this gendered representation of Scottish national identity had previously been omnipresent: ‘from Walter Scott [onwards] the Scottish “hardman” has been a mascot for his nation’. However, the nation has fundamentally changed, socially, culturally and politically since McIlvanney’s creation of Doherty (1975) and Big Man (1985) and the “hardman” symbol has been vigorously contested. Furthermore, if we read Born Free as a postcolonial text, the collapse of the masculine can be construed as resultant upon the cessation of its colonised condition. For, as Carole Jones has argued, the tough masculine individual was formed to compensate for the feelings of inferiority the colonial position undoubtedly produced. Berthold Schoene develops Jones’s point by suggesting that Scotland has now arrived at a devolutionary crossroads – somewhere between the old narratives of nation and new ‘post-nation’ structures:

Scotland’s crisis of nationhood mirrors the predicament of the contemporary masculine self, keen to become a part of new communal configurations, yet held back by pomophobic anxieties over its exact status and position.

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35 Berthold Schoene, ‘Nervous Men, Mobile Nation: Masculinity and Psychopathology in Irvine Welsh’s *Filth and Glue*’ in Bell and Miller, eds, *Scotland in Theory: Reflections on Culture and Literature*, pp.121-146, p.124. Thomas Byers describes pomophobic anxieties as panic of the postmodern: ‘persistent fears on the part of a formally dominant order that has begun to recognise that it is becoming residual’ cited by Schoene, ibid., p.123.
Moreover, as well as devolution, the impact of feminism also has to be taken into consideration as this was one of the main theoretical and operational forces that contested the ideologies of gendered identities.

Clearly Vic’s selfhood and his state of mind are tenuous. Vic does not belong: in both the private and public spheres he struggles to identify himself with the dominant and ‘typical’ behaviour available to him as a Scottish working-class man. The following quotation which concerns a colleague bragging about sexual intercourse with a mentally vulnerable woman, illustrates his disaffection:

Stevie lights a fag and starts swaggering about.
“Me and another two guys had her up the back ova 44. Y’kin do anything w’her […] I cannae believe you didnae poke’r, man”.
[Vic says to himself] I need to get away from this […] Jesus. When I finally escape into the fresh air, I almost puke behind a car. (114)

Vic’s estrangement from the dominant cultural construction of Scottish working-class masculinity creates an abject reaction within him. This, in Kristevian terms, suggests that Vic has separated himself from prevailing and perverse modes of masculinity. Furthermore, that archetypal masculinity which Vic loathes provides a sense of ‘belonging’: it is the archetypal gendered Scottish identity. As Gill Plain argues:

It is the Scottish male who stands as the defining feature in the landscape of Scottish identity […] but […] the Scottish hard man is ultimately a limiting and destructive one, constructing Scottish masculinities as inevitably […] inarticulate and violent.36

Indeed, Angie – the discontented alcoholic wife – also believes that ‘authentic’ masculinity equates with violence and dominance over women:

look at you, sitting there taking it. [Angie violently hitting Vic] You don’t even attempt to act like a real man. What was I fucking on the day I met you, eh? I must have been fucking pissed. (147)

Although *Born Free* is a novel primarily exploring gendered relationships and people’s expectations and desires, like the other writers discussed in this chapter, Hird is also interested in authentically illustrating the contemporary nation: brutal, discordant, and at times, neglectful and indifferent. Violent incidents that have marked Scotland’s recent history are alluded to and serve to remind us how far removed we are from Walter Scott’s Scotland. This is illustrated when Jake, the son, comments to his friend about a disliked classmate: ‘Why couldn’t that Thomas Hamilton guy have come to our gym when Mr Russell was taking Shug’s class?’ (88). The 1996 Dunblane primary school murders shocked Scotland and the wider world as it went against preconceived notions: Scotland had been constructed as an innocuous nation incapable of producing an American-style massacre. Hird’s passing allusion to the killings debunks the myth of the peaceful rural Highlands. Furthermore, its use in connection with Jake’s bullying tormentor reminds us how male violence is tolerated and ultimately accepted within patriarchal structures. Jake’s bully, Shug, is a young man, miserable, despondent, and his violent masculinity is a frantic attempt to achieve gendered normative behaviour. As Schoene has commented, ‘the masculine self [has become a] highly volatile entit[y], prone to violence’. 37

Conflict and violence also contribute to other, perhaps less obvious, discourses on national identity through Hird’s examination of sectarianism between Catholic and Protestant communities. This distinctive aspect of Scottish life and identity is entrenched in the narrative of the nation and is still, in post-devolution Scotland,

culturally divisive. The condition of Scottish identity politics and the ‘religious’ tensions is played out in one scene in which Angie screams at her son’s Catholic friend: ‘KEEP AWAY FROM MY FAMILY, YOU FENIAN BASTARDS’ (221). So, clearly, cultural identity is not homogenous in *Born Free* or indeed in post-devolution Scotland. In drawing attention to the violent, bigoted and self-perpetuating tradition of cultural partition, Hird suggests a need for dialogue between these polarised ‘imagined communities’ which would, in Bhabha’s assertion, enable us to ‘elude the politics of polarity and emerge as others of our selves’.38 As Hird states:

> Conflicting identity is something I think has always been very much part of the Scottish personality. Sadly, this often expresses itself through football and sectarian intolerance rather than to making us take a long, honest look at ourselves and celebrating our complexity.39

This conflicting social identity illustrates, as Hird indicates, a complicated set of signifiers including that which is specifically manifested in relation to the Other. This continuing struggle for power and internal inferiorisation is historically rooted40 and Scotland’s inability to contest and challenge the divisive attitudes has been, according to Elinor Kelly, a direct result of English control:

> The uninterrupted years of Conservative rule from 1979 to 1997 were ones in which class, regional and ethnic inequalities were entrenched, and Scotland was subject to the political sway of Secretaries of State whose loyalties were Westminster […] It served the interests of no Westminster politician or Scottish civil servant to challenge the status quo. National political culture was secure, static and oblivious to changing social patterns and trends, or to shifts in the cultural landscape of Scotland.41

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38 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.39.
39 Laura Hird Interview, see Appendix B, p.403.
40 I discuss the Irish immigration of the nineteenth country and the Church of Scotland’s response to this apparent ‘racial’ threat in chapter six of the thesis.
The ‘politics of division’ which defines who and what one is, also manifests itself through the family, as Vic (perhaps with his tongue in cheek, though this is by no means obvious) comments:

the fact that I sired a Rangers supporter is a constant source of shame and ridicule to me. I tried to bring Jake up as a Jambo but Angie’s father brainwashed him with all his Orange shit. (139)

It is interesting to note that such an important issue, politically and culturally, has not been widely discussed by literary critics and scholars investigating Scottish culture. For instance, Glenda Norquay, Ian Bell, Berthold Schoene, Cairns Craig, Douglas Gifford, Dorothy MacMillan and Aileen Christianson all discuss Scotland and Scottish fiction in terms of class, sexuality and gender, but not in terms of the religious divide, although it is a common theme in novels, poetry, song and theatre. One possible reason for this omission is that the ‘field [of sectarianism] is characterized more by public denial and private opinion than by considered data.’ However, as Hird implies, disengagement and divisions persist: the Scottish nation is still, at this juncture anyway, unremittingly divisive despite the re-instatement of the Scottish parliament. Nevertheless, due to a post-devolution re-examination of the self and nation, and the fact the Scottish nation and parliament are now internationally visible, as well as accountable, progress has been made. As Elinor Kelly notes, ‘The First Minister […] and the Justice Minister […] have moved to assert their authority in a field where there has been a political vacuum’ because, as she suggests, ‘the Holyrood authorities realised that if they were to succeed in some of their international ambitions, then […] displays of sectarian[ism]

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44 Ibid., p.13.
[…] would be not only embarrassing, but also damaging. Such visible and vociferous public debate would have been virtually unthinkable before devolution; it will be interesting to monitor whether this new political climate initiates more widespread discussion within the academic and critical community in the coming years.

The ‘in-between years’, as discussed in chapter three, produced a generation of women writers in Scotland and Wales confronting a range of social and political issues pertinent to the lives of contemporary women. Hird’s narrative continues this tradition; her novel examines the prevailing marginalisation and subjugation of women in Scotland and how these impact upon material and lived conditions. Linden Peach argues that Irish and Welsh women’s literature ‘is grounded in a matrix of empowerment and disempowerment; struggle and confrontation,’ a pattern that is apparent in the literature discussed throughout this chapter. Like the mother figure in Rachel Trezise’s In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl which I discuss later, Hird’s character Angie has a life which revolves around struggle and confrontation, empowerment and disempowerment. Angie ‘survives’ an unfulfilled life by residing in a ‘little vodka haze’ (93). She yearns for a different life: drunkenly discussing her life choices, she screams to Caroline, her ‘friend on community care’ (91):

> Freedom. Y’know […] you can take my boyfriend but you cannae take my FREEDOM. You don’t have to consult about a dozen other people before you make a decision. (92)

Angie’s appropriation of the most recognised lines from the film Braveheart (1995) endeavours sardonically to explain to her friend that family life imprisons, confines and ultimately destroys, for as she says to Caroline: ‘marriage’s like basic training for

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terminal illness’ (96). For Angie the enemy is not the English but a patriarchal culture which asserts that women are best served inside the institution of matrimony.

The dialogue between Angie and her friend illustrates the discourses that oppress women. For instance, Caroline, ‘doesn’t appear to have the confidence to do something […] decisive [and] her face looks like it should be staring through the fence at Belsen.’ (92). Caroline is imprisoned by the ideology of the ideal feminine body (she starves herself) and she thinks life without a heterosexual relationship is futile. Her drug overdoses and periodic institutionalisation suggest a society that is destructive and harmful for women. As Jane Usher argues, women in western culture generally are vulnerable to being are psychiatrically labelled as a form of social and political control:

The discourse of madness serves to divert attention away from the problems within society, focusing attention on to the individual, who is suffering only as a direct result of societal pressure. The symptoms labelled as part of the illness called madness are thus seen as a reflection of the inequalities and conflicts within society.47

Hird illustrates a world of female fragmentation caused by cultural and political discourses which subjugate and oppress. The wretched lives of Angie and Caroline highlight the damaging effects of the existing dominant social structures still in place within the contemporary nation. Hird also indicates that devolution, at least at this initial stage, has done little to alleviate the national angst: this is illustrated in the following dialogue between Angie and Caroline. Caroline asks:

‘D’you know how many suicides there were in Scotland last year?’
[…]
‘I don’t know, a hundred and sixty.’
‘Five hundred and ninety-nine. Nearly twice as many as died in road accidents. Fucking freaky, eh?’

‘It’s a fair whack…but really, in comparison to the number of people who must regularly feel like topping themselves, it’s toaty’. (94)

Angie is not a particularly agreeable character – she is verbally abusive to her children, she lies, cheats and exploits friendships. In many ways Hird’s parental characters are a reversal of the stereotypical roles normally seen in urban Scottish fiction in which the father almost always plays the ‘Hard Man’ role and the woman is ‘meek and supportive [...] maintaining the domestic realm as a haven of peace, harmony and sexual fidelity.’ In Hird’s text, it is the father who submits to his discontented life while the mother has affairs, drinks excessively and is psychologically and at times physically violent. Nevertheless, Angie is a tragic rather than malicious figure. Indeed, the novel’s conclusion is painfully poignant: Angie and Vic have come to an uneasy truce sharing a bed for the first time in months and although the last scene is given to Vic, it is the heart-rending and raw image (almost suggestive of rape) of Angie’s surrender to her role as an unfulfilled wife (and mother) that the reader is left with:

As I push into her, she lets out a wail. Her arm drops to her sides [...] As I lean down to kiss away the fresh tears, the only resistance is in her eyes. I pretend not to notice. (275)

Just as the familial home can be a site of oppression for women, gendered roles and identities can also stultify and oppress men. The ‘imagined communities’ where the family resides can divide and fracture rather than unite. Hird’s text also suggests that the imagined community can be broken by a range of political and cultural practices which disenfranchise the individual. The nation, home, ideas of belonging and culture

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‘emerge as [...] littered with unresolved contradictions and dilemmas’\textsuperscript{49} and this is also portrayed by Rachel Trezise in her novel \textit{In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl}. Trezise’s text is an examination of the geographical zone(s) which inhabit the fringes. It provides a narrative on the effects of the material, the social, and the economic on the marginalised individual and shows how a centralised power and authority controls and influences the community, the individual and that individual’s subjectivity.

Trezise’s first novel is a realist story of growing up in the south Wales Valleys. Although the language is at times clichéd and repetitive, it is a frank portrait of growing up in a dysfunctional and disadvantaged family in the midst of an impoverished and destitute region. Set largely pre-devolution, in many ways Trezise’s text is similar to the ‘wilderness years’ writing, such as that of Agnes Owens’s in terms of theme and tone and in its depiction of a very real post-industrial landscape where people on the outer margins attempt to get by. \textit{In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl} is a ‘very thinly disguised autobiography’\textsuperscript{50} narrating the alienation and disintegration of a female child and her eventual realisation that if she is to survive and develop she needs to become skilled at ‘learning to cope’ (119) with past emotionally, physically and sexually abusive episodes. The value of Trezise’s novel is that she gives the subaltern\textsuperscript{51} access to the sociocultural systems normally denied: in other words, her young protagonist (and Trezise by extension) is provided with a place from which to speak, albeit an ‘ideologically or politically, emotionally fractured space’.\textsuperscript{52} Rebecca, the protagonist, is brought up by an alcoholic and troubled mother (the father left when she was very 

\textsuperscript{50} Trezise interview, see Appendix A. p.390.
\textsuperscript{51} The subaltern is a term that Gramsci coined and which was re-appropriated by Indian writers, theorists and historians, in order to ‘recover the voices of the suppressed or silenced peasantry’; see Dennis Walder, \textit{Post-Colonial Literature in English: History, Language and Theory}, p.111.
\textsuperscript{52} Loomba, \textit{Colonialism/Postcolonialism}, p.181.
young) and consequently, she is offered no parental guidance and little support in her life. She remembers her mother ‘sinking vodka, holding knives’ (49); nevertheless, it is not her mother’s emotional neglect but the sexual, physical and mental abuse the protagonist experiences from her step-father that renders her desperate and psychologically traumatised.

As Trezise has herself acknowledged, In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl has a clear resemblance to Maya Angelou’s I Know Why a Caged Bird Sings (1969).\(^{53}\)

I’d read Maya Angelou’s I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, before deciding to write [Goldfish Bowl] and there was a lot of description there about the American south that merged with the author’s story. I found parallels in myself and Angelou – sexual abuse and repression, and in the American south and the Rhondda – poverty and repression.\(^{54}\)

From Angelou’s opening paragraph in which the young protagonist declares herself ugly, ‘one day I woke out of my black ugly dream’\(^{55}\), to the rape of the eight-year old Angelou by her mother’s boyfriend which renders her silent, there are obvious parallels to be drawn. For instance, Trezise’s character states: ‘I looked in the mirror and decided I was an ugly girl’ (30). Further on in the novel, Rebecca tells the reader why she decided to withdraw from society:

The reason why I chose not to speak or to listen was simply because people could not be trusted, and what they had to say was probably lies. I had not become a sudden victim to madness. I had become a sudden victim to a bastard. (38)

Trezise’s narrative chronicles a struggle similar to Angelou’s in a harsh and hostile environment; Rebecca’s life is marked by societal exclusion and sexual violence as a consequence of her social and gendered status. Like Angelou’s text, Trezise’s writing

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\(^{53}\) Maya Angelou, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1969; London: Virago, 2000)

\(^{54}\) Trezise interview, see Appendix A., p.390.

\(^{55}\) Ibid., p.4.
contests and challenges structures of power by giving voice to those marginalised by patriarchal and colonial systems. Nonetheless, Angelou’s text comes out of a very different era and culture (for a black American, living under the Jim Crow laws, life was unrelentingly precarious) and any attempt to draw a straightforward comparison between Angelou’s persecuted and discriminated existence and Rebecca/Rachel’s life in south Wales is problematic.

Throughout the novel Trezise reminds the reader that despite her neglected upbringing, Rebecca is a bright and precocious child who can complete full sentences like, ‘Look out there it’s pissing down’ (20), when her peers have not learned the most basic utterances. Rebecca is a loner whose love of literature keeps her sane yet sets her apart from her contemporaries: ‘the library, make no bones about it, is my favourite place in all the world’ (23). Trezise’s assertion of Rebecca’s developing intellect and hence ‘worth’ provides a positive representation of the severely marginalised. However, Rebecca’s sense of identity is fragile and unsettling and her obvious intelligence ‘began to distress [her] with fears of who [she] is’ (20). As she matured other uncertainties started to emerge; for instance, as she watched her friends she thought: ‘I was not only strange to the extent of being an alien faced with a human society, I was inferior as well’ (26). These quotations serve to illustrate that Trezise is clearly concerned with the female sense of self in a culture that habitually disrespects and devalues the feminine. As Homi Bhabha has argued, ‘cultural alienation bears down on the ambivalence of psychic identification’.

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subjectivity ‘set the tone of isolation for my life […] the boulder which would eventually render me utterly useless’ (20). This boulder image suggests a crushing of Rebecca’s selfhood and detachment from her psychic and familial roots, a condition that renders her wretched.

Trezise’s examination of gendered violence and female subjectivity can be read as an international concern; nevertheless, In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl is unambiguously a Welsh text and Trezise is part of the new generation of writers interrogating ideas of Welshness. She foregrounds her character’s location and emphasises this particular topographical space in order to contest the discourses surrounding the concept of Wales:

One of the books I had read was How Green Was My Valley [1939] which I thought was total guff, and Goldfish Bowl was a reaction to it but the poverty and bleakness was not exaggerated. It was important to me that people outside of the south Wales valleys understood what was really going on. 57

Certainly, Trezise’s novel is not nostalgic nor is it a stereotypical representation of Wales and Welsh life. Indeed, Trezise unsympathetically and uncompromisingly represents Wales and its people, and she does not, as Richard Llewellyn does in How Green was my Valley, ‘appeal to the present people in terms of a past people’. 58 Trezise is not interested in inventing a nation united across time, place, gender, ethnicity or class. Like Hird, she illustrates a nation divided and alienated.

Trezise is undoubtedly attempting to offer a fresh and honest view of her Wales, and escape from those once prevalent (colonial) representations, the kinds

57 Trezise interview, see Appendix A. p.390.
58 Peter Childs and Patrick Williams, An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory (Hemel Hampstead, 1997), p.206.
which, according to Dai Smith, are a ‘panoply of falsification’.\(^{59}\) In fact, Trezise’s intention is to depict a contemporary Welsh identity and culture that represents the hardships, the factures and fissures, and difficult nature of life within her broken community. Trezise sets the scene by providing a picture of the area in which her protagonist lives:

Penrhys […] the drug and crime capital of the valleys; and the most mentioned location on the subject of poverty and trouble, anywhere in Wales. Surrounded by forest and a two-mile stretch from civilization […] it was a prison for the innocent and a haven for the criminal. (46)

Accentuating inequality, social exclusion and the disparity between those who live in the affluent ‘South’ and those in the Welsh valleys, Trezise introduces the reader to the heir-apparent, the Prince of Wales, who is discussing his principality on television. He comments on Rebecca’s housing estate: ‘Yeeas […] Aye have bin toold a lot about an estate oan a mountain called Penrhys, which we are raising funds foar’ (47). Trezise not only demonstrates the relationship between imperial attitudes and the colonised she also, to some extent, enables a resistance of the subjugated by describing the disjunction between reality and political verbiage. The Prince of Wales is a symbol of the Empire and English hegemony and serves to remind us of structures of power and domination. However, Rebecca’s subjugation is complicated and, indeed, undermined by bringing the Prince’s words concerning Wales to the reader through the medium of television; it is worth noting the Prince has not visited the estate but rather has ‘bin told’ about it. The fact that Charles’s knowledge regarding Penrhys comes from a secondary source, and that Rebecca learns about Charles’s ideas through television, suggests an examination of how reality is mediated for us. It is also a

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\(^{59}\) Dai Smith cited in Knight, *A Hundred Years of Fiction*, p.115.
statement on the composition and formation of what we consider ‘fact’. In other words, the media forms part of the ideological state apparatus, hence it attempts to determine how people form an opinion and interpret events. Moreover, prior to introducing Prince Charles into the scene, Rebecca tells us that she has just finished reading Orwell’s *1984* (1949), another indication that Trezise is exploring the notion of truth and how it is produced, consumed and regulated.

*In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl* is a working-class novel which endeavours to resist hierarchal social structures by putting Wales’s colonial inheritance (the Prince) alongside Orwell’s study of the psychological control of the proleteriate. For instance, *1984* examines how propaganda-generated living (and fear) enables the authoritarian regime – the Party – to force its ‘subjects’ into believing and accepting anything it decrees even if it is patently absurd: lies becomes truths. At this point, it is worth remembering that 1984 was a critical date for Welsh life and culture; it is the year that the Conservative government announced the closure of Wales’s principal industry and state propaganda against the striking miners intensified.60 In Trezise’s text, Rebecca refuses to respect the status quo. She rejects the ‘magical world of Royalty’ (47) and thus attempts to contest her position as a colonial subject. Moreover, her rant regarding the Windsor clan as a ‘corrupt, power-driven lazy-arse family’ (47) resists the grand narrative of imperialism by showing contempt for the ‘Crown’ thereby disputing the wholesome and honourable image customarily associated with sovereigns. By questioning the nature of hierarchy, her disloyalty serves to illustrate how opposed and absurd this ‘foreign’ representative is. Likewise, the prince’s accent is thoroughly

mocked, again illustrating the impotency of colonial authority because, as Bhabha suggests, mimicry is

a sign of the inappropriate [...] a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both ‘normalized’ knowledge and disciplinary power [...] it problematizes the signs of racial and cultural priority [...] the menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority.  

Mocking (mimicking) the Prince’s language serves several purposes: it dismantles any authority one may expect him to have; it shows the absurdity and meaninglessness of his answer, and perhaps more importantly, this episode illustrates the enormous and enduring disparity between the Welsh working-class and the preposterously privileged and badly informed English prince. Showing cultural exclusion and division as centrally as she does suggests Trezise’s own political engagement.

However, the text is complicated by the way in which Wales is criticised as being hostile and dangerous for women. As a girl living on the margins, Rebecca is an outsider seeking a place to integrate, a place that will offer her reconciliation from herself and give her the security which she cannot access from her family or community. Like Hird, Trezise suggests the family unit is a source of misery and menace rather than security. As a consequence of her home environment Rebecca, at fourteen years old, flees Wales and attempts to leave behind her unbearable life: in England she was ‘lulled into a security that was dangerous and yet, it was “Freedom…”’ more solidified than the version my mother offered’ (53). As a result of seeing Wales

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61 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, pp.85, 87 and 88.
from the outside Rebecca, after she is brought home by the police, begins to examine her surroundings more disparagingly:

I began to look at the place of my birth, growth and youth with double vision […] I [knew] the difference between metropolitan and provincial still exists […] my short visits to Nottingham City and Birmingham Bullring would perpetually remind me what a handicap growing up in a place like the Rhondda could be. (68)

That disadvantage arises largely from Wales’s economic and sociocultural position as a second-class ‘county’ within England – a point I will return to. Throughout the novel Trezise criticizes the culture she was raised in, suggesting at one point that she was a member of a primitive nation: ‘I was ashamed to be a troglodyte, a mindless cave-woman’ (67). This judgement on her culture calls to mind Frantz Fanon’s theories on colonialism and its psychological effects; although Fanon’s theories emerge from a different context, his argument suggesting that the colonised perceive their own indigenous culture as essentially inferior compared to the coloniser’s culture seems pertinent. The ostensible cultural and social superiority of the dominant power which directs the colonised to consider their own culture as substandard through ‘the internalization of the colonizer’s perspective’ is discussed in a Welsh context by Kirsti Bohata; in terms of self-alienation, she argues, ‘a sense of inferiority derives from the internalization of the perspectives, values and ideology of the colonial or imperial hegemony’. 62

Trezise also explores stereotypical and touristic representations of Wales, yet another colonial burden, which conceals the truth and distorts actuality. As Carla Sassi has argued

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A representation [...] far from being a neutral rendering of a determined ‘object’ is an ideological tool, which can serve various purposes, including that of sustaining a colonialist project by reinforcing systems of inequality and subordination.\(^{63}\)

So when Rebecca declares, ‘I was ashamed suddenly to be someone who sings “we’ll keep a welcome in the hillside”’ (67) it is because she feels the weight of representation that does not quite match the reality:

before you had time to worry about what outsiders would think of your accent or your Welsh mannerisms, or your memories of quaint houses stuck together with walls so thin you could hear your neighbours having boring Rhondda missionary-position sex, you would have to worry about what your neighbours thought of you trying to get away from it. I wanted so desperately to shatter the dreams of hometown people who only find respect for you if you give up the fight for originality. (68)

Therefore for Rebecca, and by extension Trezise, Wales is neither the harmless and hardworking industrious community or the pastoral idyll often used in trite colonial representations but a place of poor housing, poverty and fear. Furthermore, Rebecca’s Wales is also a place where people are systematically deceived. As discussed earlier in the context of the Prince of Wales, Trezise’s novel also examines the notion of knowledge and truth and how people are deluded through manipulation into accepting myths as truths:

[the Rhondda’s] sorry inhabitants were misled into believing they had a reputation for being very friendly, welcoming people [but] we were a bunch of inbreeding hypocrites who were all spouting bullshit about living in the best place in the world. (66)

This understanding or misunderstanding of one’s environment points to Foucault’s theory of truth in which truth and power are relational. Truth is produced within discourse and is dependent on power; truth is a delusion or a ploy which aids and

camouflages the operations of social control. Knowledge is the formation of power which not only ‘delineate[s] specific inclusions but enforces overt and covert exclusions’. And knowledge, power and ‘truth’, of course, are administrated and controlled by imperialist domination and manipulation.

However, the influence and control emanating from the centre are resisted and challenged by Trezise’s focus on the economic, material and social factors that affect the conditions of the Valleys’ population during the Thatcher era. Trezise starkly illustrates the polarities between the power base and the periphery:

Hendrefadog teenagers followed their parents to the dole queue, making us a notch lower than the working class. My generation, the products of unemployed parents, divorce and downright poverty, tried desperately to find satisfaction in joyriding and class B drugs. (66)

By uncompromisingly depicting the ‘God-awful Rhondda’ (90) as a place with a ‘constant lack of choice’ (70) Trezise’s narrative endeavours to be pedagogic and political: as she states, ‘writing which deliberately disregards politics teaches its reader nothing.’ So Trezise is attempting to counter the ‘truth’ generated from the hegemonic centre in the 1980s and the early 1990s which insisted that poverty did not exist, for as David Adamson states: ‘The Conservative government denied the existence of poverty in the U.K [...] and [failed] to recognize the impact of its policies in Wales’. The destructive consequences of Westminster policy on the Valleys served to alienate the

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67 Trezise, see Appendix A, p.391.
individual and at this time, any notion of nationhood and belonging was unwelcome. As Rebecca states:

I honestly could not understand or sometimes even want to how we could actually stand up for the National Anthem and say we were proud to be residents. (71)

Rebecca’s understanding of her nation’s oppression and her rage about that situation has resonances with Irvine Welsh’s pre-devolution *Trainspotting* (1993). In this text one of Welsh’s politically-astute characters protests against the Scottish predicament:

It’s nae good blamin it oan the English fir colonising us. Ah don’t hate the English. They’re just wankers. We are colonised by wankers. We can’t even pick a decent, vibrant, healthy culture to be colonised by […] What does that make us? The lowest of the fuckin low, the scum of the earth. The most wretched, servile, miserable, pathetic trash that was ever shat intae creation. Ah don’t hate the English. They just git oan wi the shite thuv goat. Ah hate the Scots. 69

Rebecca’s (and Welsh’s characters) antipathy is indicative of its time and conveys the effects of colonization and the causal inferiority complex, whereby blame is internalised and ‘the native […] doubts the worth and significance of inherited ways of life’. 70

In order to resist colonial conditioning writing, ‘away from the centre’ gives a cultural space which enables a counter response to the subjugated position; as Gerry Smyth states: ‘It is generally accepted that culture […] plays a vital role in the colonising and decolonising processes’. 71 Trezise’s text emphasises the importance of writing and the belief that scripting one’s own history is an important means of survival: it is by writing that Rebecca, who has tried to commit suicide several times, has managed to survive. She states:

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70 Beveridge and Turnbull, *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture*, p.5.
My Gran […] gave me the person who is writing this sentence. She gave me treasured stories […] When I began to write this book I was half-way down the spiral. I carried on in the same direction for some part. I got to the bottom and turned around […] I knew…it was absolutely essential that I began to write this book. (118-121)

At the close of her story, Rebecca’s relation with her grandmother proves the catalyst for her re-birth as a writer. Clearly Trezise has been influenced by the formidable (and ever-present) grandmother in Angelou’s novel. But the introduction of the apparently influential gran character at this late stage in the book raises some basic questions concerning Trezise’s narrative technique and points to her inexperience as an author and the need for further editing.

The idea of storytelling as a way of resisting colonial power and the absoluteness of ‘truth’ and of combating the resultant psychosis of the colonised position, is of major importance in both feminist and postcolonial writing and has been well documented. Writing enables retrieval from the discourse of imperialism and consequently the recovery of a sense of self.72 For women, narrating the self can be seen as curative and vitalizing as well rebellious, and this is especially relevant for women living in the south Wales Valleys, a hitherto politically and culturally masculinised landscape. Through women writing the obscure becomes manifest and articulate. As bell hooks argues,

For women of oppressed groups who have contained so many feelings – despair, rage, anguish – who do not speak, as poet Audre Lorde writes ‘for fear our words will not be heard nor welcomed’, coming to voice is an act of resistance. Speaking becomes both a way to engage in active self-transformation and a rite of passage where one moves from being object to

subject. Only as subjects can we speak. As objects we remain voiceless – our beings defined and interpreted by others.  

For Rebecca, writing her story is a rite of passage; it enables her to live and subsequently the power of the once unspeakable history evaporates. As Rebecca concludes her story she states: ‘my past has dissolved, how quickly it isn’t mine any more’ (121). For Trezise, writing was also crucial:

Coming from a poor background, writing was very important to me. Because I was interested in politics and poetry, and all the things people from a poor background are encouraged not to be interested in, I didn’t have many people I could talk to about literature or about my day to day feelings, so I started writing them down, and that was a means of survival. 

Trezise’s novel, in the end, celebrates survival – no mean feat considering the protagonist is marginalised four times over; as female, under-class, Welsh and a child rape victim. Rebecca is representative of the voice of the subaltern, the silenced, the deprived, oppressed and often hidden lives of the Valleys’ young female population, and as such, Trezise’s text is notable for she liberates Rebecca by giving her a voice. However, what makes Trezise’s text especially remarkable is that the author is also representative of the subaltern; although the creative voices of the Valleys’ young female population are still infrequently heard, Trezise has found her own space in which to speak for herself, to represent herself and her community.

The act of writing and representation occupy a central place in the work of the writers discussed in this thesis and are key to feminist and postcolonial theories of

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74 Trezise interview, see Appendix A, p.392.
75 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that there is ‘no space’ (103) for the subaltern to speak, they are persistently and systematically always spoken for and hence misrepresented. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ [Online]. Available from: http://www.mcgill.ca/files/crclaw-discourse/Can_the_subaltern_speak.pdf [Accessed 10 June 2010].
subjectivity and resistance. For both Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak the novel is an agent of imperial hegemony: as Spivak states, ‘the role of literature in the production of cultural representation should not be ignored’.\(^76\) Likewise, Said suggests that culture and imperialism are intrinsically interconnected:

imperialism and the novel fortified each other [...] the novel is an incorporative, quasi-encyclopaedic cultural form. Packed into it [is] an entire system of social reference that depends on the existing institutions of bourgeois society, their authority and power.\(^77\)

Like Trezise, Janet Paisley uses fiction as a mode of resistance against imperial and cultural hegemony, and like Trezise, Paisley’s intention is to articulate the experiences of the voiceless and marginalised. *Not for Glory* is the novel as a political tool in which people and place are given an identity and presence. Paisley explicitly informs the reader that this is a narrative that considers the social, political, cultural and economic exclusion of a country that has endured being under the domination of a powerful colonial power. The book begins with a quotation from the Declaration of Arbroath:\(^78\)

For so long as a hundred of us are left alive, we will yield in no least way to English domination. We fight not for glory nor for wealth nor honours; but only and alone we fight for freedom. Which no good man surrenders but with his life.\(^79\)

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\(^77\) Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.84-85.

\(^78\) The *Declaration of Arbroath* (1320) was a formal declaration of Scottish independence prepared after a series of bloody events. The English armies under Edward II were in retreat in 1314; however, by 1319, with the recapture of Berwick, the English persisted in launching attacks into Scotland. The Pope had not accepted Scottish independence probably because Robert the Bruce had been excommunicated for killing John Comyn in a church in Dumfries in 1306 (Comyn had formed an alliance with Edward, but possibly had more of a right to be King than Bruce). Thus the *Declaration of Arbroath* was prepared as a formal Declaration of Independence. The Declaration appealed to the Pope to understand the situation from a Scottish perspective and not to take the English claim on Scotland seriously. It used persuasive words implying that without acceptance of the Scottish case the wars would continue and the ensuing deaths would be the responsibility of the Pope. *The Declaration* was signed by the Pope in 1320. See Chris Cooke and Dominik Gamble, ‘Declaration of Arbroath’, *Gateway to Scotland* [Online]. Available at: http://www.geo.ed.ac.uk/home/scotland/arbroath.html [Accessed 15 October 2010]

This work of fiction is deeply engaged with the political environment of its time: as well as the novel’s title and epigraph, the opening chapters are subtitled after the pronouncement engraved on the mace used at the recommencement of the modern Scottish parliament in 1999 – ‘Wisdom’, ‘Justice’, ‘Compassion’, ‘Integrity’. Paisley’s political point is formidable. And it is a point about which she wants there to be no ambiguity: at the end of the first chapter, ‘Howie’s Land’, the author has given a footnote explaining the origins of her subtitles:

The mace presented by the Queen at [the Scottish Parliament’s] opening is inscribed: ‘There shall be a Scottish parliament’ and has four words engraved on it: ‘Wisdom, Justice, Compassion, Integrity’. (11)

This is a novel about nation and community at the start of the new millennium and at the beginning of the new political system of government. Not for Glory is written in a combination of Scots and central belt dialects. The people living in a village somewhere in mid-Scotland are all given their own platform to tell the stories of their lives and to provide their own perspective on the events happening around them. This multi-perspective stylistic device is similar to that used by many of Paisley’s contemporaries in both Scotland and Wales, and employs polyphonic discourse to enable their characters to speak for themselves.

As in Hird’s Born Free, life in the village is a microcosm for Scotland. Paisley portrays young adults, unemployed, bored, mischievous, and at times criminal; families who appear ordinary from the outside but inside are fractured and hostile; pensioners who have lived together for years, tolerating misery and poverty; single mothers trying to survive despite financial and childcare support problems. There is the teenage 80

mother-to-be fed up with her feckless boyfriend, the financially broke shopkeeper, and the forty-year-old man with learning difficulties tormented by the village children. The individual paths of the inhabitants, the poor, the marginal, the socially disabled, interweave but remain separate. As one character puts it,

It’s a wheel turning oan a wheel, livin in a village. Awbody’s life’s their ain. Yin hing, spinnin oan its ain axis. You never git tae ken wha folk really ur. Awbody’s gaun roon in their ain space. Nothin tae dae wi onybody else. An the place is spinnin tae. Aw they lives makin it intae yin place. This village. S’pose I’m yin ae they wee wheels. So’s ma da. An ma maw. (14)

Like Hird, Paisley does not offer an idealistic vision of post-devolution Scotland but an uncompromising, and at times, a thoroughly depressing vision of the postcolonial landscape. The novel starts and finishes with Howie, the unpromising ‘Buckfast’ king ae the Glen [who is] Nothin but bad news’ (1). Howie, who has been ejected from his pregnant girlfriend’s flat ‘cause I’m nae use’ (2), pledges that he will change:

Swear to God, Treeze, I’ll no touch a drop fae noo oan. Gaunnae be a dad. Git masell straight. Get a job. Nae booze, nae blaw. See youse aw right. Be there fir the wee man, whin he comes along. (2)

Howie’s ineffectual life consists of loitering, drinking, smoking, consuming illegal drugs and evading the police. Although it seems unlikely that this reckless, puerile, unemployed (and almost certainly unemployable) working-class lad will change, the novel ends with his seventeen-year-old girlfriend giving birth with Howie at her side emotionally affected by the reality of the situation:

81 Buckfast is a tonic wine made by the monks at Buckfast Abbey in Devon. According to some statistics at least 70% of its production is consumed by people living in Lanarkshire (on the outskirts of Glasgow). It has been linked to anti-social behaviour and ministers have become so concerned with its consumption amongst young working class that there has been repeated calls for its prohibition in Scotland. Scottish Health Minister Andy Kerr has called it ‘an irresponsible drink that holds a special place in the hearts, and livers, of Scottish youth’. See Kirsty Scott, ‘Battle of the Binge’, The Guardian, Wednesday 25 October 2006 [Online]. Available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2006/oct/25/drugsandalcohol.guardiansocietysupplement [accessed 6 June 2008]
lookin at oor wean  wee mooth open sqawlin like a gull. Wee face aw rid [...] Ken he’s real. He’s just fair real. Ma een are watterin [...] I think I’m gaunnae greet’. (287)

Howie’s shift from cocky, self-centred ‘ned’ to the suggestion of a more considerate and emotionally-capable father suggests Paisley’s hope for a more mature culture. For if Scottish cultural identity frequently ‘manifests [itself] in gendered terms, and the self-hating discourse of inferiorism’ and ‘[m]aculinised Scottishness stands in dread of feminised weakness’, 82 Howie’s growing emotional maturity suggests the beginning of a more composed and collected nation. Significantly, the final chapter is called ‘Freedom’ clearly an allusion to Scotland’s devolved status, but also perhaps a reference to Howie’s abandonment of ‘the hard man’ masculinity which almost annihilated his future. Interestingly, Paisley’s reference to ‘freedom’ is a motif that had began to appear with regularity in devolved literature – Hird alludes to ‘freedom’ twice in her text through Vic’s Born Free and Angie’s allusion to Braveheart and Trezise’s Rebecca talks of needing a “Freedom…” more solidified than the version my mother offered’ (53).

Like Hird, Paisley’s text problematizes notions of ‘Scottish’ masculinity and she gives the strongest and most decisive voices to the women of the village. The notable female characters are the robust and resilient single mothers, Maureen and Julie. By giving these two characters intelligence and energy, Paisley destabilises the apparent centrality of masculinity in Scotland. I say apparent because although I have argued at the beginning of this chapter that the ‘nation’ is gendered masculine, the ‘strong, virile

idea of Scottishness, grimy at the edges but all the more potent for that\textsuperscript{83} has only ever been a fictional model for the nation. As Laura Hird asserts:

[The Scottish hard man] is certainly not representative of the culture I grew up in myself which I always saw as being more of a matriarchy. The history of Scotland has always been populated by feisty, strong women and weak, ineffectual men.\textsuperscript{84}

In fact, in Not for Glory the men are, by and large, incompetent, dense and mindless at best, and dangerous, frustrated misogynistic killers at worst. The women are active and thriving despite the aggravation and persecution directed at them. Maureen, ‘twa boys an divorced’ (22), supports herself and two sons through the ‘auld craft’ (wicca). As the narrator explains:

[her man] lost the heid yin nicht. She couldna remember whit fur. Just pait ae her life then. Bein attacked. Yin bloody mess blurred intae anither. That nicht, wi his hauns roon her throat, him kneeling oan her chist, blood bubbled fae the back ar her nose oot her mooth She passed oot […] when she came roon, neck black an blue wi fingerprints, purple thumbprints oan her windpipe, he cawed her a witch. (23)

The ex-partner’s horrendous violence and habitual abuse pointed Maureen towards a way of self support – an unpatriarchal and hence unconventional one: ‘Wicca made a hale lot mair sense that the kirk, wi her man singing aboot a male god’s mercy an preyin tae “Oor Faither”’ (23). Maureen is a courageous, unyielding woman who is compassionate (she gives a home to one of her son’s friends after he gets evicted from the family home by a sexually and mentally abusive stepfather). She is able to stand the persistent hatred of her male neighbours (for her self-determination) who ‘came tae her door an ranted’ (31) and called her ‘a slapper’ (30). Likewise, the other single parent,


\textsuperscript{84} Laura Hird interview, see Appendix B, p.409.
Julie, also has to survive the sexist anger of her neighbours: as one male villager declares: ‘Twa brats. Nae man. Tart, in’t she? […] The’l be a string ae men. You wait’ (68). Both women – independent financially as well as domestically – are clearly a threat to traditional and ‘normative’ male power structures. Maureen’s and Julie’s gendered denigration suggests that women still have to struggle for space in Scottish society. However, their spirited denial of male authority or superiority suggests to me that women are at the centre of sociocultural transformations.

Julie, to the fury of the curtain-twitching neighbours, befriends Tom, the emotionally isolated forty-year old learning-disabled man, whose lack of companionship and understanding from the villagers leads him to spy on his neighbours as a form of entertainment and sexual gratification. The chapters involving Tom and Julie are set out in the style of a play script. This technique is disconcerting in that the reader is aware of looking in, of being voyeuristic (like Tom himself); it also emphasises the multiple discourses that surround Julie as a woman and Tom as a ‘special needs’ man. Both Julie and Tom pose problems for discourses concerning nation and nationhood: neither of them fit the ‘masculine’ narrative of the nation, therefore they become legitimated targets for abuse.

Paisley’s story depicts the complex social problems that Scotland and its renewed parliament face in the twenty-first century: domestic violence, misogyny, business failure, alcoholism and drug-related crimes. Furthermore, contemporary Scotland is still defined by strict gender divisions which disable and impinge upon both female and male social, cultural and economic lives. However, Paisley’s sardonic humour ridicules notions of hegemonic masculinity and femininity. This is illustrated, for instance, when Cassie, the academically-bright sixteen-year-old escaping from home
because her step-father has barred her from studying at university, saves Jas the businessman who has ‘gaun bust’ (179) from committing suicide:

He was oan fire. Spread-eagled in the bush. His hair reeked. Cassie grabbed her bag [...] pulled oot a can ae juice [...] poorin the juice ower his smoking heid [...] ‘I’m blund’, he said. ‘I cannae see.’ ‘Open yer een!’ His lids flicked up. ‘I am blund everhin’s aw black. Wee pinpricks ae licht. That’s aw thur is.’ She looked up to whaur he was lookin. The sky was full ae staurs. ‘I kin see a wee pinprick tae,’ she said. ‘Lying oan its back oan the grund.’ (179)

Paisley’s mockery brings to mind the pre-devolution texts of Galloway and Owens; yet in its bleakness and tragedy Paisley’s text is also comparable to Trezise’s. Furthermore, like Trezise, Paisley also geographically situates her narrative in the periphery, in this instance outside the hub of Edinburgh and Glasgow. These socially and economically marginalised settings indicate a move from the metropolitan perspective and a decisive shift from tolerating cultural imperialism. Interestingly, this repositioning is a device that Welsh and Scottish women writers increasingly use, as the following chapters show.

_Not for Glory_ is an analysis of the cultural condition of a country attempting to re-visualise and re-form its intellectual and imaginative space. As previously discussed, the ‘wilderness years’ saw a positive re-awakening of Scottish cultural self-expression; however, for some authors one of the key issues necessitating debate in post-devolution Scotland is the persistent marginalisation and underrepresentation of indigenous languages and dialects in a country which yet markedly bears the sociocultural legacy of three hundred years of Anglicisation. With its vigorous use of

Scots, Paisley’s text carries on the tradition of correcting this linguistic wrong. Clearly, Paisley uses the novel as a piece of political rhetoric: by employing the language of the people of Scotland rather than the language of the ‘foreign’ governing bodies, Paisley is suggesting language and its use is central to power, discourse and sense of self-identity. Of course, many Scottish writers throughout the centuries used Scots, or a ‘synthesis of a range of Scots’, such as Glasgwegian and the Edinburgh vernacular, in an attempt to free Scotland and the Scots from the burden and oppression of Anglicisation. Furthermore, as John Corbett has noted, ‘from the sixteenth century on, there is an established and honourable tradition of literary translation into Scots’. However, Paisley, unlike Galloway for instance, does not give any space to Standard English. The omniscient narrator’s language is Scots, as is that of all the characters, even those in professions that one would normally associate with Standard English, for instance, Julie, the teacher, and the ever-present village police. Because Paisley does not employ Standard English for the third person narration, the Scots language is never separated, detached or marginalised; it is at the centre throughout. Indeed, Paisley’s text is intent on presenting no linguistic fragmentation or severance, the likes of which Edwin Muir suggested was one of the main predicaments Scots faced as a consequence of the Union of 1707:

This linguistic division means the Scotsmen [sic] feel in one language and think in another; that their emotions turns to the Scots tongue, with all its associations of local sentiment; and their minds to standard English which for them is almost bare of associations other than those of the classroom.  

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86 For instance, Robert Burns in the 1700s, Hugh MacDiarmid in the 1920s and Janice Galloway, Liz Lochhead and Irvine Welsh in the 1990s.
88 Ibid., p.177.
Paisley’s text ‘sets aboot freeing oor tongues’.\textsuperscript{90} The Act of Union may have effectively invalidated the indigenous language and impeded Scots from expressing themselves and their culture in their own tongue, however, as Paisley argues,

\begin{quote}
A land whit maks muckle o its richt tae speak fur itself cannae be hauden tae anither fur the language tae screive its future wi. Folk mak the words needit tae talk aboot theirsells. Tak that awa an ye are ay translatit intae somethin else, torn awa frae histray, culture an custom. \textsuperscript{91}
\end{quote}

Undoubtedly through the narrative of \textit{Not for Glory}, Paisley is not only sanctioning the Scots language but through its persistent use, especially by the teacher and police, she is legitimising it, and hence making a potent political point, linguistically. Indeed, the reinstatement of the Scottish parliament offered activists like Paisley hope for the languages of Scotland to be officially recognised and publically utilized as we have seen happen with the Welsh language in Wales. As Wilson McLeod states: ‘The new Parliament is the most important forum where this new openness toward Scotland’s languages can be institutionalised and developed.’\textsuperscript{92} Language is a key concern in the texts discussed throughout this thesis and it is the issue that most centrally connects Scotland and Wales in the postcolonial period: women writers from both these nations engage with the idea that language is intrinsically connected with political ideology and identity politics. For writers such as Paisley, language plays a decisive role in the (re)emerging nation’s indigenous sense of self. Simon During argues that:

\begin{quote}
In both language and politics the post-colonial drive towards identity centres around language […] For the post-colonial to speak or to write in the imperial tongue is to call forth a problem of identity, to be thrown into mimicry and ambivalence. The question of language for postcolonialism is political,
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
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153
cultural, and literary [...] in the material sense that a choice of language is a choice of identity.\textsuperscript{93}

Like Bakhtin, Paisley examines how language, as a material practice, is always constituted by and through the subject. All language, Bakhtin argues, is dialogic: that is, it is from a particular point of view directed towards a particular audience. Furthermore, all languages have a subtext of values and perspectives. Therefore any challenge to these disparate distinguishing languages is a challenge to these deep-rooted ideological aspects. What Paisley is saying is really quite simple: that the Scottish people have been forced or coerced into believing that Scots (the language), and therefore its people, is inferior. Consequently, their perception, understanding, analysis and way of thinking have been invalidated. In order to resist, or counter the insidious linguistic colonisation people must utilize their indigenous language. Importantly, Paisley’s use of Scots makes no concessions to people who do not understand the language and its dialects.

While Paisley’s novel engages with the philosophy of linguistic tradition as the Scottish nation settles into a new administration at the start of a new millennium, Trezza Azzopardi’s \textit{The Hiding Place}\textsuperscript{94} considers how change and unwelcome development can lead to personal and cultural alienation and partition. Similarly to the other writers discussed in this chapter, Azzopardi interrogates social and cultural phallocentrism and challenges notions of essentialist and masculinist ideas relating to national and personal identity. Moreover, like those of Hird, Trezise and Paisley, Azzopardi’s text also

\textsuperscript{93} Simon During cited in Childs and Williams, \textit{An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory}, p.193.
\textsuperscript{94} Trezza Azzopardi, \textit{The Hiding Place} (London: Picador, 2000). All subsequent references to will be to this edition and will appear in parenthesis in the main body of the text.
focuses on the family and how the traditional domestic unit can be a source of violent subjugation and oppression.

Short-listed for the Booker Prize in 2000, *The Hiding Place* was judged alongside books by internationally established writers such as Margaret Atwood. ‘The unexpected inclusion of Welsh writer Trezza Azzopardi’, as *The Guardian* put it, confirmed that Welsh writers in English, and the Welsh literary scene in general, was becoming a fairly strong entity.95 During these early years of political autonomy contemporary writers were seeing their work enthusiastically discussed, not just in Wales, but internationally. It would seem that the ‘voices of Wales have not been silenced’96 and that Gwyn A. Williams’s bleak contention in 1985 that the Welsh people were ‘now nothing but a naked people under an acid rain’97 was unduly pessimistic.

Like many other Welsh writers, Azzopardi questions ideas of nation and nationhood and examines what it means to be Welsh in an increasingly transient and globalised world. *The Hiding Place* is about family history. The story of the Gaucis is told primarily through the eyes of Dolores, the youngest of six daughters, who has returned to Cardiff in the late 1990s to attend her mother’s funeral. Azzopardi’s narrative is an examination of the fractured and fragile lives of the working-class in an increasingly fractured and fragile environment. The lives of the Gauci family – Frankie, the cruel, self-centred, chronic gambler whose reckless wagers set off a chain of events that have calamitous consequences for the family, Mary, the oppressed wife, and their daughters – are reconstructed before the backdrop of poverty, misery and hopelessness.

96 Knight, *One Hundred Years of Fiction*, p.187.
Like many of the other texts discussed in this thesis, the narrative structure is non-linear; although the novel begins when Dolores is three years old, the family’s story begins when Mary and Frank leave their respective homes in the 1950s and arrive in Cardiff. The narrative shifts illustrate how time separates and divides the Gauci sisters and enables a consideration of the significance and importance of time, history, memory and recovery – social, individual and collective.

_The Hiding Place_ is a story about an individual endeavouring to piece together her past: as Louis, Dolores’s nephew, tells an old family friend, ‘Dolores is interested in the old times’ (257). Revealing, managing and tackling the past is complex and difficult, and although childhood memories haunt the entire family, Dolores’s sisters refuse to deal with their history. So, while Dolores is searching for some kind of truth among her faded memories and the disappearing landscape of her childhood, she understands that memory and reality can be fluid, subjective and socially constructed: ‘My memory belongs to a five year old. It’s a child’s bubble of street names and people’s names. Not the real thing’ (256). Her sisters are reluctant and scared to return to the past: for instance, Celesta, who was sold by her father to a wealthy, aging business man, forcefully tells her sister, ‘I Don’t Do Memory Lane. Okay?’ (266). And Luca, the sister who has emigrated to Canada says, ‘Understand me Dolores, I don’t remember One Single Thing’ (274).

Azzopardi is interested in how we come to understand the past and how memory is constructed, assembled and performed. As Linda Adams comments, Azzopardi is ‘fascinated by the unreliability of memory, by the way the same event can be recorded with such differing registers of pain within the same family […] Truth is
plural’; as Dolores says ‘[a]s with all truths, there is another version’ (75). In this way, *The Hiding Place* has much in common with Hird’s and Paisley’s novels which both, through their employment of the multi-vocal narrative, illustrate that ‘truth’, and ‘reality’ are relational and manifold. So, for instance, Dolores in her search for the past encounters a variety of divergent stories made up of other people’s recollections. When talking to Martineau, an old family friend still resident in Tiger Bay, she is ‘stuck […] in Martineau’s story’ (264). Further, Louis’s versions of the Gauci’s history ‘were gilt-edged stories – of a vice ring, a murderous feud, a child sold into prostitution’ (244). Hence, the family’s narrative becomes a substantial tale of intrigue: ‘a small fire is an inferno, a burnt hand is a horror story, and a falling out between old friends is murder’ (245). In her years of absence – Dolores was removed to England for adoption after her father’s disappearance and her mother’s breakdown – the family’s history has been ‘changing, altering imperceptibly over the years’ (245). Nevertheless, Dolores’s need to recall is perhaps a consequence of her forced exile; to liberate herself she needs a history as this connection is a route to selfhood. In both feminist theory and postcolonial theory, memory and history are enormously important ideas in terms of identity, subjectivity, agency and narration. The concept of history – how people’s lives are narrated, how information about them and their culture is disseminated, understood and valued – is extremely complex and problematic. As Peter Childs and Patrick Williams argue, colonised people have been ‘passive participants in history made by others’. So rather than neglecting the narratives of the past, recall offers insight into the present:

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98 Linda Adams, ‘If the geography’s there I can let other things fly’, *New Welsh Review*, 51 (Winter 2000), pp.17-20, p.18.
Remembering is an act of lending coherence and integrity to a history interrupted, divided or compromised by instances of loss. We engage in history not only as agents and actors but also as narrators or storytellers. In narrative we may be able to redress forcibly forgotten experiences, allow the silences of history to come to word, and imagine alternative scripts of the past. Our understanding of the present is invariably linked to [...] a recalled past.\(^\text{100}\)

Hence, Dolores, and importantly Azzopardi, are endeavouring to unearth, and communicate not just personal or individual histories but the histories of the community.

So, as well as charting the disintegration of the Gauci family, Azzopardi records the politically-fuelled decline of the once-vibrant Butetown and Docklands community. On Dolores’s return home after many years living in Nottingham she finds the port area of Cardiff demolished, the ravages apparent in ‘the shambolic shops and deserted dwellings left standing in Tiger Bay’, where, ‘Squatters and that’ now live (255). The disparity between the remains of Butetown and the city undergoing development is clear: ‘the dingy row of shop fronts’ (255) is contrasted with the ‘airy space of blond wood and chrome fittings’ (241) of a new Cardiff Bay cafe. Amongst the neglect of an entire community, Azzopardi illustrates the urban transformation: the ‘change in the city [...] years of roadworks and cordoned-off streets, digging machines and noise and dust’ (255). Dolores’s memories are no longer preserved in solid brick and mortar but are located only inside her exiled head: ‘I don’t know what year it is, but I feel as though I am five again’ (236). Azzopardi’s representations of Cardiff illustrate a city so single-mindedly concerned with re-construction/destruction that it has palpably deserted its working-class citizens. Furthermore, Azzopardi’s visual imagery of the forced evictions

and exile of the residents is not only dispiriting but suggestive of colonial confiscation and the destruction of occupied lands:

Each week, another street is crushed to rubble [...] homes where people used to live become a stretch of broken bricks and barbed wire [...] the change in the neighbourhood is inexplicable to him [Frankie]. It starts with a few boarded-up houses, a friend waving goodbye from the back of a lorry, and suddenly there is a fist fights with contractors, lines of children lying on the ground in front of the council trucks [...] demolition changes everything. (87)

The portrayal of the multi-ethnic, working-class Butetown shows a community betrayed by city planners, developers and politicians. The ‘local subalterns’101 have no possibility of success, as one neighbour says of the forced evictions:

They’ve gone [...] two days notice, they got. Bloody council – they don’t waste time…they want us out by the end of the month…we won’t have a shop left at this rate. (84-85)

Azzopardi illuminates the reality of the situation for many. Her narrative serves to remind us of the ‘decline of a great port’102 and the spirited fight against the ‘local “slum” clearances of the 1960s.’103 This is a community that had long been betrayed by the moral gatekeepers as degenerate and corrupt. The unremittingly negative and prejudicial representations determined the opinions and judgement on a whole range of social, cultural and political strategies and policies.104 As Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon argue, ‘hegemonic narratives [...] created commonsense perceptions of the area [and] promoted racism and class discrimination.’105

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102 Knight, A Hundred Years of Fiction: Welsh Writing in English, p.185.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid., p.172.
The turbulent cultural shifts south Wales has experienced in recent years, from the decline of heavy industry to the newly established late-capitalist cosmopolitanism of the Welsh capital, with its ‘proud streetlamps in civic colours [...] bins with tattooed heralds’ (244), are not only charted but also problematized by Azzopardi. Dolores’s ‘home’ has been transformed from the commercial port that brought her father to Wales along with many of the other Butetown residents into the yuppiedom quaysides of new Cardiff; yet for Dolores, it is ‘all new, and all the same’ (255). Azzopardi’s familiarity with Cardiff, and especially Butetown, provides an authentic and sensitive portrait of a community made invisible by the dominant and external value system. As Huw Thomas argues, outsiders had habitually represented Butetown as a seedy, threatening and dangerous place.

For fifty years [...] the port [...] to many [...] was a world of its own, largely irredeemable [...] way out of the social, economic and political mainstream of the city [...]then along came] some stategy for changing the area’s image - ie. For burying demons which those outside the area had conjured up in the fist place. 106

As Thomas rightly suggests narratives of people’s lives are sometimes manufactured by outsiders for political deals and commercial pacts. These representations invalidate entire histories: for instance, a member of the legal profession (relatively) recently referred to Butetown as ‘an upside down society’ which possesses ‘an evil reputation.’ 107 Azzopardi’s narrative humanises and gives voice to those obscured by ‘history’.

107 This disparaging image of ‘an upside down society’ was by the prosecutor for the Crown during the notorious ‘Cardiff Three’ murder trial of Lynette Whyte who was murdered in 1988. Quotation cited in Glenn Jordon and Chris Weedon, Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall, p.171.
As well as ethnic and class prejudice and injustice, Azzopardi also examines
gendered discrimination, historically and contemporaneously. For women living in
previous decades there was no place to hide; the past was a time when opportunities for
women, and working-class women in particular, were limited at best and punishing at
worst: as the young Dolores forebodingly comments, ‘Secretly, my mother wants
Celesta to enjoy herself while she can: she knows what’s in store’ (100). The economic
dispossession and bleak prospects created by patriarchal capitalism meant that women
struggled to survive. Moreover, the alienation produced by socioeconomic and cultural
inequality meant women were left desperate and vulnerable, as this passage from The
Hiding Place highlights:

young women collect on the corner to sell salvage from the derelict homes […]
None of it belongs to them, and nobody wants to buy it. They stand there all
day […] At night these same girls call out to Frankie in their flat chilled voices;
Wanna Play, Handsome? See anything you like. (88)

And, as in Paisley’s text, women in the marital home are just as much at risk: Frankie, a
wife-beater, ‘mistakes his rage for love. He wants her, he hates her, he’ll make it up to
her, he will tear her into shreds’ (74). However, women’s subjugated position and
emotional and physical oppression are not only located in the historical: Cardiff three
decades later is hardly any better for women. This is illustrated by Rose, Dolores’s
sister who is mentally and physically abused by her partner and domestically enslaved.
When she tells her partner Terrence she plans to attend her mother’s funeral he punches
her, yelling, ‘You’re not goin’ an’ that’s final!’ (208).

Rose waits until she hears Terrence’s footsteps receding down the path […]
She crosses the kitchen, opens the door of the freezer and takes out a packet of
peas. She holds them to the swelling on the face. (208)
Azzopardi’s text illustrates how women silently endure their lives in a social structure which endorses abuse and neglect, for as Jalna Hanmer and Catherine Itzin remind us: ‘men’s violence is an everyday, culturally supported activity’.  

Central to Dolores’s narrative is the self-sacrificing mother, Mary, who is forced to watch her children being physically and emotionally abused, used as bargaining tools for dodgy deals and finally sold to the highest bidder: Celesta is traded off to an overweight middle-aged businessman and Marina is prostituted to a Maltese gangster in lieu of debts. Interestingly, Dolores’s memories of her mother and Azzopardi’s description of Mary’s life and environment take on a Gothic mode. Mary’s sphere, the family home, is full of dark brooding memories which envelope the isolated Dolores when she visits the Butetown house: ‘I wasn’t prepared at all…I [didn’t expect] this dereliction, this hollowness […] the ache of this house’ (210).

As discussed in the previous chapter, the use of the Gothic to examine and expose women’s confinement and limitations within patriarchal structure has been long employed by women writers and Azzopardi, like Jones, Galloway and Barker, follows in this tradition. Her haunting narrative becomes increasingly ominous and threatening as Dolores’s memories reveal a family home occupied by male domination, female breakdown and childhood insecurity. During Dolores’s visit to her old home she can still sense her father’s menace, and as she sits in her mother’s now abandoned house she feels ‘a prickle of air behind me, like my father’s breath, chases me flying up the stairs. I wait in darkness until the banging of my heart subsides’ (209). As a child Dolores is confined upstairs to safeguard her from her father and ‘the closed-in heat.


109 For a discussion of this issue see Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith, ‘Introduction: Defining the Female Gothic’, *The Female Gothic New Directions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).
Darkness underneath’ (277) still haunts Dolores. Her adult self now dreams she sees ‘his shadow on the step is giant with death’ (277). And the turmoil of self manifests itself as ‘only a ghost pain’ (280). Azzopardi also uses Gothic tropes to explore key issues such as gender and power and how these impact upon identity and self-worth. This is a society governed by patriarchal power structures which sustain male domination and female subjugation. Life for Mary has been pitiless and Azzopardi vividly depicts her earlier years in her village of Hirwaun in south Wales which were characterised by drudgery and cruelty:

Every morning, that walk through the weather [...] to that stinking yard behind the hut [of the Miners’ Welfare] – chiselling at the ice on the water-butt, plunging her hands in and out of the frozen water until the skin on them gave up and cracked like chickens’ claws: all winter, standing in the yard, peeling those potatoes. And the night! The men with [...] their glazed stares, watching her as she slopped the beer into their mugs. (70)

In Cardiff, Mary marries a man as mean and self-centred as her father: as Rose reminds her sister Dolores, ‘[Father] beat the living daylights out of us, he left us without a penny and he just fucked off’ (247). Mary’s only respite is the afternoon chats, gin and cigarettes with her next door neighbour, the much disapproved of Eva, who because of her independence (and presumably because of her childless state) is accused of ‘Lowering the tone of the neighbourhood’ (62).

By focusing on Mary’s life Azzopardi makes visible lives that have often been obscured. As Deirdre Beddoe suggests, this invisibility of Welsh women’s lives was the aggregate of three separate but connected units: ‘Patriarchy, Capitalism and History’.110 Women’s unwaged work and responsibilities go unnoticed in capitalist cultures because the discrimination and prejudices of historical narratives are ‘not only

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divided along class lines but along gender lines too’. 111 Although Mary attempts to be ‘the backbone of the family’ the daily domestic struggles and despair caused by her disintegrating family finally take their toll despite her strength of character. After a life of poverty, misery, domestic violence and loneliness, Mary finally breaks down. As a result of her ‘failure’ she is institutionalised and subsequently loses her children. Mary’s dispossession was gendered: as a woman she belonged nowhere and was a pawn in the men’s capitalist dealings. She was an escapee from the masculine-dominated mining village, a space where the bitter father despises his daughter and menacing ‘men with [...] yeasty breaths [...] watching her [...] watching her and saying nothing’ (70) encroach upon her being, making her vulnerable and exposed. Mary hopes the city will offer her a better life only to find the urban a place of struggle and conflict. Her dispossessed state echoes Virginia Woolf’s contention in *Three Guineas*:

> Our country [...] throughout the greatest part of its history has treated me as a slave; it has denied me education or any share in its possessions. “Our” country still ceases to be mine if I marry a foreigner. 112

Hence, it is possible for Frankie to have a smart suit, hat and gold cufflinks and to claim territory in ‘Frankie’s Patch’ (24). But Mary has no material possessions and no possibility of attaining a space of her own, and even her hiding places are unearthed.

With similarities to Paisley’s text in terms of male characterisation, Azzopardi’s men are, by and large, cruel, callous and dangerous. However, Frankie’s character serves to illustrate the historical, cultural and ethnic diversity of Cardiff. The Butetown community had a population of 10,000, and was ‘home to more than fifty

111 Ibid., p.229.
nationalities. Nevertheless, in fictional representations it has either been reduced to racial and class stereotyping or ignored altogether; as Jon Gower states, *The Hiding Place* depicts the ‘immigrant experience of Wales [which] has seldom been recorded in fiction’. Throughout the novel the artefacts Frankie has taken from his homeland are important and ever-present reminders of who he is and where he came from. For Frankie, static ideas relating to nation and nationhood are vital and his imagined community is symbolised by his father’s ruby ring which he wears, and which is, significantly, the only thing to be recovered from his gambling debt by which he forfeited the family business, the family home and Mary’s only material possession, her wedding dress.

Frankie’s character also provides us with an external view of Wales as seen by ‘outsiders’ prior to devolution when Wales was often perceived as nothing more than an English county, or as Berthold Schoene-Harwood puts it in a Scottish context, an ‘English satellite’. The conflation of Wales with England and the consequential substitution of ‘English’ when ‘British’ is meant is illustrated by Frankie’s answer to the following question: “‘Your first visit to Wales, is it?’ And Frankie […] nodded again and said yes, first time in England” (41). Moreover, in terms of ‘belonging’ and identity, Azzopardi challenges the idea of Wales as a monolithic nation by portraying a multi-culturally diverse society inhabited by Polish, Italian, Greek, French Algerian, North African and Irish people. As Charlotte Williams asserts in *Sugar and Slate*, there are many way of being Welsh. Azzopardi’s concern with illustrating the heterogeneous nature of Wales corresponds with the majority of Welsh writers

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examined in this thesis and situates her within the new tradition of Welsh writing in English. Kirsti Bohata argues that:

the cacophony that is the multiplicity of Welsh voices, of languages, of world views, is increasingly being embraced as central to contemporary Welsh identity. Rather than searching for “one voice” that will unify us, artists [...] are beginning to see that the multiple inheritances of Wales, the differences and diversity contained within its borders, are a great source of strength, vitality and creativity.\textsuperscript{117}

Nevertheless, although Wales is a fusion of cultures, that diversity and difference at times create uneasiness and tensions. Discourses surrounding notions of identity and belonging, inclusion and exclusion are illustrated during Dolores and her sister Fran’s conversation regarding a new boyfriend:

She [their mother] wouldn’t like it, [Fran] says. He’s a Half-Caste. I can’t sleep until I’ve asked her about half-caste. Because that’s what we are: that’s what they call us at school. I can’t see why my mother wouldn’t like Fran’s boyfriend if he’s just the same as us. (153)

The hybrid nature of Wales examined in the text is significant; the Gaucci children are called half-castes, and in terms of belonging and identity, this linguistic signifier is heavily invested with meaning. Clearly, the people who classify the Gaucci children thus are articulating the dominant discourse; significantly perhaps the name-calling occurs within the main ideological state apparatus (school) and not the subaltern community. This discourse seeks to point out difference with the intention of ‘othering’ the children. However, the concept of hybridity can be used assertively and positively as it deconstructs binary structures: it ‘breaks down the symmetry and duality of self/other, inside/outside.’\textsuperscript{118} As Homi Bhabha asserts,

\textsuperscript{117} Kirsti Bohata, ‘A Place without Boundaries: The Fiction of Christopher Meredith’, \textit{Planet}, 145 (Feb/March 2001), p.82.
\textsuperscript{118} Childs and Williams, \textit{An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory}, p.137.
the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an *internal* national culture […] based on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity […] it is the ‘inter’ – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation – the in-between space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-national-nationalist histories of the “people”. And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves.\(^{119}\)

In fact, Bhabha suggests that hybridity achieves what the dominant discourse denies: it enunciates the difference between and within cultures, and helps us to interrogate the concept of identity, subjectivity and belonging. Indeed, one of the key elements in postcolonial writing is to invalidate, or problematise ideas of ‘authentic identities’.\(^{120}\) Thus, Dolores’s innocent contemplation usefully demonstrates the complex, contradictory and paradoxical nature of Welsh cultural and social identity. Identity and nationality are fluid, ever-changing cultural constructions dependent on time, place and person. This is what *The Hiding Place* achieves: it shows that the residents of ‘Butetown […] claim identities that are both mixed race and Welsh’ and thus challenge ‘hegemonic versions of Welshness which define it as intrinsically white’.\(^{121}\) Furthermore, by locating *The Hiding Place* in the working class, multi-cultural heart of Wales’s capital and by animating the community, Azzopardi is giving a voice to the marginalised inhabitants much in the same way as Paisley, Hird and Trezise have done to their community of characters. Moreover, like Leonora Brito, Azzopardi

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\(^{119}\) Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.38.


reveals the ‘hidden history’ of Wales which has had ‘since at least the sixteenth century [...] a black presence.’

The implications (and consequences) of the politics of identity, class and gender are imperative issues in the novels of many post-devolution women writers. As Aileen Christianson and Alison Lumsden comment in their study of contemporary Scottish women writers, the classifications ‘nation’ and ‘gender’ have been complicated and critically questioned by key postcolonial theorists. Taking their premise from Bhabha, Christianson and Lumsden argue that national identities, like boundaries, are not innate but culturally, politically and economically constructed. For Azzopardi, identities – personal and social – are also unstable, problematic or indeed defiant. Near the end of the book when Dolores meets Celesta’s grown-up family, one of her sons, Louis, who has only just became acquainted with Dolores, says,

Hey, Aunty Dol, look at this.
He unbuttoned the front of his shirt and pulled it to one side.
A tattoo of a dragon on his breast. (245)

The character of Louis and his search for a sense of ‘authentic’ identity is symptomatic of the times and Azzopardi presents an important point. As a child Louis was sent to private school, presumably to distance him from the local community, but as an adult he names his (and his brother’s) café the Moonlight – after their grandfather’s (Frankie) first dockland’s venture. Furthermore, although raised in another part of the city he ‘had that quizzical timbre of the Docks’ (244). Louis ‘wanted history’(244) and it would seem that his dragon tattoo is his way of attempting to achieve this; after all it is a

potent symbol of Welsh identity and national allegiance. So it would seem that even amidst the cultural and social transformation and fortunes of contemporary Wales, a significant connection with both a family story and a community history is sought. As Bill Ashcroft argues,

The story that decides ‘what happened’ is a story that determines ‘what is’. For this reason history is of crucial importance in constructing a sense of identity [...] history has had a major role in producing a sense of being itself at a national level.  

Yet, according to Tony Bianchi, since devolution there has been an obvious shift from narratives of class and nation and this represents a ‘loss of history and therefore narrative’.  

Instead of narratives of continuity and change, loyalty and betrayal, action and consequence, we have topographies filled only with motion and its dysfunctions: infirmity, mutilation, illness, madness, confinement, disorientation, endless oscillation, paralysis and death. If history was once a metaphor for the expansion of empire (and for Wales its accommodation within that empire) we are reduced to these spaces now, in turn, metaphors for the end of national history.  

Yet, it is not a loss of history that Welsh fiction is experiencing but a re-making of it: an unearthing of lost and untold histories. Azzopardi’s text concerns itself with all of Bianchi’s concerns: continuity and change, loyalty and betrayal, action and consequence, as well as with death and illness. Azzopardi’s bleak portrayal of life in the Welsh capital is a literary rebellion; like Trezise’s text, it challenges the mythical and romanticised portraits of the Welsh by both Welsh and English writers, and it reminds us of the struggles of individual and community. Like those by Trezise, Hird and Paisley, Azzopardi’s text shows a critical awareness of the complex and at times

126 Ibid.
detrimental economic and social changes that have taken place in the peripheral nations over the last decades. And like the other writers discussed in this chapter, Azzopardi illustrates that life, then and now, is difficult and harsh for those living on the margins, especially women. Accordingly Azzopardi is one of the new generation of writers who certainly do not engage in sentimental renditions, ‘colonial complicity [or] colonial stereotyping’.127

Belonging and identity at the start of the new millennium and the new political system of power are clearly complex and challenging issues. Nevertheless, Welsh and Scottish women writers unite in their stance – Trezise, Hird, Paisley and Azzopardi demonstrate that women were and still are exploited, manipulated, and marginalised. A new political era emerged in these early years of devolution but as these texts show there is still much work to be done concerning the culture of tolerance towards gendered oppression and violence. The four texts discussed in this chapter all consider the traditional family unit as a site in which subjugated, disappointed individuals with unfulfilled desires proliferate. Linden Peach has argued that notions of family, history and community are frequently employed to further the public discourse of nationhood; however, exploring the concept of ‘nation’ through these subjects can actually serve to undermine it, exposing not a coherent nation but sites of internecine rivalry.128 The discourses and ideological formations of gender and nation that women have struggled with and challenged over the years were not immediately eliminated by devolution. Yet, despite the challenges, Hird, Trezise, Paisley and Azzopardi have all shown that a measure of self-determination and regeneration is possible.

127 Knight, A Hundred Years of Fiction, p.xii.
128 Peach, Contemporary Irish and Welsh Fiction: Gender, Desire and Power, p.13.
Chapter 5
Re-Imagining Identity, Family and Space (2002-2004)

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These in-between spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.¹

Three years after the implementation of new systems of government women writers in Wales and Scotland continued to use the family as a means with which to analyse the state of their nations as well as the condition of the ideological structure of the domestic. However, added to these concerns were issues regarding gendered identity, sexuality and the ideology of space and place. The period 2002-2004 saw a measure of cultural and social progression and change, and although this was gradual² women writers in Scotland and Wales started to reflect socio-political developments by depicting different modes of being and imagining new possibilities. For the first time ever, women in Wales attained their objective when parity was achieved in national politics.³ And although Scotland did not achieve quite the same level of gender equality, these early years of autonomy were shaped by feminist activists and women’s groups

¹ Bhabha, The Location of Culture, p.1.
² The Fawcett Society states that during the period of 2003: ‘positive measures [...] increased the number of women in Scotland and Wales in the [...] elections. Women [made] up 40% of MSPs in Scotland and exactly 50% of Welsh AMs.’ Available at: http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=49 [Accessed 1 February 2011].
who put ‘equality concerns’ and issues such as domestic violence firmly onto the political agenda.  

Women writers in Wales and Scotland were also putting domestic violence and gendered inequalities and concerns onto the agenda, and although the familial remained central, the traditional family unit became increasingly complex and problematic. For instance, Sophie Cooke’s *The Glass House* (2004) and Stevie Davies’s *Kith and Kin* (2004) illustrate the insidious menace and violence that occur within seemingly ‘ordinary’ families, while Tiffany Murray’s *Happy Accidents* (2004), Zoe Strachan’s *Negative Space* (2002) and Erica Wooff’s *Mud Puppy* (2002) examined the theme of lesbian sexuality and the ways in which political and sociocultural structures censure difference in order to maintain the status quo. The politics of language also connects the writers in this chapter although they investigate this issue in a number of quite distinct ways; while Anne Donovan’s *Buddha Da* (2003) and Erica Wooff’s novel consider how class, cultural identity and language intersect, Donovan’s analysis suggests that a cacophony of voices enables resistance to the pressures and demands of the dominant language. As in chapter four, a common feature in the texts discussed in this chapter is the writers’ employment of multi-vocal perspectives, a textual

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7 Tiffany Murray, *Happy Accidents* (London and New York: Fourth Estate, 2004). All subsequent references will be to this edition and will appear in parenthesis in the main body of the text.

8 Zoe Strachan, *Negative Space* (Basingstoke and Oxford: Picador, 2002). All subsequent references will be to this edition and appear in parenthesis in the main body of the text.

9 Erica Wooff, *Mud Puppy* (London: Women’s Press, 2002). All subsequent references will be to this edition and will appear in parenthesis in the main body of the text.

10 Anne Donovan, *Buddha Da* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2003). All subsequent references will be to this edition and will appear in parenthesis in the main body of the text.
egalitarianism which contests a dominant centralised perspective, thus enabling the periphery to speak.

The quotation from Bhabha at the start of this chapter serves to illustrate the modes of resistance writers in Wales and Scotland employ to examine the politics of spatiality and subjectivity. The writers in this chapter de-centre the narrative of the nation and extend it out to geographical spaces beyond the ‘capitals’ of Cardiff, Edinburgh and Glasgow. Thus the focus shifts to Herefordshire, Perthshire, Newport, Orkney and the Gower Peninsula. This ‘reclamation’ of previously marginalised space provides an interstitial perspective and displaces power structures. Moreover, the writers suggest that the constraining, controlling and inhibiting classifications of “class” and “gender” need to be fractured, altered and displaced and instead complex ‘figures of difference and identity’ adopted. As the authors discussed suggest, it is crucial to disengage with organising categories to enable us to come to an understanding of our diverse selves and cultures. Like Bhabha, post-devolution writers contest discourses which essentialize nationhood and identity since these define people and place in order to define boundaries and maintain the status quo. As Robert Crawford argues in a Scottish context:

it is the job of intellectuals not so much to produce further totalizing views of Scottish culture, not to define Scotland and Scottishness but to dedefine them [...] Scotland needs not the pursuit of some elusive echt Scottishness, but requires many reminders of its protean and plural past, present and future.

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12 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, p.1.
13 Robert Crawford cited in M. Wynn Thomas, Corresponding Cultures: The Two Literatures of Wales (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), p.3.
This is exactly what the writers in this chapter, and in the thesis as a whole, offer: a range of representations pertaining to the ever-changing, diverse, heterogeneous past, present and futures of Wales and Scotland.

The ideology of identity has been at the core of our western culture at least since Enlightenment philosophers enquired into its constitution. In contemporary Wales and Scotland the concept is no less urgent, as Scottish poet Jackie Kay has asserted: ‘nothing matters more than who we are in the world, where we have been and where we are going. The issue of identity is at the heart of our society and involves everyone.’

It is this statement, or quest, that connects the writers discussed in this chapter, and although there are, needless to say, differences within their exploration of identity, the issue remains central for both Welsh and Scottish writers. The authors examine a range of concerns that impact upon identity and subjectivity; amongst other things, they explore gendered oppression, place, dispossession, death and sexuality. Each critically examines the regulatory structures which contain and restrain female achievement and agency. Their creative representations and analyses of nation and community, and how their protagonists try to make sense of their environments, provide us with a basis for a feminist, as well as a postcolonial investigation. These are defiant writers – they refuse to accept patriarchally-imposed uniformity and ‘normality’, instead challenging, changing, conflicting and resisting through their creative endeavours. Davies, Wooff and Strachan explore the politics of identity and they do so by centring non-heterosexual identity, so that those who are often peripheral, immaterial and irrelevant become the focus. What is important here is that the writers make lesbianism ordinary.

and familiar. These writers illustrate through their narratives that to be ‘gay and Scottish [or Welsh are] not mutually exclusive conditions’. Murray, Donovan and Cooke position adolescent females at the centre of their narratives thus giving the often seen but less heard voices validity and power. Understanding culture and society through these young women provides a different perspective on the effects of the structures which constitute selfhood and nation.

Strachan’s novel, *Negative Space*, as its name suggests, concerns itself with the ideology of spatiality. In artistic terms, the negative space is the space that surrounds the subject and provides meaning and form; in this case, the spaces and places which classify, define and govern the subject. Strachan’s protagonist is contained and classified by the places she inhabits and her search for a sense of self and agency begins with a journey – a moving away and beyond spatial confines. As the protagonist, Stella, who remains symbolically nameless until the narrative’s conclusion, states: ‘If Alex had said we had to walk to Orkney I don’t think I’d have been fazed, just as long as we were going away’ (1). Her move from Glasgow (once the second city of the ‘empire’) to the North Sea wilderness between the Scottish Highlands and Scandinavia enables Stella to escape the limitations of the Scottish urban landscape and examine the ideological structures of space, place and what Katie Gramich refers to as ‘ethnoscapes’. This re-location to ‘a place that’s nearer the Arctic Circle than it is to London’ (193) decentres the hegemonic paradigms that constrain and contain Stella, thus allowing her to scrutinise the productions of her culture. It is only through this act of distanced scrutiny that it is made possible for Stella to imagine new possibilities and

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ways of being, as she says: ‘not so long ago I couldn’t imagine ever being content or at ease again’ (228). This geopolitical decentring also provides Strachan with the opportunity to examine the plurality of Scotland and its diverse and ancient histories: Orkney, as the protagonist remarks, ‘has three thousand years of history’ (231).

*Negative Space* concerns the narrator’s struggle for selfhood having hitherto been defined by both her relationship to Glasgow and her relationship with her recently deceased brother, Simon. He and Stella had ‘a strange synergy between [them]’ (22) and after his death Stella could not comprehend ‘being alive in his absence’ (60). The story of Stella’s dislocation begins when she wakes up hungover in a Glasgow flat unable to remember anything of the night before: ‘Oh God, I’m the freak, I’m the person that nobody knows who turns up at a party, makes an arse of themselves and won’t go away’ (6). Since Simon’s death Stella has searched for anonymity in alcohol, feeling ‘the pressure of familiarity’ (92) and has become obsessive about scrubbing ‘her body back into a blank canvas’ (78). Her sense of despair also leads her to seek distraction in meaningless and at times violent heterosexual sex: behaviour that suggests the devalued subject’s need to expunge her selfhood.

Power, influence and control as they impact on female identity, subjectivity and sexuality in this post-devolution Scottish space/place are central to Strachan’s novel. Stella’s inability to construct a sense of self and her increasing alienation from her environment is illustrated though the visual metaphor of entrapment. Stella is ‘a girl in a bubble [and] people [are] constructing me in their minds’ (105). The bubble image is reminiscent of both Sylvia Plath’s bell jar and Rachel Trezise’s goldfish bowl, suggesting that women’s sense of containment and isolation in a hostile environment traverses the spatial and temporal.
As in several of the novels discussed in this chapter, there is a spectral sense in *Negative Space*, a haunting of the past. Strachan’s story about identity and trying to bury the past in the hope of reclaiming a sense of self and thus securing a future could be read as analogous to Scotland itself: a ‘narration of the nation’. This is a place hitherto defined by ‘British’ hegemonic binary structures: coloniser and colony, state and nation, past and present. Although all the writers in this chapter confront dichotomous configurations, Strachan examines and criticises issues that are specific to Scotland’s history and culture. Near the beginning of the book Stella stumbles out of a tenement flat and onto the main thoroughfare of Argyll Street where the gigantic graffiti on a wall thunders ‘PRODDYLAND’ (7). This mundane text on an urban wall attempts to lay claim to a particular city space in a run-down part of the city. Yet what is interesting about this example of Scottish sectarianism is that the writing is ‘faded’ and as the protagonist walks off ‘she mutters “fuck off”’(7). It is worth remembering that this essentialist aspect of Scottish identity is historically situated in the union of Scotland and England. As Ross Poole argues:

In eighteenth-century England/Britain, a major common element was Protestantism. The expulsion of James II constituted England as a Protestant nation, and this was an important unifying element when England and Scotland came together as Great Britain. Protestantism was a signifier of Britishness, and those who were Catholic were for that reason not full members of the British nation.\(^\text{18}\)

However, in this post-devolution era the fading graffiti that provokes Stella’s anger is suggestive of transformation and an escape from polarizing structures of the past, something that is not so strongly suggestive in Hird’s text as discussed in the previous chapter.

\(^{17}\) i.e. land belonging to Protestants.
As in many of the other texts discussed in this thesis, Strachan’s narrative examines the relationship between space, place and identity. Like Azzopardi and Stevie Davies (discussed later in this chapter), Strachan employs the idea of spatial-temporal movement to allow her character to develop an understanding of the self. Bakhtin’s chronotope is useful here as it refers to the central connectedness of temporal and spatial interaction in literature and seeks to show how time/space have been represented in different cultural landscapes,

In the literally artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one [...] Time [...] thickens [and] becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history.\(^{19}\)

Bakhtin suggests that time and space are interdependent and inseparable and this enables an examination into how people, place and the temporal function in relation to one and other.\(^{20}\) In *Negative Space* time and space are fluid, moving backwards and forwards as the protagonist recalls the events and localities that led her to the present self. The chronotope of urban/rural has different consequences for the protagonist. In Glasgow, Stella is a life model and although her occupation implies self-exposure, in fact her nakedness obscures the inner self and keeps her distanced and isolated; as Stella says, ‘Life modelling isn’t that passive, you get a chance to act, to pretend to be someone else’ (168). It is an apt reflection for someone who cannot, at this point, be ‘Stella’. Her apparent submissiveness is further commented upon when Stella is in Orkney: one of the women artists remarks to her ‘it is funny you always being the object never the agent’ (238). This acquiescence is suggestive of her state of being, a point Audre Lorde makes when discussing oppressed people’s powerlessness; she refers

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to them as ‘the dehumanized human.’ Lorde states, ‘to survive [the oppressed] have always been watchers, to become familiar with the language and manners of the oppressors, even sometimes adopting them for some illusion of protection.’ The protagonist’s passivity is indicative of her own lack of subjectivity and her inability to have absolute and unconditional selfhood; yet it is also indicative of women’s continued lack of voice and agency in contemporary Scotland. So, although Aileen Christianson argued in 2002 that women writers were now able to produce creative work ‘from a confident assumption that being female and Scottish are culturally positive’, for Stella, being female in this geopolitical space is markedly negative.

Christianson agrees that women are ‘also still writing out of the inequalities of women’s positions’ and it is this positionality, ideologically founded and grounded, that Strachan examines. In the city-space we see how gendered identity intersects with place and self-determination; in Glasgow, the protagonist is constituted and controlled by social and cultural influences and institutions which impinge upon her subjectivity. She is merely a body, ‘just a thing, a big chunk of flesh and bone’ (169) and she uses sex as a way of ‘stop[ping] the gaping emptiness inside’ (48). However, she is often mistreated as men habitually ‘reduc[e] [her] to the physical’ (134). Consequently, her lack of agency means she becomes the ‘primary target for the operation of power’. Furthermore, in this space/place the protagonist becomes occupied territory which is

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21 Audre Lorde, ‘Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference’ in McClintock, Mufti and Shohat, eds, Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives, p.374. Lorde refers to oppressed peoples as black women, black men, white women, lesbians, and old people.
22 Ibid.
24 Ibid., p.77.
suggestive of the problematic relationship between the centre and margin, for as Jan Jindy Pettman states: ‘Colonial power made use of certain ideas of women and sexuality to construct and police both women’s bodies and racialised boundaries’. This policing of women and female sexuality is historical in nature and evident in Wales in the 1847 publication of the *Blue Books Report* (discussed in chapter three). In contemporary Scotland, female sexuality is still socioculturally and institutionally disapproved of as Stella’s visit to the doctors for a morning-after pill illustrates: ‘she [the nurse] looked at me as though I was unfit to possess reproductive organs if I couldn’t keep better control of them’ (130).

Both concrete and ideological control of women has, of course, been the subject of numerous feminist analyses, and this is an issue explored in all of the texts discussed in this thesis. Like Azzopardi in *The Hiding Place*, Strachan employs the Gothic to illustrate gendered control, anxiety and estrangement experienced by women. Stella’s flat takes on disturbing and shadowy qualities, ‘the carpet [...] festering almost, like it’s rotting before my eyes’ (120) and it is the place where ‘Simon haunts me’ (121). Azzopardi’s and Strachan’s use of Gothic tropes connects and historically situates them with pre-devolution women writers such as Galloway and Jones. Moreover, *Negative Space* is positioned within the tradition of the Scottish Gothic with its allusions to the doppelganger, a device famously utilized by nineteenth-century Scottish writers James Hogg and R.L Stevenson to examine the apparent split identity of the ‘Scottish’ character. Here Strachan’s doppelganger follows the grief-stricken protagonist around, causing psychological unease and impeding her movements:

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I’m aware of something right on the edge of my peripheral vision. Not something, someone. Whenever I look he disappears, even if I try to creep up on him slowly with my eyes, making no sudden movements. He spends the day haunting me, forever behind me or round the corner, I’m stuck in a game of hide and seek that I’m not going to win, and I don’t even want to play. But I can’t rid myself of this doppelganger dogging my every footstep, and what’s more of course I want him to be there. Under my breath I count to ten, coming to get you this time. (15)

Unlike Glasgow, which offers only entrapment and fear, Orkney offers light, space and liberation for Stella. The sensation of physical space is significant, and through Strachan’s persistent use of the word ‘space’, the reader gets a sense of the ‘exposed’ and ‘isolated’ island; her emphasis on the skies and stars – the ‘huge sky’, ‘the stars […] so bright’ (212) – creates the sense of an infinite expanse stretching out and beyond cultural and material confines. Stella’s wanderings amongst the beautiful tempestuous elements enable her to come to an understanding of history, space and subjectivity and give ‘a deep contact with the past’.27 It is in Orkney, a place ‘heavy with history’(222), where Stella symbolically buries Simon amongst the ancient standing stones, that she is able to recover a sense of self. Strachan’s use of the rural Scottish landscape articulates a ‘fundamental’ spiritual connection with the Scottish topography and its ancient past and in this way has echoes of earlier Scottish novels. However, Strachan’s work does not essentialise Scottish identity in the manner of some early twentieth century writers who asserted that tradition and continuity defined us and that Scottish people’s authentic identities (and destinies) were inherently (therefore racially) situated within the Scottish landscape.28 Rather, as in the negative space of the artist’s canvas, Orkney is where other things are not present; the space around Stella,

28 Ibid. p.723.
where Vikings, Scots, Celts, Picts and Norwegians have all laid claim to the land (and therefore the concept of a historically continuous tradition is absent) liberates her from identities imposed upon by others in an attempt to locate her and construct her in accordance with societal ‘norms’. Orkney is the liminal space which facilitates rethinking in ‘the realm of the beyond’. It is in the interstices where identities can be restructured or expunged; they are never predetermined and fixed. Indeed, the liminal space is a hybrid space which draws our attention to how cultural meanings and hence identities, are constructed and staged.

Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation.

Significantly, it is in the liminal space of Orkney that Stella rejects heteronormative structures and consequently finds a profound physical connection with a new female lover, Iram.

Indeed, the concept of space lends itself to both feminist and postcolonial analysis for, as Sara Mills argues, many feminists ‘consider the confinement of women to be the determining factor in women’s sense of their position within spatial frameworks’. Similarly, Jane Jacob asserts that the social construction of space was crucial for imperial acquisition and control. Furthermore, Jacobs argues that the city was a constituent part of the imperial project: ‘it was in outpost cities that the spatial

29 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, p.1.
30 Ibid., p.2.
order of imperial imaginings was rapidly and deftly realised.\textsuperscript{33} For Stella, the spatial entity of the city is the source of displacement and loss of identity, and it is where agency and autonomy are suppressed. In Glasgow she is used to ‘people distorting me to suit themselves’ (108). Glasgow also illustrates the gendered nature of constructed spaces and how power and discourse operate within those spaces. It is significant that the topography of Glasgow is represented through masculine/male spaces: the public bars, the male artist’s studio, McColl’s flat (Simon’s friend with whom Stella has a drunken, violent sexual encounter) and Simon’s flat. It is in Glasgow that Stella asks, ‘who is this person that I’ve become?’ (123); it is the place where her body is objectified by lovers and artists and where she exists only through Simon’s haunting presence. It is only by vacating the negative space of the city that Stella is able to detach from that subordinated position. In Orkney she realises that living is a tangible option: ‘My own death [...] I am not thinking of that so much now’ (231).

Moving away from the domesticated ‘negative’ space and gendered conventions by which she has been constrained enables her to start thinking why she ‘avoided [...] identification of self with body [...] why I’ve felt so dislocated’ (272). Orkney’s ‘negative’ space is a peripheral place where she feels like a person:

I’d thought before we came over to Orkney that it might be odd, spending so much time in all-female company, but until now, doing this stuff with Alex, I had felt less rather than more female being here. Less of a woman, more of a person’. (257)

By contrast, the city space (and with it power and control) belongs to the male: Stella sees ‘all the skinny little girls [...] terrified of taking up too much space’ (199) suggesting that in twenty-first century the construction of gender still adheres to a ‘model

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p.4.
of femininity […] that [suggests] real women are thin, nearly invisible’. 34 Indeed, as Jane Evans Braziel and Kathleen LeBresco assert, the ‘ideal feminine body is small. A woman is taught early to contain herself, to keep arms and legs close to her body and take up as little space as possible’. 35

*Negative Space* ends with a mixture of hope, uncertainty and optimism. Having returned from Orkney, Stella again leaves Glasgow and travels south. She has come to an understanding that moving further than her immediate spatial and social confines, looking outward and beyond, enables personal progress. It is during her train journey that Stella decides to reconnect with Iram, her Orkney lover, who is based in London. And although the protagonist has ‘a niggling concern’ (291) the novel ends with Stella dreaming of renewal and rejuvenation: ‘We’re surrounded, the seeds [from a rose bay willow] lodging in our hair and brushing all furry against our hands’ (295). The drifting rose bay willow seeds, a flower frequently found in derelict urban spaces, offers a positive image of rebirth for the city in this post-devolution landscape. Aileen Christianson argues that contemporary Scottish women’s writing offers not closure, but infinite opportunities and possibilities. 36 Strachan’s conclusion undoubtedly and positively does this.

The politics of identity, space and place are also central to Erica Wooff’s novel *Mud Puppy* (2002). Wooff’s novel disrupts hierarchal dichotomies of centre and margin and urges us to embrace a world of infinite possibilities. This is a lesbian love story which tells the story of Daryl, an artist, Ani, a young petrol-pump attendant and an immigrant American salamander, the mud puppy, found in the river Usk. Of course, the

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narrative is more than a tale of a three lost souls: it is an exploration of the possibilities which a post-devolutionary Wales can offer in terms of concepts of identity and subjectivity – national, sexual and gendered. It is also a narrative that examines borders and peripheries, ideas of being rootless and ideas of belonging. Located in Newport, ‘just fifteen miles over the Severn bridge’ from England (5), the borderlands setting is significant; it is an in-between place, ‘a transitional place of becoming, a state of flux between two different states of being.’

As Daryl explains:

Newport is a border town, its loyalties split down the middle. Yes, the Welsh flag flies from the churches and public buildings. Yes, Newport has two seats in the Welsh Assembly. Yes, the current Archbishop of Wales resides in Newport. But although the road signs are all bilingual, English is usually on top. The county name oscillates between Gwent and Monmouthshire. (92)

As Daryl suggests, Wales has no ‘fixed horizontal nation-space’. Rather, it is a liminal space where cultural and linguistic differences are played out. As a result of its bilingual culture, Wales is, as the poet Gillian Clarke has argued, a place of entrenched tensions: ‘There’s no moment of life in Wales that hasn’t got an edge.’

This ‘edge’ is illustrated in a conversation between the two main protagonists – Daryl who spoke Welsh as a first language and Ani, who has been brought up monoglot English. So although ‘Welsh speakers are the in thing these days’ (92) Daryl has to struggle to get Ani to understand the value of the indigenous language, ‘You can’t not have Welsh spoken in the capital […] It’s the principle’ (103, 104). For Ani, Welsh is ‘gobbledegook […] all just a big wank’ (103, 105).

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38 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.142.
The narrative begins, like Strachan’s, with travelling away from the centre. Daryl, who moved to London after discovering her father lied about her mother’s death (suicide rather than a car accident), decides to return to south Wales to ‘make a fresh start’ (55). In a similar way to Strachan, Wooff suggests that time, place and space are fundamentally connected, and the spatial is intrinsically linked to power relations. In London, Daryl feels restricted, ‘All my time and space [were taken over] [I] failed to notice [my] horizon growing flatter [...] Until it bec[a]me [my] prison, a prison of time and space’ (p.55); however, in Wales, there is a sense of freedom as ‘the boundaries are all blurred’ (94). While in London Daryl tried to distance herself from Wales: she has tried to ‘shake […] off’ (5) her roots; nevertheless her ‘Welshness’ ‘sticks’ and after nine years of exile Daryl acknowledges, ‘we all have to stop running at some point’ (43). Daryl decides ‘to come back home. Back to the land of my fathers. Back to the land where they understand about roots’ (56). Daryl’s sense of nationhood and belonging is complex and thus creates conflict and tensions. Whilst in London she did not ‘dump [her] accent [to] blend right in’ (93) and this positioned her in the colonial discursive mode as Other: an unsophisticated provincial. Refusal to detach linguistically from Wales meant humiliation and ridicule, and as Daryl says, ‘shit like that is hard to keep fighting on a daily basis’ (93). Nevertheless, rejection of the dominant culture undermines that culture’s sense of superiority. However, while Daryl has signified her cultural difference and allegiance to her ‘roots’, problems and complications still arise. Daryl cannot just be Daryl; she has had to use her ‘Welshness’ with ‘a capital “W”’(5) and as such London became, for her, the site of performative Welshness. She recounts that

Being Welsh has become my special feature. My trademark. Being Welsh is very sexy at the moment. At least a certain type of Welsh is sexy. You know

Although Daryl, who is now located in Wales, informs us that she performed this identity ‘to my own advantage’, (93) her interaction with London illustrates that the Welsh are still constructed as different from the Anglocentric norm.40 Like Sarah Vaughan, ‘the Celtic Siren’ in Brito’s short story (Brito, 14), Daryl’s performance resonates with the negative associations of the nineteenth and early twentieth century colonial constructions of identity when, as Ruth McElroy argues, the Welsh were constructed and normalized ‘as exotically and amusingly different’.41 However, what is different here is that Daryl’s performance is intentional and her description of the locals as ‘the sophisticated London public’ (56) drips with irony. So although that ‘exotic’ tag still surfaces, Daryl is aware that this is a ‘version’ of herself and she understands her ‘foreign’ identity is produced by the hegemonic centre.

Homi Bhabha has argued that because identity is discursively produced it can be restructured and modified and thus can have transformative powers, especially for those in-between or on the borders. Yet, as Daryl’s frustration shows, the dominant culture marginalises, distorts and misrepresents:

I wish I had a pound for every Londoner who’s told me about the time they went to Wales on holiday. How they walked into a pub and everyone was speaking English, but the minute they open their mouths [...] the locals switched to Welsh [...] And then there’s all the people who snigger at the way I say saucepan and toothbrush...But the ones that really make me so angry I want to stamp on their heads until their brains shoot out of their ears, are the jokers who hawk and spit at your feet when you approach. ‘That’s how you say hello in Welsh’, they say. (93)

40 Bohata, Postcolonialism Revisited, p.30.
However, what is most interesting about this passage is that Daryl finishes it by inverting the colonial notion of the uncultivated native by referring to the Londoners as ‘baboons’ (93). Hence, Daryl not only resists the dominant culture’s constructs and values, she remonstrates against the binary structures which impose the inferior/superior dichotomy.

Although London is the site for much of Daryl’s adult experience, this locale is only represented in the novel by her brief reflections; thereby denying space or voice to England’s hegemonic centre and challenging its imagined cultural centrality. In London Daryl was made conscious of her identity as ‘Welsh’, yet this marker signifies nothing beyond being ‘not one of us’: ‘not English’. One of the main considerations in Wooff’s novel is her illustration and contestation of the notion that identity is innate or uncomplicated, or indeed that there is a Welsh homogeneity. Some of the tenets of a supposed singular ‘authentic’ Welsh identity are challenged through the character of Daryl’s Anglican father, Rhodri, who stands for tradition and stability:

The Vicarage, is exactly the same as it was nine years ago […] Everything exactly the same […] Downstairs I can hear Dad in the kitchen talking to the dog like he always does, following the same early morning ritual he always has. (19-20)

However, Rhodri is not a ‘chapel’ person, which is commonly associated with ‘authentic’ Welsh identity. As Andrew Thompson suggests, historically the chapel was the principal organizing standard in the sociocultural life of Welsh people:

the publicity given to the intermittent religious revivals, and the growing recognition outside of Wales of the collective strength of Welsh Nonconformity, all served to reinforce a self image of the Welsh as a Nonconformist nation.42

42 Andrew Thompson, ‘Coming to Terms with the Past: Religion and Identity in Wales’, Seminar Bristol University [Online]. Available from:
So although Nonconformity became closely aligned to ideas of ‘Welshness’ Daryl’s father illustrates the diversity of religious life and identity in modern Wales.

In contrast to Rhodri’s ‘Welshness’, Ani (an inhabitant of Newport and Daryl’s lover) and her family, and in particular her step-father Keith, provides us with yet another version of contemporary Wales. This family symbolises connectivity to neo-colonialism and the hub of late-capitalist consumer culture. Ani’s increasingly elaborate fantasies psychologically transport her to America and Keith, who is ‘the spitting image of Elvis’ (47), performs professionally as ‘The King’, one of the most significant and revered of all USA’s cultural icons. The influence of American culture on this modern Welsh working-class family is evident. However, although Wooff argues for an acceptance of diverse Welsh identities, Ani’s family’s willing assimilation into the values of capitalism and neo-colonial power may not be so positive. The family takes pleasure in garish material possessions and consuming in excess: as Ani says, ‘Mam and Keith […] don’t understand the concept of less is more’ (47). Nevertheless, this family’s relationship with America can be read as a part of the south Walian tradition of looking outwards to the wider world and America in particular.43

Certainly what is clear is that in Mud Puppy notions of a traditional identity exist alongside a newer more globally-influenced subjectivity. Both Ani and Daryl reject colonial and phallocentric concepts of female identity, thus creating for themselves different ways of being. Whilst in England Daryl constructs her identity to suit the circumstances and Ani, in Newport, dreams of leaving her world and re-invents herself

http://www.bristol.ac.uk/sociology/leverhulme/thompson_seminar.pdf [Accessed 21 November 2010]

and her life. Ani does not ‘belong’ and fantasizes about re-locating to ‘London to be famous’ (85). She weaves stories and factual events together until reality and fantasy become inseparable. Bakhtin suggests that when space and time are represented equally in a novel they are both ‘concerned with points of crisis [...] turning points and catastrophe’\(^{44}\) and this is true of both Wooff’s and Strachan’s texts. However, in Wooff’s novel, place, identity, spatiality and temporality are intertwined to the point of absolute chaos and disorder which suggests a disturbance of Ani’s interior space. Yet, it is not so much that Ani is ‘inventing all these strange people [...] saying mad things’ (202) as an element of the discourse of displacement, rather Ani’s actions are also subversive. She is concealing and obscuring the borders and breaking the rules and this is very much what Wooff’s novel is about: as Daryl repeatedly says, ‘the boundaries are all blurred’ (94). Further, Ani is also attempting to resolve who she is by consciously creating her own identity: she joins a workshop which teaches her ‘how to walk like a man’ (85) and be ‘loud and tak[e] up space...you know, like men do on buses’ (105). Ani’s comment concerning the politics of space echoes Stella’s in Strachan’s novel, where she expresses bewilderment at ‘all the skinny little girls [...] terrified of taking up too much space’ (Strachan, 199). Indeed, both Wooff and Strachan powerfully and effectively argue that space, place and gender intersect in power structures and relations. Whilst Stella seeks space and succour away from the city, Ani, financially restricted to Newport, refuses to accept spatial and sociocultural confines. With her short cropped hair, drainpipe trousers and men’s cowboy boots she constructs a different Ani; her ‘masculine’ performance is defiant and her resistance to the ‘norms’ suggests Judith Butler’s argument that ‘there is no gender identity behind

the expressions of gender; [...] identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results”. 45

Identity and gender are cultural constructs which the fragmented Ani can occupy, employ and practise for her specific needs. Although Ani is attempting to circumvent the binary view of gender by opening up new ways of being, and finding new possibilities for lesbian subjectivity, her estrangement from both self and Wales – her fantasies concern a parallel world in New York – finally takes its toll on her when she attempts suicide by jumping into the river Usk. Ani’s attempted escape from societal constraints mirrors that of the mud puppy who is ‘cooped up in some poxy old fishtank’ (204) in a Cardiff science laboratory. Like Ani, Daryl also rejects societal constructions of gender, identity and sexuality. When she tells her friend Louise that she is gay, Louise says: ‘but you wear skirts, make-up. You don’t look like a…’ (97) Louise’s reaction suggests two things: firstly, her perception of lesbian identity is constructed by socio-political ideologies and discourses which assert (as a way of identifiable containment) that lesbians all dress in the same ‘butch’ style. And secondly, because Louise’s utterance trails off it suggests that the actuality of lesbian identity in Newport, or indeed Wales, is still unspeakable.

In addition to subverting the structures that produce gendered identity and subjectivity, Wooff also considers the structures that formulate our ideas of nationality and nationhood. As a result of discovering the mud puppy, Daryl becomes known to a visiting US businessman who commissions her to design a statue to celebrate ‘our two great nations’ (136). The tensions between the businessman and Daryl are clear from the start. When he comments that the restaurant they are dining in is ‘So English’, Daryl

45 Butler, Gender Trouble, p.25.
retorts: ‘Wales. This is Wales, not England’ (137). And while the American envisages a ‘civic monument’ and ‘nothing too elaborate’, Daryl ‘want[s] a whole new world of possibilities’ (229). Her sculpture, unbeknown to the businessman, is a ‘solid life-sized dragon shaped out of [...] river mud’ (276) created to flow from its platform back into the Usk, ‘back to the beginning’ (276), like the mud puppy itself.

Through Daryl and her artistic vision, Wooff sets out to deconstruct traditional assumptions about Wales. Daryl has been asked to construct a ‘permanent’ (275) representative image of the nation, an image from which, because of her gender and sexuality, she has been excluded. So for the unveiling, amongst the local dignitaries and the American businessman, Daryl arrives at the waterfront in a ‘blue velvet suit [...] dress shirt [...] new crepe sole shoes [...] I cut my hair, slick it back into a pompadour, shape the hair cutting into side burns with gum, paint on a pencil-thin moustache’ (271). Her performative rebellion against heteronormative and gendered constructs deconstructs masculine/feminine configurations which have been at the foundation of western society’s power structures.

The final page of Wooff’s text makes a significant and unequivocal statement about the old Wales – symbolised by dragons. She suggests the need for the myths surrounding Wales and Welsh identity to disappear along with other outdated ideas of nationalism, nationhood and gender-restrictive identity. Like Daryl’s mud-dragon, Wooff suggests identity is fluid and transitory. As the mud-dragon collapses back into the Usk mud, Wooff’s dissolving image implies that the system of images and beliefs which a society constructs to maintain, preserve and validate its own sense of being should also disappear. The dragon symbolises a traditional Wales, but it is a fictional representation constructing a fictional Wales: an ‘invented’ idea of nationhood. This is
a new era, a new receptive country that needs to reflect new ways of being, as Daryl says: ‘Isn’t that what evolution is? The creation and recreation of new realities? [...] I guess it depends on your definition of reality [...] And the miracle is that we can occupy more than one level at any one time and in any one space’ (263). Wales, as Steve Blandford argues, has to ‘seek [...] to reflect its fluid, flexible and evolving new post-devolutionary identity.’ After the ‘mud dragon [...] wash[es] away [...] Back to the beginning. Back to the end’ (276), Daryl contemplates a new Wales:

a world of constant movement, change. A world without boundaries and borders, rules or controls. A world of pure energy where you are free to choose between independence and interaction, where you can create any choice, live out all possibilities. (277)

Like Wooff’s novel, Anne Donovan’s *Buddha Da* (2003) is concerned with society’s ideological divisions and restrictions which limit and regulate identity and subjectivity. As argued in the preceding chapter, both Welsh and Scottish women writers post-devolution are reconstructing masculinities as well as femininities in opposition to normative gendered expectations. Furthermore, in terms of opening up new possibilities for non-dominant modes of representation of the nation and nationhood, Donovan offers us ‘non-phallic masculinity.’ Devolution is a liberating process which, according to Berthold Schoene, enables new ways of being; it offers us a ‘devolved’ masculinity which is a positive force facilitating a rejection of traditional forms of aggressive and domineering masculinities. Moreover, according to Carole Jones, ‘the changing state

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46 Blandford, inaugural professorial lecture, *Film, Drama and the Break-up of Britain*, n.p.
of the nation creates opportunities for transforming our idea of national identity. This is indeed evident in both Wooff and Donovan’s novels.

*Buddha Da* is set in contemporary Glasgow and relates the stories of the working-class McKenna family whose domestic life fractures when the father decides to leave Catholicism to become a Buddhist. The non-hierarchal tripartite novel employs first-person narratives giving a voice and perspective to each of the characters: Anne-Marie, the twelve year old daughter, Liz, the mother and Jimmy, the ‘Buddha Da’. Donovan uses a mixture of comedy and pathos to examine gendered restrictions, the ideology of nationhood and the rejection of sociocultural conventions. The author and her characters repudiate an innate, and hence stereotypical, Scottishness; instead the novel suggests diversity and multiplicity for a progressive contemporary society. The story begins with Anne Marie describing her father:

> Ma Da’s a nutter. Radio rental. He’d dae anything for a laugh so he wid; went doon the shops wi a perra knickers on his heid, tellt the wifie next door he’d won the lottery and were flittin tae Barbados, but that wis daft stuff compared tae whit he’s went and done noo. He’s turnt intae a Buddhist. (1)

From the outset Donovan introduces the reader into the thematic concerns of her fiction: language, class, religion, and gendered sociocultural expectations. And like many of her contemporaries, Donovan’s use of Glaswegian vernacular is uncompromising: there is no standard English authorial voice translating the action for the reader. This is an important political point: Donovan is asserting the right to use and realistically illustrate her ‘own spirit’; her language and her culture and hence resist cultural hegemony.

Nevertheless, Donovan’s cultural representations have been criticised; for instance,

journalist Alan Docherty argued that in order to allay the book’s ‘significant’ problem Donovan’s characters should converse in the same linguistic registers as the (still) dominant culture, regardless of geographical location:

Novels like Buddha Da should carry an advisory warning: readers may find the language in this book unintelligible, a significant problem with Buddha Da – many readers won’t understand the language the characters talk in. The book’s reliance on Glaswegian vernacular will be off-putting to anyone who hasn’t spent a little time in Scotland.52

Docherty’s argument that Donovan’s novel is ‘unintelligible’ smacks of English cultural imperialism, or as Edouard Glissant would say, it illustrates ‘the universalizing force that [...] reduces everything to “the same.”’53 For Donovan, the novel had to authentically reflect her own culture: ‘I feel my work is very Scottish and that’s important to me’.54 As well as a resistance strategy Donovan’s stance makes Scottish voices and culture audible; an important approach in postcolonial terms because, as Glissant argues, it allows

people who yesterday inhabited the hidden side of earth [...] to assert themselves in the face of a total world culture. If they do not assert themselves they deprive the world of a part of itself.55

As in many of the Scottish and Welsh novels discussed in this thesis, language, the ideology of accents and linguistic stereotyping, are key concerns in Donovan’s text. For instance, whilst on his first Buddhist retreat, Jimmy has a conversation regarding meditation with the Rinpoche and later reflects: ‘there wis sumpn smarmy aboot him ah

54 Anne Donovan cited by Rosemary Goring, ‘She talking our language now. Reverting to the mother tongue has brought out Anne Donovan’s best work’, The Herald, Saturday 4 January 2003, p.14
didnae like. Mibbe it wis his English accent […] he just got right up ma nose’ (32).

Jimmy is self-conscious about his own Glaswegian working-class accent and how it has been denigrated as the language of the uneducated savage. This is illustrated in a conversation with one of the other retreatees, Barbara from Edinburgh:

‘You’re from Glasgow?’ Barbara asks
Jimmy replies: ‘And me wi ma posh voice on’. (32)

Jimmy’s linguistic self-consciousness is not dissimilar to Daryl’s in Mud Puppy, although Daryl’s linguistic denigration is not necessarily class-based and occurs when she is outside her own nation. Furthermore, the ridicule Daryl experienced produced anger rather than embarrassment. Jimmy’s discomfort with his ‘inferior’ accent is a consequence of colonial ideology which, according to Beveridge and Turnbull, ‘expresses the middle-class English prejudice that Scottish speech (and in particular Scottish working-class speech) is unrefined and defective’.56 Further on in the book, Jimmy is walking through Glasgow’s Botanic Gardens and reflects on the voices he can hear around him:

Ah could hear voices comin closer […] Loud and clear, a voice that demanded you listened tae it, you couldnae tune it oot. Confident, they voices, they English voices. Mibbe she wasnae English right enough. Loads of times you thought they were English and they turned oot tae be Scottish but went tae private schools. (281)

Again, Jimmy deliberates on the structure and function of language, the differences between accents and the way in which they are perceived in a class-based society. Jimmy’s initial reaction to the ‘confident’ voice is that it is English. This supposition relates to David McCrone’s argument that ‘the narrative of class in Scotland is one in which issues of national identity play out across class,’ and this, he suggests, is

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56 Beveridge and Turnbull, The Eclipse of Scottish Culture, p.12.
undoubtedly linked to the ‘role of the Anglicised lairds’.57 Indeed, as Murray Watson argues, the socio-political situation has meant there has been a ‘blurring of English and middle class status’ in Scotland.58 McCrone’s and Watson’s arguments correlate with Donovan’s concerns, the prevalent belief that the ‘posh’ voice is not ‘authentically’ Scottish because Scotland is both internally and externally imagined as a solely working-class nation. Although this is a point that I would argue is specific to Scotland and differs to some extent from the situation in Wales, there are some similar divisions in Wales, especially in geographic terms. Indeed, according to Jane Aaron, ‘the blurring of English and middle class status’ does have similar divisions in Wales: it used to be the norm in Wales prior to industrialisation that English was the language of the land-owning classes and Welsh of the peasants, but with industrialisation, English became the language of the working class. It is difficult for the people in north-west Wales to recognize this: they still connect the English language with the middle classes, while some south Walians see Welsh as signifying middle class.59

Although Donovan shares certain literary features with fellow Scottish writers in general, and Glaswegian writers in particular, with regards to employing the demotic as a creative tool, what is important and key about Donovan’s text is that the language serves as a background to her narrative exploration of a diverse and developing Scotland. This is in contrast to Paisley’s Not for Glory, analysed in chapter four, where the storyline and characters are secondary to the use of Scots. In Donovan’s novel Scotland’s multicultural plurality is mainly illustrated through Anne Marie and her

58 Ibid.
59 Jane Aaron, verbal communication, April 2011.
friends. On one occasion Anne Marie is in her friend Nisha’s house when Nisha’s
brother, Gurpreet, walks in on the two youngsters playing his records:

He started speakin even lower, in a language ah dinnae unnerstaund but mixed up wi English words […]  
[Anne Marie asks Nisha] Do yous speak Punjabi in the hoose then?  
No really. When ma da was alive we used tae – he wanted us tae speak the mother tongue – but Kamaljit and me just speak English most of the time.  
Even my ma doesnae really speak tae us a lot. But Gurpreet likes tae mix it especially when he’s DJin […] Thinks it makes him a bit different fae the others’. (102)

Gurpreet’s amalgamation of languages and cultures into a hybrid embraces diversity, and challenges both cultural and linguistic hegemony (in relation to both Scots and English).  
And his playful and defiant performance rejects any idea of an ‘authentic’ language. It is suggestive of Edouard Glissart’s concept of ‘counter poetics’;\(^60\) when Gurpreet plays his hybrid tracks he shows ‘the social articulation of difference from the minority perspective’;\(^61\) Glissant argues that rather than trying to find a new language separate from the dominant one, ‘a strategic relationship of resistance and subversion to the dominant language is negotiated from the inside. What is produced is a counter discourse.’\(^62\) This idea of hybridity is in Glissart’s terms a non-hierarchal and non-reductive Creolization which is an articulation ‘always in process’ and as such has ‘positive value attached to mixed composite cultures.’\(^63\) Gurpreet’s musical and linguistic creativity illustrates a positively polyglot Scotland.

Anne Marie’s friendship with Nisha and her family authentically illustrates Glasgow as a multi-ethnic, hybrid centre: a reality often ignored by much more high profile writers such as James Kelman. And what is interesting is that the heterogeneous

\(^61\) Glissant cited in ibid, p.16.  
\(^62\) Ibid.  
\(^63\) Ibid.
nation is represented through the ‘younger’ generation who positively embrace difference and diversity. For Anne Marie, her father’s religious conversion and Nisha’s religious and cultural background are respected and valued and provide new perspectives concerning her own (Irish) family, culture and city. So although Anne Marie reflects that visiting Nisha’s house is not any different from going to her Gran’s house for dinner, ‘the calendar on Nisha’s wall was of Sikh temples, no scenes of Donegal’ (99). Although Nisha and Anne Marie represent a devolved, heterogeneous Scotland, it is one still struggling under the cultural imperialism of England, as the following dialogue between Nisha and Anne Marie, who are researching Tibet, nicely illustrates:

Ah pulled oot an atlas, laid it on the table and looked up the list of countries at the front.
‘Nisha,’ ah whispered. ‘Tibet’s no in this.’
She scanned the list.
‘Tuvalu – where the hell’s that?’
‘Havenae a Scooby. Sounds like a toilet cleaner. Hey, they’ve even got the Vatican City.’
‘That’s a country?’
‘But Tibet isnae, apparently.’
‘Anne Marie, that’s it. It’s no a country.’
‘Aye it is, that’s where the lamas come fae.’
‘Have you looked under China?’
Ah remembered what the lamas had said aboot their country bein taken over by the Chinese.
Nisha turned back tae the atlas. ‘Look here it is […] in the index. Tibet – see Xizang Zizhiqu, China.’
It geid me a shock, seein it like that. Ah kind of thought the Chinese were nae supposed tae be there.
[…] ‘Status: Autonomous Region’
‘Nisha’, ah whispered. ‘They’ve only got the Chinese flag here – you’d think they’d have wan of their ain.’
‘Or a language.’
‘Tibetan.’
‘No according to this. Still,’ she said, ‘Bet you Scotland’s no in it either.’
And it wisnae. No as a country anyway, just part of the UK. (Capital: London. Status: Monarchy.) And nae flag either. Or languages of wer ain. (261-262)
This exchange between the two friends depicts their emerging political consciousness regarding the subaltern status of both Scotland and Tibet. The atlas illustrates the excluded and marginalised identities as well as the historical, cultural and economic relations between two small countries and their larger, colonizing neighbours. Needless to say, the friends’ exchange also has parallels to Wales’s obliteration at the hands of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: the now infamous ‘For Wales, See England’ entry\(^{64}\) or indeed the more recent ‘blunder’ in which Wales was ‘airbrushed [...] off the [European] map’.\(^ {65}\) Cartography, or graphic representation of territory, or lack of, is ideological: ‘reality’ is ‘plotted’ and space represented dispassionately. The following discussion between Nisha and Anne Marie serves to remind us of the politics of map-making:

> Ah’d always thought Scotland was a mountainous country but on the map we were nearly all green, and so was India, just under Tibet. […]
> ‘Nisha, d’you still have relatives in India?’
> ‘Cousins, aunties and uncles…’
> ‘Whereabouts in India?’
> ‘Aboot here…in the Punjab.’ She pointed tae a spot in the northwest of India near the border wi Pakistan. ‘That must be an awful wee scale – India’s massive compared tae Scotland.’
> ‘Mrs MacBrude tellt us that most maps don’t show the countries the size they really are – they make Europe bigger and Africa and India smaller.’
> ‘Now there’s a surprise’. (262)

Nisha and Anne Maire’s friendship, and their ability to analyse the discourses in which they are educated, and live surrounded and contained by, enables a reconfiguration of self and nation. This restructuring or re-construction of the self and, more significantly, of Scotland the nation, is shown through the girls’ production of a CD for a competition in which they employ a fusion of Latin, Punjabi and Tibetan. The

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finished CD’s effect transcends creative aesthetics, it is about communication and connection; as Anne Marie says: ‘ah really wanted them, no just tae like it, but tae unnerstaund it’ (311).

As well as trans-cultural potentiality, Donovan also examines the positive effects of a devolved Scottish identity on the ideology of masculinity. Like Vic in Born Free, Jimmy worries about deviating from the dominant values associated with the Scottish male; nevertheless, he is clearly disillusioned and fatigued by this gendered identity and its causal psychological effects. At the Buddhist retreat he reflects:

Mibbe ah wisnae that daft efter aw. And there wis sumpn, no exactly excitin, couldnae find the word fur it – ah suppose mibbe you’d say stimulatin, if it didnae sound sexy – but anyway, sumpn aboot listenin tae folk talking aboot ideas, things you couldnae quite unnerstaund. Ah mean, the guys ah work wi wid be cartin ye aff tae the funny farm if ye tried tae have a serious conversation, and wi John it’s the footie […] there’s naebuddy that talks aboot anything beyond the day tae day. (36)

Jimmy’s interest in Buddhist philosophy facilitates an examination of the self and the wider world. As in Wooff’s Ani and Strachan’s Stella, gendered expectations and restrictions direct Jimmy away from his conventional surroundings – in his case, Catholicism and family and ‘footie’. And, like Ani and Stella, Jimmy needs to reposition or re-locate himself in order to develop and progress; as he says, ‘Ah’m ona journey and ah don’t know where ah’m gaun’ (108). The developing consciousness of Jimmy’s character suggests possibilities for plurality and fluidity of subjectivities; as Liz says, ‘[t]here’s a lot of different ways a bein.yersel’ (174). And like Wooff and Strachan, Donovan suggests that identity is a discursive product shaped and articulated in ‘specific historical and institutional sites’ and ‘constructed within, not outside,
discourse. As power structures have been reconfigured as a consequence of devolution then so can identities and subjectivities be reshaped. As Anne Marie’s grandmother comments, we now live in ‘Changed times. Changed times’ (158). Donovan’s text opens up possibilities; as Berthold Schoene suggests, the question that has to be asked now is whether contemporary Scottish masculinity could possibly be described as a devolutionary kind of masculinity that has embraced its feminine marginality and is saying “no” to power.67

Buddha Da ends with Liz (who is pregnant with another man’s baby) and Jimmy reconciled and contemplating a new life together. Like both Wooff and Strachan’s novels, Buddha Da ends on a positive and optimistic note with all protagonists looking towards the future – albeit with some tentativeness; Liz says: ‘But what about the future? Wish there was some way of knowin if we’re daein the right thing, but there isnae. Never is’ (328).

Whilst Donovan’s novel concerns itself with future possibilities and anxious expectations, a common theme in Welsh women’s post-devolution texts is the protagonist ‘returning home’. This is, according to Mark Stein, a common motif in post-colonial literatures:

‘Return’ [...] is related to seeking an earlier state or position, to giving into nostalgia and a yearning for home. It is encumbered by the weight of tradition; yet the absence of a tradition, its inaccessibility, can be as weighty and return inducing. But if tradition is always a motivated reinvention of the past to serve the requirements of the present, then returns signify agency [...] Returning in this sense is an act of participating in one weaving a collective memory in the making and remaking of tradition rather than merely a comfort-seeking activity.68

68 Mark Stein, Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation (Ohio: Ohio State University, 2004), p.57.
Stevie Davies’s ‘return’ novel *Kith and Kin* (2004) is a retrospective and unsettling narrative which begins with death rather than life; yet it too, like Donovan’s book, has hopefulness as an underlying theme. As Davies’s title suggests, this is a book primarily concerned with ideas of home and belonging. Set in Swansea and the Gower peninsula, the story begins with the death of a young woman, Francesca: ‘vile, violent. A maelstrom of despair’ (1). The first-person narration by Mara oscillates between her present life and her childhood with her cousins Francesca (Frankie) and Aaron. The three cousins form part of an extended, close-knit family which starts to disintegrate as the teenagers collectively rebel, take drugs and inhabit a hippy commune. Like Dol in *The Hiding Place* and Daryl in *Mud Puppy*, Mara has lived outside her homeland for most of her adult life and is scared and scarred from memories of her past:

> the flight from Wales when I lived incommunicado, on the run not so much from my kin as from the shafts of memory they awakened – has left me cautious and almost pathologically sensible. (24)

Now a ‘big fish in the NHS’ (17), Mara works in a unit which deals with patients’ post-traumatic phantom pain; however, it is Mara’s own past that persistently haunts her present; as she says, the deceased Francesca ‘is hurting in me’ (10). Moreover, Mara’s work assisting people ‘lacking some part of themselves’ (5) clearly parallels her own sense of loss. Nevertheless, this haunting, which also occurs in both Strachan’s and Azzopardi’s novels, can be employed as a means of recovery; it can ‘bring awareness of [...] history to the present’.  

It is through the discovery of old video tapes which show ‘flower power in the Gower’ that the past is brought into direct contact with the present. The footage, shown

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on BBC Wales, ‘stirs […] up a lot of old memories round here’ (15) but enables Mara to revisit her past and confront the pain and tragedy she has hitherto attempted to avoid. However, as the reader discovers, every act of memory is also an act of forgetting; memory is selective, as Mara, much like Dolores in Azzopardi’s *The Hiding Place*, concedes: ‘versions are all you have’ (246).

Like many of the other novelists considered in this thesis, Davies shows the family as a source of oppression. From the outside, the family appears respectable, dependable and loyal. However, as the epigraph says: ‘Rhy dynn a dyrr’ (‘Too tight breaks’). Rather than a place of safety, the family ‘provide[s] a thick and ultimately stifling security blanket for the three cousins’.70 It is this narrow and restricted internalism that dominates the family and in many ways ultimately causes it to fracture. As the cousins mature, the notions of traditional family units, duties and loyalties mutate and finally disintegrate. However, the ‘alternative’ family also fails to offer comfort and support; indeed, Frankie’s desperation and psychological disturbances are rooted in both her hippy family and her blood family. The hippies take advantage of Frankie’s neediness and likewise, her blood family, especially her mother, is ineffectual in protecting her from the emotionally and sexually abusive stepfather. It is these culminating events that lead to Frankie’s drug abuse and ultimately her apparent suicide.

Although *Kith and Kin* provides a specific sense of time and place, and is concerned with ideas relating to nation and nationhood, this is not a parochial text. Rather, Davies examines specific Welsh issues within a wider context; it looks out

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beyond the borders to broader universal issues, a feature seen in the majority of post-devolutionary texts discussed in this thesis. For instance, Mara is troubled by global injustices: women’s inequality, social and economic discrimination and neo-colonialism. Like many other contemporary Scottish and Welsh writers, Davies deals explicitly with issues concerning gendered structures of power, domination and exploitation. Through *Kith and Kin*, Davies suggests that girls and women are violated, subjugated and exploited within both the familial and the imagined community. Nevertheless, Davies reminds us that despite the apparent centrality and authority of the masculine in Welsh culture during the 1960s and 1970s, women were starting to fight against societal constraints and ‘patriarchal ideas about women’.

Mara’s family expected her to adhere unquestioningly to the gendered ideological conventions regarding behaviour and responsibilities; however, as Mara states, her mother ‘detected my daughterly defects, together with my lack of qualification for wifedom and motherhood’ (34). Like Stella in Strachan’s novel, Mara is constantly fighting against the norms of a society which justifies power structures by dividing the world into binary oppositions. In her defiance she says: ‘I will not marry, I will not wear a frock. I will not be a girl, I’ll be like Uncle Pierce’ (46). Dominant values and attitudes enforced ‘respectability’ and heterosexual marriage, so although Mara’s teenage academic success meant her ‘father fantasised about my economic prospects’ (84) these paternal fantasies also related to her ‘marriage eligibility’ (84). Nonetheless, Mara had no intention of conforming to the role of submissive wife and her rebelliousness provides us with a representation of Welsh women’s historical, spirited fight against ‘male-

\[\text{\textsuperscript{71}}\text{Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limit of Geographical Knowledge* (Minneapolis: Polity, 1993), p.12.}\]
imposed concepts of correct female behaviour’ and illustrates a time when women were starting to ‘acquire the female right of self-definition’.  

However, it is not only the traditional family unit that Mara resists; it is also the imagined community of Breuddwyd (ie. Dream) – the country house (now hippy commune) the pregnant Francesca inherited from her grandmother. This place was to represent a more emancipated and egalitarian space; as Mara says, ‘At Breuddwyd, we’d have a new kind of society, with love and children, and less of the possessiveness […] that had burdened our parents’ (111). However, over time Mara starts to question the authenticity of the hippies’ revolution, suggesting that ‘perhaps the folk at Breuddwyd were not in rebellion at all?’ (154). As Mara points out, the binary oppositions that determine societal norms still operate in the ‘drop out’ environment. With a conspicuous similarity to the conventional culture where women were underrepresented or indeed excluded from much of the public arena, women in Breuddwyd were still marginalised and subordinated: ‘Men were the tongues; women the ears’ (85). Women were kept firmly in the domestic sphere; Mara, reflecting on one of the female hippies’ existence comments: ‘her life was no different to my mother’s except that no apron was involved’ (88). In contrast, Mara was a rebel who ‘had been born to generate change in an old order, not to sit at home and iron and bake and breed’ (208). However, like Strachan’s Stella, Mara suffers gendered oppression and aggression and her refusal to conform results in sexual violence. She rejects the role of ‘concubine’ (151) and as a result is raped by the ‘leader’ of the hippies, George, for failing to gratify his sexual desires. Mara’s sexualised, brutal ‘punishment’ by ‘the patriarch’ is indicative of women’s position within a sociocultural system that facilitates

and endorses violence against women. But, Davies’s victim is not silenced; rather, Mara courageously takes George to court and, against misogynistic insults of ‘bull dyke and female impersonator, a deviant women’s lib man-hater’, her victory has ‘a political significance […] in terms of women’s emancipation’ (229). Indeed, Mara’s fight throughout the narrative is for freedom from the oppressive regimes that have attempted to obliterate her sense of self; she wants to ‘forge an identity, not dissolve it’ (145).

In terms of constructing identity, the Welsh language offers a sense of belonging and hence its use as an ideological apparatus in the colonial project of ‘native’ assimilation and integration. Davies’s portrayal of psychic alienation and familial breakdown reminds us of the experience of the historically oppressed and how cultures are lost through ideological discourse that produces cultural inferiority. Throughout the nineteenth century and for much of the twentieth, the Welsh language was comprehensively denigrated and its degraded status internalised by the Welsh. As Kirsti Bohata states:

As one might expect, the Welsh colluded with the demise of the language and there was no shortage of commentators, including many of the Welsh themselves, who saw the key to the progress of Wales and the individual Welshman as being to learn English and [...] to forget Welsh.73

Hence, Susan, Frankie’s mother says, ‘Mamma never allowed Welsh spoken in the house [because] Welsh [was the] language of baboons […] the best people don’t’ (69). Interestingly the language used by Susan’s mother is the reverse of that of the more confident post-devolution Daryl in Mud Puppy and this is indicative of the changing times. But in the earlier epoch, the colonized condition of Wales mean Mara’s family were incapable of recognising the cultural injustices the Welsh endured; furthermore,

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73 Bohata, Postcolonialism Revisited, p.20.
their prohibition of Welsh in the private sphere indicated the extent to which colonial indoctrination succeeded. Geraint Jenkins reminds us of inter-(first and second world) war ideology:

In schools, there were compelling incentives to acquire and use English at the expense of Welsh. English-medium schooling became the norm and there were powerful psychological pressures on parents to discriminate against Welsh. It was dinned into their heads that learning Welsh was futile. English was the language of ‘getting on’ and the old language was seen as a source of shame.74

The mother’s alienation from her own culture is clear through her repetition of the insidious nineteenth-century English dogma and discourse which argued that the Welsh required civilizing. As Stephen Knight states, Matthew Arnold considered the Welsh language to be a hindrance to the Welsh and it was believed that ‘the Welsh were a backward people in need of the enlightening influences of the English language [because] the Welsh language [was] degenerate’. 75

Cultural imperialism does not just devalue and diminish the Welsh culture and nation at home but English domination operates to make it invisible beyond its borders. This is apparent when Mara and Francesca travel to America and discover that their country is unknown to outsiders. As Mara says, Wales was

A nation whose reputation had not yet reached Texas apparently, though Texas claimed kin with Scotland and Ireland. Did we mean Wales, England? [Americans] politely asked [...] we explained. We mentioned dragons. Taliesin, Lloyd George. (156)

Moreover, the one family member who has emigrated from Wales to America, the dreadful Auntie Midge, has abandoned her ‘Welshness’ and now has a ‘raucous Americanised voice’ (156). Undoubtedly, Scotland’s and Wales’s protracted and

75 Knight, One Hundred Years of Fiction, pp.9-10.
inequitable relationship with England has resulted in cultural assimilation and if these cultures are to survive, and the nations develop as independent entities, they have to be creatively imagined: as both Ed Thomas and Alasdair Gray have argued, we need to see our ‘culture reflected back to us.’

Davies’s cultural reflection portrays and (re)imagines Wales, its culture and its recent history and shows a multifaceted, complex nation with many and diverse pasts, presents and futures.

Edward Said has argued that literary representations have historically been a part of the imperial project’s tools and as such they are ideologically-constructed images which require perceptive analysis, for as Said states:

[T]he crossings over between culture and imperialism are compelling [the] struggle over geography is [...] not only about soldiers [...] but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings.

Depending upon motive or purpose, representations can empower or disempower. As Ella Shohat states:

Each [...] utterance must be analyzed not only in terms of who it represents but also in terms of who is being represented for what purpose, at which historical moment, for which location, using which strategies, and in what tone of address.

Both Shohat and Said argue that as an element of identity politics, representation carries a particular function. As a means of reacting against English hegemony, contemporary Scottish and Welsh literature have started to represent their nations as diverse and complex spaces. However, as I argued in chapter one, much of that contemporary

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77 Said, Culture and Imperialism, pp.5-6.

representation, especially in Scotland, has been understood as urban, disenfranchised and masculine; as A.L. Kennedy states, ‘there is still an idea that the Scottish product will be grim and gritty and male.’  

Sophie Cooke’s *The Glass House* (2004) represents an entirely different version of Scotland. This is the story of a rural, upper-middle-class family through which Cooke endeavours to write the Scottish nation and culture as a diverse space within which class and gender tensions and conflicts are played out. Multiplicity is at the heart of writing emerging from these post-devolutionary years, as I have argued, and Cooke’s first published book demonstrates the depth and diversity of work by contemporary Scottish women writers.

*The Glass House* examines three years in the life of a wealthy family through the eyes of its narrator, Vanessa. The story begins with the fourteen-year-old Vanessa returning to the family home in the Perthshire glens after being recently expelled from her boarding school. Vanessa is the naïve and forgiving victim of her mother’s vicious and spiteful autocratic behaviour: ‘I know she loves me when she’s being angry. I know she loves me when she is hurting me. That’s the way love is’ (85). Cooke’s novel sets out to challenge many established or fixed notions about identities: as Vanessa says at the end of the narrative, ‘everyone composes themselves’ (269). Through the character of the mother, Mary, Cooke questions the ideology of femininity and considers how the myth of the ultimate model of womanhood, the Virgin Mary, is dangerous and destructive. The Virgin Mary, as Margaret Bruzelius reminds us, ‘represents a uniquely powerful idea of motherhood that pervades Western

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79 A.L. Kennedy cited in Siân Reynolds, ‘Gender, the Arts and Culture’ in Abrams, Gordon, Simonton and Janes Yeo, eds, *Gender in Scottish History since 1700*, pp.170-198, p.188.
consciousness’. Cooke’s Mary departs from the ideological expectations of the self-sacrificing, tender and caring mother, ‘the universal and biological quintessence of womanhood’ which alienates and ultimately destroys women’s lives. As Betty Freidan argued in 1963, the West’s patriarchal and capitalist machinery had relentlessly coerced women into believing that their key role in life was to find success, happiness and fulfilment as wives and mothers and ‘desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity’. Cooke’s character illustrates that Freidan’s concern is still worryingly relevant in post-devolution Scotland. Mary is isolated, miserable and unfulfilled: she tells Vanessa, ‘[This is] no place to bring up three children on your own, though. You would have gone mad with it’ (197). As the ‘cracks in her are meeting’ (208), Mary, like Daryl’s mother in Mud Puppy, psychologically collapses and eventually commits suicide. Furthermore, Vanessa, like Trezise’s protagonist, bears the pain of her fractured childhood and dysfunctioning family on her own: she is both unable and unwilling to communicate her anguish to her sisters, Lucy and Bryony. When asked by her older sister if their mother is violent towards her, she comments to the reader: ‘She [Lucy] examines my face. She won’t find anything there, though, because I spring-cleaned it long ago’ (99). In terms of boundaries between the outside world and the interior, Cooke employs a similar central image to those of both Trezise and Strachan: a glass container to illustrate the isolation of femininity and confinement of female subjectivity.

Vanessa lives in a solitary world, and the secluded haunting glens of the southern Highlands provide a silent wild backdrop to illustrate her lonely existence and her yearning to find a sense of belonging:

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81 McClintock, “‘No Longer in a Future Heaven” Gender, Race, and Nationalism’, p.107.
The glen is goldish green in the late sunshine, the trees down by the river look happy. That’s where I used to go, I used to curl up between their roots and feel kind of safe. (2)

Like Strachan’s and Barker’s novels, Cooke’s narrative is removed from the urban setting to enable a deconstruction of gendered and essentialist concepts of Scottishness while still exploring ideas of nationhood and belonging. So although the protagonist’s ancient landscape seems to signify a connection to ‘roots’, like Strachan, Cooke is not suggesting a Scottish homogeneity, or ‘a return to roots [...] and a – single – Scottish identity’. Rather, this space allows Vanessa agency and the ability to think outside the strains and constraints of the horrors of the domestic sphere, where she is ‘watch[ed] very closely these days’ (59).

The construction of space, place and belonging in Cooke’s novel is complex and laden with tension. Vanessa’s family are geographically as well as emotionally divorced. Home and belonging are distinct and disconnected ideas for each family member and, as in Azzopardi’s and Trezise’s novels, this space does not automatically denote security and harmony. So, while Mary and Vanessa live in the secluded gothic pile which signifies alienation, Vanessa’s two sisters live at a boarding school during term time and the father, who is an oil engineer, has his home in Saudi Arabia: as Vanessa comments, ‘He wasn’t too upset about leaving Scotland. I get the impression that he likes living in the Middle East’ (12). The family home is the site of physical and emotional disruption, violence and trauma, and it is where power relations are played out. Rosemary Marangoly George argues that the ‘home’ in contemporary culture is a political site built on binary structures and models of inclusion and

exclusion, a point that relates to and connects much of the literature discussed in this thesis:

Homes are not about inclusion and wide open arms as much as they are about places carved out of closed doors, closed borders and screening apparatuses when different groups or individuals jostle each other to establish a space as their own, as an exclusive manifestation of their subjechthood; this struggle can become urgent as keeping oneself alive. As a result ‘home’ becomes contested ground in times of political tumult either on the level of power struggles at a national communal stage, or at the interpersonal familial level.84

Although, Vanessa’s house is positioned in rural isolation with no near neighbours, the McAlpine’s ‘white bungalow’ (14) can be seen ‘far down to the right’ (14). But though the McAlpines may be within view they inhabit another Scotland and their presence serves to illustrate Vanessa’s family’s disconnection, and Scotland’s heterogeneous (and class-based) nature. As Vanessa comments, the McAlpines ‘are completely different from all the other adults who are my mother’s friends or my friends’ mothers’ (27). The exclusion of the ‘completely different’ McAlpines is based upon their working-class status; according to Vanessa’s sister Lucy, the McAlpines are ‘common’ (28). It is this difference and disparity that is fundamental to The Glass House and Cooke’s exploration of nation and identity.

Yet, Cook does more than examine diversity within Scotland; her novel interrogates basic assumptions about what makes ‘Scottish’ people ‘Scottish’, and in this way it has much in common with Erica Wooff’s Mud Puppy in terms of challenging traditional ideas of national identity. However, what separates Cooke’s novel and many of the other Scottish texts from the Welsh ones is the Scottish writers’ persistent and vigorous emphasis on the significance and rigidity of the class system within Scotland’s

contemporary political and cultural structure. Cooke’s text suggests that identity is an economic, political and cultural construct, a discursive practice, and through highlighting the disparity between its central and peripheral characters, Cooke questions what we perceive as being ‘typically’ Scottish. Furthermore, Cooke, like many postcolonial writers and scholars working with ideas of subjectivity and belonging, questions the fundamental notion of nation and nationhood, problematising the concept of an ‘essential’ nationality.

Like Wooff and Azzopardi, Cooke considers the school as an ideological site in which interrogations of national and personal identity take place. In Azzopardi’s text, as we saw in chapter four, it is in school that Dol is named a ‘half-caste’. These contemporary authors suggest that notions of space, power and difference become apparent in the school system, a structure (or apparatus) which serves to preserve the status quo. However, in Wooff’s novel, the post-devolution political landscape indicates a more positive aspect to education: ‘a Welsh dimension’ (91) has to be included in all lessons in order to combat years of neglect. In Cooke’s novel, the school is the site of dispute about identity, belonging and nationhood. In class Vanessa is asked by a student

‘you jist moved here?’
‘No’, [replies Vanessa]
‘Eh, she talks very nicely […] see the way she says “no” […] ‘Gnoh,’ she mimics. ‘Ah, you’re deid posh.’ (34)

The disparity between Vanessa and her classmates is illustrated when her mother asks,

‘Have you made friends with any of them? Have you made contact with Mars?’ (36)

Mary’s sarcastic comment clearly illustrates the Othering nature of class system. Vanessa’s ‘deid posh[ness]’ not only sets her apart from her high school peers but also,
more importantly, calls into question her identity and nationality. Vanessa’s class status excludes her from being an authentic Scot: ‘They all think I’m English [but] I don’t know why they all call me English. I haven’t got a drop of English blood in all my body’ (42-43). The exchange between Vanessa and Alan is important in terms of cultural and national identity and belonging:

[Alan] It’s the way you talk. You don’t sound Scottish.
[Vanessa] I’m as Scottish as they are. It’s got nothing to do with being Scottish – Hari’s Indian, Laura’s frigging Italian […]. My dad’s from here, my mum’s from Helensburgh, and I was born in Perth. It’s not where you’re from. It’s the way you talk.
[…]
Oh yeah. And posh people can’t be Scottish. (43)

And this is the crux: there may be multiplicity within Scotland but ‘Scottishness’ and what that identity represents is a vision of the underdog, a working-class people dispossessed by its politically and economically more powerful neighbour. This particular representation of ‘Scottishness’ became more marked after 1979 and the ensuing eighteen years of Conservative government. Scotland’s social, cultural and economic deprivation became increasing troubled and hostility to Westminster policies was perceived as solely working class. As Eleanor Bell argues,

It is clear the effects of Thatcherism within Scotland led to fervent political reactions and a strengthening of Scottish cultural identity as a form of united resistance.\footnote{Eleanor Bell, \textit{Questioning Scotland: Literature, Nationalism, Postmodernism} (London: Palgrave, 2004), p.39.}

So if national identity was reinforced and re-invigorated during the Thatcher years, the construction of a ‘typical’ Scot, the nature of belonging and the determinants of ‘Scottishness’, excluded people like Vanessa and her ‘posh’ family. Scottish writers such as Kelman and Irvine Welsh are champions of urban working-class identity, which
needless to say, also genders the working-class Scot as male. Perhaps with the renewal of some political autonomy and with the ‘auld enemy’ stripped of some of its influence, what defines ‘Scottishness’ can now offer a greater multiplicity, thus enabling an articulation of many experiences. Or, as Berthold Schoene-Harwood puts it, Scotland has become ‘a heterogenous conglomerate of a great diversity of mutable discourses’. Cooke’s placing of a wealthy family at the centre of her text resists national stereotypes and opens up the debate on class and identity. As Vanessa says:

I am part of a lost tribe, you know. We’re not allowed to be Scottish because we’re rich and happy. I mean, you have to be poor and oppressed to get membership, don’t you. (52)

Like Wooff, Cooke resists fixed, essentialist, or reductive identities. Furthermore, her characters do not illustrate an uncritical allegiance to Scotland; they are psychologically and spatially fluid, either displaced or dreaming of re-location. As Vanessa says, Alan ‘tells me about how he is going to leave Scotland and work abroad’ (51) because Scotland is ‘too cold. And nobody ever dis anything’(52). And when her father, unknown to Vanessa, returns to the UK, it is London he decides to live in rather than Scotland. In fact, by the end of the novel ‘we […] go south, all of us’ (273). Vanessa, saddened but liberated by her mother’s death, ‘can’t stand being reminded of her. Even this whole country is too small’ (269); she decides to ‘go travelling […] to clear [her] head’ (259). Consequently, freedom from her mother, her family and Scotland affords Vanessa the space to ascertain selfhood, subjectivity and autonomy, and on the final page she packs her rucksack and leaves home to go ‘somewhere where they speak a different language’ (270).

86 Schoene-Harwood, ‘“Emerging As the Other of Our Selves” – Scottish Multiculturalism and the Challenge of the Body in Postcolonial Representation’, p.54.
The writers already examined in this chapter suggest that to evolve and progress as nations, cultures and people, we need to move beyond the singularities of identity such as class, gender and sexuality to cultivate an understanding of cultural differences. Homi Bhabha argues that the interstitial spaces, the borderlands and peripheries, are places which dislocate the binary structures by which we live and thereby offer possibilities for negotiation, advancement and progress:

The social articulation of difference [...] is a complex and on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities [...] Social differences are not simply given to experience through an already authenticated cultural tradition; they are the signs of the emergence of community envisaged as a project – at once a vision and a construction – that takes you ‘beyond’ yourself in order to return, in a spirit of revision and reconstruction, to the political conditions of the present.87

Tiffany Murray’s *Happy Accidents* (2004) is a novel of hybridity and in-between spaces in which all the central characters live imaginatively in another place or space. Set in the 1980s, Murray’s story revolves around Kate, the ten-year old who is being raised by her grandparents in a large dilapidated house on the Welsh/English border. As Kate’s narrative progresses family secrets emerge and hidden desires surface. Like most of the Scottish and Welsh texts discussed in this chapter, *Happy Accidents* is about finding space, negotiating freedom and eventually articulating longing. The novel begins by deconstructing dichotomous social structures of class identity with Kate lying on ‘a red chaise-longue in a red front room [which is] a bit of posh and common’ (1).

Like Hird’s and Cooke’s protagonists, each family member expresses a desire to be elsewhere: Kate wants to ‘run away and join the circus’ (3) and for the most part she finds liberty by inhabiting the imaginative worlds of *Jane Eyre* and *Salem’s Lot*. The grandmother, Iris, exists imaginatively in America – the place ‘Grandpa dragged her

87 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.2.
over from […] a million years ago’ (2). The grandmother lives in another era, and this is articulated through the secret love letters from her past – this is a point I will return to. The grandfather also inhabits another time and place. As Kate explains, he is

Captain Lawrence St John Happy, one of the youngest Captains of His Majesty’s Royal Navy, circa 1942 [he’s] Bonkers! Crazy Loco! Muddled! [...] He […] told me that ‘central heating is for wimps, deserters! Damned pen-pushing pansies’! (7)

Likewise, Kate’s mother, Marlene, has ‘gone adrift’ (13, italics in original). Struggling with a sense of self and ‘authenticity’ Marlene ‘drove off one Sunday in a speed streak of a red car’ telling her daughter she was ‘off to see a man about a dog’ (55). Marlene is supposedly living in the France – a premise authenticated by the French postcards Kate received ‘at regular intervals’ (62). However, as the family later discover, Marlene is actually living on the other side of the Black Mountains: across the border, as she later confesses to Kate, ‘just over those mountains, in Wales [where] I really have found myself’ (62). Like Strachan’s protagonist, Marlene has to move further from the ‘centre’ in order to articulate a sense of self.

Occupying the borderland means the Happy family are multidimensional subjects inhabiting diverse zones and identities. As Jaishree K. Odin says:

at the borders […] the border subject emerges out of the perpetual encounter of the dominant regulatory norms and the minority experience[...]Border subjects, thus, live in two or more cultures at the same time. This has given rise to the notion of subjectivity defined in terms of multiple subject positions, which is a direct challenge to the earlier formulation of subjectivity as unitary and singular.88

As in Wooff’s *Mud Puppy*, boundaries and borders are geographical, physical and symbolic; they are also unstable and flexible. Murray’s borderland does not limit or contain; the significance of spatiality and geography is expressed through the large farmhouse which is situated in the ‘half-English, half-Welsh garden’ (2). Furthermore, ‘this border-land’ (15) locale is where place, identity, politics and history intersect: the family have owned it ‘for a squillion generations, and that land spills into Wales’ (15). Grandpa’s land *spilling* over the border suggests the malleability and fluidity of borders, the inability to contain.

The production and politics of identities in the borderland offers many possibilities: Kate sees herself as ‘American and English’ (1) and ‘a little bit Welsh’ (261). Moreover, through the convoluted composition of the family, Murray examines the intersection of, and the complex relationship between, English, Welsh and American cultures: Aunt Rita (Gran’s sister) suggests power relations are changing when she refers to England as the ‘goddamn cold oity-toity English earth’ (256). The English centre clearly has not retained its principal status; rather Rita thinks it pompous and self-important. Cultural divisions are also evident through the character of Aunt Reggie, the grandfather’s sister who lives in Abergavenny. Reggie refers to Gran and the dying Aunt Rita’s trip to the synagogue as a trip ‘off to the Infidels!’ (239) In fact, to the slightly ‘unhinged’ Aunt Reggie, the American Gran is inferior and her culture alien; Gran never does anything correct, anything ‘the Happy way’ (237) and as such Aunt Reggie has a mission ‘To save [Kate]. From that damned. Yankee business’ (225). These social and cultural differences create a complex and conflicting relationship between members of the extended family. Nevertheless, this ostensibly disparate family inhabit the borderlands where the ‘whole question of belonging and the status of
inside/outside’ are interrogated. Thus binary thinking is dismantled and transnationality ensues. So what we see happen is ‘the margin of hybridity, where cultural differences “contingently” and conflictually touch becomes the moment of panic which reveals the borderline experience’ and agency becomes possible.

Indeed, it is outside the home environment that the limiting and defining dichotomous structures become evident. Like both Cooke and Azzopardi, Murray suggests that the school is a site of struggle in terms of identity and belonging. This location attempts to sustain, preserve and perpetuate dominant ideological structures of the family and because the Happys represent difference from this conventional patriarchal institution, Kate is verbally maltreated. However, Kate resisted the school’s intimidating attempt at sustaining ideological configurations: she ‘threw pink custard at a teacher when she asked me what it was like not having a proper family’ (14, italics in original).

In the physical sense, Katie is bodily limited: her grandmother is obsessed with body weight, and she tells Kate, ‘One Moment on the Lips for Ever on the Hips; The Fatty-Fatty-Fat-Fat’ (56). This obsession seems to have originated from Gran reaching ‘second in the Miss Coney Island Beauty Pageant, 1941. “Second, because of my fat hips!” (6) And, as Kate asserts, her Gran is ‘not gonna let that goddam lardiness happen to me’ (6). Hence, ‘Gran and I don’t eat breakfast, because [Gran says] “it’s better than a tapeworm, honey” […] and in the evenings we drink bowls of hot water with soup spoons, as Grandpa’s gravy bubbles […] on the stove’ (6). As the local doctor disapprovingly comments:

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91 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.208.
She is underweight [...] Mrs Happy, Kate is small for her age, strangely small, but you really should get some more meat on these bones. The girl needs feeding up. (10)

The concept of female malnourishment in order to reach an ideal of femininity is returned to throughout the text: the grandmother’s apparent eccentricity is an illustration of the limits, rejection and negation of women in patriarchal ideology. This idea is, of course, examined in many of the texts written by Welsh and Scottish women writers: for instance, as we have seen, Strachan’s protagonist Stella comments on ‘all the skinny little girls […] terrified of taking up too much space’ (199). Moreover, the grandmother’s fixation on appearance also highlights the extremes of self-denial in order to achieve the dominant ideal and idealised body shape. As a result of Gran’s unwholesome obsession, Kate is ‘light as any midget eleven-year-old who eats nothing’ (92). Further, again in apparent adherence to stereotypes of femininity, Iris is also obsessed with the colour pink – symbolic of (Western) femininity and normative ideas of womanhood and gendered bodies.

However, contrary as it may seem, those heteronormative ideas of womanhood are, to an extent, challenged in one of the most intriguing aspects of Happy Accidents, that is, the location where space and sexuality intersect. The attic is the space/place beset with yearning, desires and deserted dreams. Like Jane Eyre’s double, Bertha, spectral figures of the family’s past haunt the space and persist into the present. However, the Happys’ attic is a haven, a place where the possessions and memories of Marlene’s dead twin sister, Eva, are stored in ‘Eva’s Sanctuary’ (224) and where the ashes of Kate’s father, who died after being accidentally run over by Marlene, are kept in a mayonnaise jar. The attic is also the space where Gran’s clandestine life is securely sealed. Her love affair with Mathilda (who died of pneumonia a few days before Eva)
occurred in the attic, and their love letters, full of longing, hope and desires, are stored there. Moreover, it is in this interstitial space that Gran stores her means of escape: an envelope of money and plane tickets to America. The attic is a safe and secluded female space which enables illicit love to be articulated. And it is the place where Kate starts to imagine herself as a sexual being:

Jamilah [Kate’s friend] leans across and kisses me. Her bat-fur top lip tickles, but it’s soft and I don’t want her to stop. I think about Mathilda up in the attic with Gran, being old maids and making love [...] I’d like to stay with Jamilah for ever, especially if she’s got an attic. (181-183)

Of course, attics have long been part of the narrative of women’s literary history – the roof space conveying desires, dreams and fears which cannot be expressed or explored in regulated patriarchal spaces – and Murray is self-consciously reworking this tradition.92 As Rita Felski states,

The attic rooms that house Brontë and Gilman’s madwomen are resonant symbolic spaces [...] graphic reminders of the places off limits to women who are consigned to the margins of culture.93

In Happy Accidents, the attic is a space which destabilizes borders and boundaries: it is an in-between space where Kate and Gran can be themselves, where multiple identities can be performed without restraining regulatory structures. In the attic, Gran’s identities – American, Jew/Church of England, wife and lesbian lover blend and merge – and Kate’s hybrid identities of English, American and Welsh fuse alongside her identity as a sexually developing being.

92 Sandra M Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination (New Haven/ London: Yale University Press, 1979) is an early study on this subject of a female literary strategy.
Nevertheless, as I have shown through Aunt Reggie, cultural hybridities are not always welcome and Reggie serves to remind us of the ‘old’ colonial world. Reggie is constructing the family’s genealogy and confesses her ‘Happy Family Tree’ project is still unfinished because the family’s historical narratives are rather complex. She ‘keeps finding “things” that put her off, “things that cloud, that darken the issue!”’ She told my grandmother we’ve mixed with the Welsh and others’ [italics in original] (317). The family’s shadowy and sinister past is gradually revealed, so we discover Kate’s grandparents own the ‘Field of Bolden’, the site of violent colonial encounters, where ‘[t]he Battle of Boldenham’ was fought. Jamilah, Kate’s friend, explains its historical significance:

‘when the English killed all the Welsh and your family were the English’.
‘But we’re Welsh, a bit’ [Kate replies].
‘Not then you weren’t. You’ve been bastardised since.’ (260)

Jamilah’s adept response regarding hybrid and mutating identities illustrates how that ‘contact zone’ of the border offers fluidity and multiplicity.

Nevertheless, narratives of oppression and colonial domination haunt the Happy family’s history, and the pictorial representations of their ancestors serves to remind us of imperial ideology which gave the trade and ownership of people cultural respectability. The Happy Family Home, as Kate tells us, was built for ‘Wilhomena and Samuel [who] had things called plantations in the West Indies’ (111). The ‘things called plantations’ suggests the family’s economic involvement in the slave trade, as does the ‘Liverpool Art Gallery [...] painting called The Happy Family and Slaves, 1755’ (111). Aunt Reggie’s after-dinner stories also illustrate the extent of bourgeois involvement in the imperial project:
Our Christmas lunch has been a voyage through Reggie’s life: her childhood in India; a marriage in Kenya, where she opened a safari lodge and met the Queen. A divorce in Macau […] Now we’re on Ceylon and she’s missed out Aberystwyth. (244)

Reggie’s omission of Wales from her travelling tales is undoubtedly because Wales was not deemed ‘exotic’ enough; however, her disregard does highlight the minor and inconsequential status associated with Wales as a nation and as a part of the constituent element of the privileged empire. Although arguments about Wales’s complicity with the colonial project abound, through Aunt Reggie’s superciliousness Murray destabilises simple or straightforward judgments concerning Wales and empire.

In many ways chapter five ends as it started – with movement. The writers discussed traverse identities, family structures and ideas of personal and collective belonging and space. Just five years into the new political structure, ideas relating to power structures, space, place, home and belonging and how they intersect, challenge and contest with each other have come to the fore. This period – 2002-2004 – was one of optimism and confidence, in terms of both culture and politics and Scotland’s and Wales’s women writers reflected this national sociocultural self-assurance. Rigid ideas concerning relationships were challenged and the politics of place and identity which had isolated and limited the lives of women (and men) are resisted. These women writers have refused to accept ideological constructions of womanhood and the obscuring of important differences of selfhood and their defiance depicts the physical and psychological violence enforced roles create. Indeed, the importance of the texts discussed in this chapter is in the way the writers represent a myriad of possibilities for women, and moreover put those disparate identities, hitherto obscured because they were not compatible with phallocratic culture, at the centre. So, for instance, lesbian
sexuality is ‘normalised’ and ordinary. Through providing us with multifaceted, complex representations of people and nation, Strachan, Wooff, Donovan, Davies, Cooke and Murray have shown that Wales and Scotland can ‘initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.’94

94 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, p.1.
Devolution is unleashing a momentum that must be charted not because it can solve the problems of the past, but because it is shifting the balance between covert and overt, between mythology and reality, between rhetoric and substance.¹

Devolution has increased the debate on national identities and what it means to be ‘Welsh’, ‘Scottish’ or ‘British’ in a politically restructured formation, although ‘being British’ has always been a multivalent and slippery term for many people inhabiting Scotland and Wales.² The very idea of a seemingly fixed or inherent identity is no longer desirable, realistic or, indeed, rational and the writers discussed in this chapter suggest that essentialising national and personal identities is limiting, negative, and ultimately destructive. This chapter begins in 2005, the year of the ‘British’ General Election, which raised further questions on the construction and production of ‘British’ identities; for instance, ‘British’ Identity Cards and the ‘British Citizenship Test’ were amongst the biggest political issues of 2005.³ Since devolution there have been numerous studies enquiring into the contemporary concept of ‘Britishness’.⁴ As David McCrone argues:

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There is a wealth of articles, books and discussions and programmes on the presumed or impending ‘death of Britishness’[and a] view that there is a ‘crisis’ of Britishness [...] fuelled, indirectly, by recent government attempts to foreground Britishness.⁵

Likewise, in 2005, Richard Haesly’s research concluded that Wales and Scotland were rejecting ‘Britishness’: he argued that ‘devolution has increased “exclusive” Welsh and Scottish identities’.⁶

This period also saw some extraordinary cultural shifts in both Wales and Scotland: there was a marked increase in creative writing being published and critically reviewed, and as in the case of Welsh and Scottish political developments,⁷ women’s fiction was starting to show growth and maturity within a more international framework. In 2005, Francesca Rhydderch writing from a Welsh context, argued that ‘devolution was heralding exciting changes: growing appreciation of Welsh writing across the UK, in-migration of significant writers from elsewhere, and a literature that now embraces [a diversity] of genres.’⁸ As this chapter argues, contemporary women writers in Wales and Scotland are a vigorously heterogeneous group. During this period, Welsh and Scottish women’s writers’ growing confidence enabled them to explore, sometimes with rage and sometimes with humour, difficult questions relating to nationhood, identity and the politics of representation in the twenty-first century.

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As in the previous chapter, most of the writers considered herein employ a multiple-perspective narrative. Jackie Davies’s *About Elin* (2007)⁹ and Lesley McDowell’s *The Picnic* (2007)¹⁰ use this technique to examine past lives and make visible habitually hidden experiences. Both these novels are ‘return’ narratives – a structure more frequently employed in post-devolution Welsh women’s writing rather than Scottish texts (for instance, the protagonists in the novels of Erica Wooff, Stevie Davies and Trezza Azzopardi all return to Wales for various reasons). Jackie Davies and McDowell’s stories centre on a family tragedy, which leads to the unearthing of painful pasts and a recovery and re-consideration of historic ‘reality’. Davies’s central protagonist, Elin, a lawyer who left Wales thirty years previously only returning for her brother’s funeral, does not articulate her life experiences and perspective in her own voice until the final chapter. Instead, Davies allows the villagers to construct the character of Elin before the actual facts behind her departure from Wales are revealed. This serves to remind us of the socially constructed and at times spurious nature of our communal histories. McDowell’s central character, Sadie, a newly qualified lecturer, spends the entire narrative attempting to unearth her grandmother’s past; like that of the grandmother in *Happy Accidents*, McDowell’s grandmother’s ‘authentic’ self has been concealed from the family out of sociocultural and political necessity. Through the grandmother’s secret love letters, unearthed by Sadie, we learn of the plethora of hardships faced by women in the past because of the politics of gendered and sexual identities which impinge upon female subjectivity; these are issues examined to some extent in all the novels considered in this chapter.

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⁹ Jackie Davis, *About Elin* (Dinas Powys: Honno, 2007). All subsequent references will be to this edition and appear in parentheses in the main body of the text.
In a similar way to Murray’s *Happy Accidents* and Cooke’s *The Glass House*, both discussed in the last chapter, Catrin Dafydd’s *Random Deaths and Custard* (2007)\(^{11}\), Nikita Lalwani’s *Gifted* (2007)\(^{12}\), Alison Miller’s *Demo* (2005)\(^{13}\) and Ali Smith’s *Girl Meets Boy* (2007)\(^{14}\) all put young women at the centre of their texts. These narratives tell the stories of trying to find a space and place in cultures that discriminate by gender. Both Dafydd’s and Miller’s novels examine a sixteen-year-old female endeavouring to understand the world and eventually coming to terms with complex, changing and conflicting cultures. While Dafydd’s focus is on language, Miller’s is on the complexities of politics and relationships in a globalised world in which deep-rooted prejudices and threats persist into the present. Likewise, Lalwani’s novel interrogates entrenched intolerance as it follows a young Welsh-Asian girl growing up and becoming increasingly rebellious towards parental regulations. Smith’s novel concerns three young women negotiating and exposing the myths that surround the politics of gender and sexuality and the destruction caused by a world governed by transnational corporations in search of ever-increasing profits.

The issue of language connects as well as differentiates the Scottish and Welsh writers in this chapter: whilst Scottish writers focus on class consciousness and prejudice, Welsh writers frequently assert the importance of language in maintaining a distinct cultural identity, and a sense of ‘Welshness’. As I discussed in the previous chapters, the politics of language is a recurrent concern for Scottish and Welsh writers

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\(^{11}\) Catrin Dafydd, *Random Deaths and Custard* (Llandysul: Gomer, 2007). All subsequent references will be to this edition and appear in parenthesis in the main body of the text.

\(^{12}\) Nikita Lalwani, *Gifted* (New York: Random House, 2007). All subsequent references will be to this edition and appear in parenthesis in the main body of the text.

\(^{13}\) Alison Miller, *Demo* (2005; London: Penguin, 2006). All subsequent references will be to this edition and appear in parenthesis in the main body of the text.

\(^{14}\) Ali Smith, *Girl Meets Boy* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2007). All subsequent references will be to this edition and appear in parenthesis in the main body of the text.
because of the centrality of this issue to a sense of belonging, alienation and dislocation. However, what is also interesting is that Dafydd, like many of the Scottish writers examined in this thesis, suggests that the language situation in Wales is dominated by class issues as well as geographical ones. Lalwani too examines how the loss or rejection of one’s indigenous language can alienate and isolate, yet, like Ali Smith, Lalwani also considers how language can be used to manipulate, distort and conceal the truth in order to sustain and maintain unequal power structures.

It has been evident throughout this thesis that representations of Welsh and Scottish identity have long privileged, and therefore empowered, the masculine thus marginalising female experience. Nations, as Anne McClintock reminds us, are ideologically constructed and enacted through a plethora of dogmas and discourses:

\[\text{Nations are not simply phantasmorgia of the mind; as systems of cultural representation whereby people come to imagine a shared experience of identification with an extended community, they are historical practices through which social difference is both invented and performed.}\]^{15}

Furthermore, if representations of national identity have privileged masculinity it has, without a doubt, favoured white, heterosexual masculinity. Charlotte Williams argues in a Welsh context – but the debate can equally be applied to Scotland – that devolution should provide ‘opportunities to challenge the myth of Welshness and to identify and disengage those symbols and meanings of national pride from narrow ethnic absolutism.’^{16} This is what Nikita Lalwani’s *Gifted*, a story about identity and belonging, endeavours to do. Lalwani illustrates the cultural diversity of Wales – a

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15 McClintock, “‘No longer in a Future Heaven’ Gender, Race and Nationalisms”, p.89.
diversity that until relatively recently was virtually unknown in terms of politics, culture and ‘Welshness’.17

*Gifted* gives voice to the ‘marginalized, traumatic, and often hidden experience of emigration and settlement […] shaped by high expectations prior to arrival that were betrayed by racist and class exploitation’.18 Lalwani depicts the consequences of alienation, isolation and belonging on both first and second generation migrants raising many interesting questions concerning internal and external colonisation and racism. Ideas of nationhood and female subjectivity are investigated though the young protagonist, Rumi Vasi, a ten-year-old girl with exceptional mathematical skill. The narrative follows Rumi growing up and eventually growing increasingly defiant as her parents attempt to steer her towards a life of academia and female obedience. As she states near the end of the novel just prior to absconding from Oxford University, ‘This is not my life […] This is not my life’ (264).

The story is set in Cardiff in the 1980s and begins with the father, Mahesh, reading Rumi’s exercise book, which acts as a diary. Rumi describes a visit to her friend Sharon’s house to collect sporting equipment. As they approach the house Sharon says to Rumi:

‘I just have to check you can come in Rumi because my mum doesn’t like coloured people.’
Then she went in [to her house] with the others [the white friends] and I waited outside. (3)

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17 In terms of politics, the Welsh Assembly still has a way to go in terms of representing minority voices – out of the sixty Assembly Members only one originates from an ‘ethnic’ minority, a mere 1.7% of the Assembly’s AMs. Data accessible from the National Assembly for Wales [Online]. Available from: http://www.assemblywales.org/memhome/mem-profile.htm [Accessed 6 June 2010]
Mahesh’s discovery reveals how the ten-year-old is dealing with racist attitudes towards her difference – a difference that she is unable to discuss with her parents but able to articulate in writing. The diary also challenges some basic assumptions concerning Wales – that it is an unprejudiced nation not prone to racism because of its own subjugated position. As Charlotte Williams argues:

The sentimental imagination of the nation casts the Welsh as tolerant, internationalist [...] In Welsh society three often cited myths perpetuate the denial that the Welsh can be racist:
‘That there are few black and ethnic minority people living here.’
‘There is no problem here.’
‘That the Celtic nations are tolerant nations.’
In the face of longstanding evidence of street, institutional and ‘banal’ racisms, the dominant hegemony of Wales continues to communicate the culture of disbelief, denial and deflection.19

The racism Rumi experiences leaves her isolated and marginalised; a displaced subject, positioned outside the nation because of her ethnicity. For Mahesh, Rumi’s diary exposes the tragedy of the racialised and colonized subject; treated as Other, their difference leads to rejection and humiliation. The word ‘coloured’ in Rumi’s diary troubles him:

it is an annoyance that deliberately attacks his thoughts every few minutes. Why did Rumi write that in her exercise book? [...] ‘Coloured’ [...] What would they make of this back in college [...] What would they think of this name? [...] Coloured? Why did she write it? (4-6)

The racist signifier ‘coloured’ operates to mask the complexity of identity and history; moreover, it keeps Rumi and her family separate from the dominant culture, for as Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis argue, this naming ‘serve[s] to differentiate and dominate and serve[s] to deny full participation in economic, social, political and

Mahesh’s attempt to broach the subject of racism illustrates how historical and political events shape a sense of self:

‘Do you like school, Rumi?’
‘I don’t like the bullies.’
‘What do you mean, bullies?’
‘People who aren’t nice to me.’
‘Do not let things affect you. You are ten years old now.’

[...]
‘If someone hits you, then hit them back. If they hit you once, hit them twice.’
If you are shocked, so am I, he thought. But you are not going to be a victim. That I will not allow. (4)

Indeed, refusing to accept the role of the subjugated resonates throughout the novel. For Mahesh, emotional strength and fortitude are vital. So, when Shreene, the mother, submits to the ‘immense strain of […] desolation’ (43) and phones home to India she is anxious Mahesh may find out. Shreene’s communication necessarily remains secret because ‘Mahesh would not approve of this kind of weakness […] succumbing like this to such a melodramatic tug of the heart’ (43). When Mahesh feels alienated and dislocated when he visits a public house, ‘he made a reprimanding mental note: “If you look down on your own status, you can only expect the same from others. No more of that”’ (124). Undoubtedly, the legacy of imperialism and colonisation has caused Mahesh’s anxiousness. By persistently reasserting his emotional strength and resilience, Mahesh is attempting to resist colonial discourses that claimed the ‘white man’ is intellectually and socio-culturally more refined. Nevertheless, at the same time as remaining profoundly attached to his Indian and Hindi cultures – Mahesh has, for instance, a ‘shrine for their guru […] on top of a chest of drawers’ (249) – he is also

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critical of aspects of that culture. His arranged marriage to Shreene worries him because of ‘the stereotypical elements of their union – the fact that they were essentially strangers’ (9). Although he is suspicious of ‘British’ morals, Mahesh aspires to the Western ideology of success – in other words, he is an ambivalent subject. But, because of his continual commitment to his original culture Mahesh, to an extent, resists the endeavours of the colonial project whose purpose, according to Thomas Macaulay, was to create

a class of person, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect [...] No Hindu who has received an English education ever remains sincerely attached to his religion.  

Nevertheless, and regardless of his qualifications and status, the legacy of imperial ideology means Mahesh still feels demeaned and inferior and he internalises colonial discourses that stereotypically represents the colonised as lacking. This is aptly illustrated when Rumi’s teacher is visiting the family to discuss Rumi’s prodigious mathematical talent. Whilst listening to Mrs Gold talk, Mahesh reflects, bitterly, to himself:

why was [Mrs Gold] so surprised that he and his daughter could string numbers together with reasonable panache? They were hardly shopkeepers [...] He was not going to dissolve into the rivers of blood, among Enoch Powell’s armies of bacteria, defecating in people’s nightmares on the landscape of their precious country. He was Dr. Mahesh Vasi, PhD, a man who had begun his maths career [...] in Patiala [...] Now he was here [...] speaking to a room of one hundred students each week, employed in name by the University of Swansea, subset of the University of Wales itself. What about that then? (7-8)

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21 Thomas Babington Macaulay cited in Anderson, Imagined Communities, p.91.
Mahesh’s need to attest value and importance (and the resultant anxieties caused by the pressure to assimilate) creates a family that is not only disconnected from their selves but from each other. The cultural disconnection and uneasy integration experienced by the migrant colonised subject is shown through Mahesh’s ban on Hindi being spoken at home because of his belief that the English language is the model of distinction and superiority. Nevertheless his ambivalence towards certain aspects of ‘British’ culture suggests Bhabha’s theory of colonial mimicry, which is ‘the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite’. Indeed, Mahesh’s mimicry reminds us that ‘whiteness’ and its associated values are constructed characteristics and the ironic effect of adopting ‘English’ behavioural patterns undermines any notion of an ethnic essence and an inherent ‘Englishness’ – or indeed ‘Welshness’.

However, because language is a key constituent of identity and representation, Mahesh’s prohibition of Hindi is problematic for the Vasi family: it creates secrets and induces isolation. For instance, Hindi becomes ‘the secret text in the lullabies Shreene sings to Nibu [the younger brother] when Mahesh is not around’ (27). The family’s linguistic impossibilities are manifested in Rumi’s love of maths: for her maths is a language she can understand and connect with. She thought, for instance, that ‘Five hundred and twelve was a lovely number. Really friendly’ (17). But, because Rumi ‘cannot understand Hindi’ (27) she is emotionally isolated and culturally estranged from her mother. Shreene finds it impossible to articulate her feeling and thoughts adequately to her daughter in a language other than her own. Consequently,

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23 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.86.
the communication gap caused Shreene an almost physical pain when she thought about it [...] she could not express herself happily to her own daughter. Instead she came out with platitudes. Awkward generalities. (45)

The Vasis’ linguistic problems illustrate the temporal extent of the colonial project. Simon During makes a valuable point in connection to issues of language, identity and belonging:

In both literature and politics the post-colonial drive towards identity centres around language [...] For the post-colonial to speak or write in the imperial tongues is to call forth a problem with identity, to be thrown into mimicry and ambivalence. The question for post-colonialism is political, cultural, and literary [...] in the material sense that a choice of language is a choice of identity.24

The imposition or adoption of a foreign language has obvious resonances with Welsh history as well, especially its imposition as a means of social control and manipulation.25 As Ismail Talib has noted: ‘educating the natives in English not only served the civilizing mission but also – and more importantly perhaps – the imperial mission of exerting better control over them’.26

The inability to communicate seeps through the family and re-emerges after Mahesh has discovered that his daughter, whilst at university, has had a relationship with a boy. Rumi’s romantic liaison, albeit a relatively innocent one, enrages her parents as it goes against particular modes of feminine behaviour. Moreover, the student is a Muslim, and the relationship is unforgivable because as Mahesh tells Rumi, ‘My family were raped by Muslims’ (246). Rumi’s transgression results in her parents’ refusing to speak to her and language becomes a site of contestation and struggle:

They avoided connecting with words, found other ways to observe their duties […] There was an agreement that this language of physical theatre had to be respected by both parties – to ignore it would be perilous indeed: it would mean their forced deportation back into the land of speech. (251)

Lalwani’s text also illustrates that despite time and geographical distance historical memories are still vitally important. Indeed, the conflicts and ensuing suffering endured by winning freedom from colonial rule continue to resonate with Rumi’s parents; their anguish is understandable, for as Shirin Keen asserts:

The partition of India left both India and Pakistan devastated. The process of partition had claimed many lives in the riots […] Many years after the partition, the two nations are still trying to heal the wounds left behind by this incision to the once-whole body of India. Many are still in search of an identity and a history left behind beyond an impenetrable boundary.27

And as a result of those wounds Mahesh finds it impossible to let go; he graphically recalls, ‘I was there are the time [...] I was four years old [...] My mother, pregnant with my sister carried me over the border in a suitcase [there was] mass cremations, burning bodies, train carriages full of flesh’ (65). Ned Thomas makes an interesting point about Wales in this respect, a point which applies to India too:

the suppressed group carries with it the sense of history; it cannot but feel the pressure of historical movement, historical direction. While the comfortable, adjusted social group can live in the present, we have to live in the past and in the future for the consciousness of suppression is implicit in the notion of liberation and emergence.28

Gifted portrays the disillusionment and fears of the migrant experience and Lalwani’s representation of Mahesh is valuable in voicing the complex and complicated experiences of the educated middle-class migrant. However, much of the complexity of

Lalwani’s text lies in the character Rumi, in her sense of self and developing subjectivity. It is through Rumi that ideas surrounding second generation migrant nationhood, identity and belonging are brought into question. In fact, these are issues the author herself has discussed in relation to her own identity:  

I wonder how to label myself and my brother in this list of nationalities - Indian origin, childhood in Wales, Sindhi parents displaced through the partition of India from a state in what is now Pakistan. There is a crucial difference between us. My father’s family took refuge in Rajasthan, and I was born in Kota, but my brother was born in Heath Hospital, Cardiff. It is a moot point as to whether it is a difference at all, really.²⁹

Like Katie in Happy Accidents and Nisha in Buddha Da, Rumi crosses two distinct cultures. And, although at times this is an ambivalent position, it does offer a positive movement towards hybridity. This is illustrated when she is visiting India and her cousin asks her:

‘Are you Angrez or Indian?  
Rumi waits. A lot seems to hang on the answer she gives [...]  
‘Both, yaar!’ she says, the unrolled r in the final word betraying her lack of Indian accent. (166)

Of course, Rumi is not ‘Angrez’ – she is Welsh-Indian. When she is with Fareed, her illicit boyfriend from London, it is her Welshness that is teased: ‘He grinned and mimicked her Welsh accent’ (222). So Rumi’s identities are plural, multifaceted and always dependent upon the discourses around her. She tells Fareed that India is in her veins, ‘inescapable’ (220) but she is constantly fighting against her parents’ traditions; and although the memory of partition haunts Rumi’s parents, for Rumi it remains ‘the alien word’ (55). Through Rumi’s character, Lalwani represents the second generation’s attempt to negotiate different cultures, traditions and conventions, ones that are often

‘competing [and] often incompatible’. Rumi is divided between her Welshness – no ‘hint of an Indian accent’ (166) – and her parent’s wish for her to be ‘a girl, an Indian one at that’ (47). Rumi’s sense of self and her difference from her peers has, at times, less than positive aspects: her cultural distinction meant she saw herself as ‘freakishly dressed in a lacy frock and thick woollen tights [...] the Indian synthetics completed a long list of reasons to be embarrassed’ (17). The sartorial division between Rumi and her school friends meant she was ‘not an identikit ident iden denters...Identical dentiski. Skident. It hurt’ (17). Rumi’s linguistic wordplay with ‘identity’ and ‘identical’ serves to remind us of the cultural construction of identity and difference. Marginalised by the other girls, Rumi ‘always had to ask if she could join in [...] as though it was a special favour [...] It made her mad. It was more than embarrassing. It was a horrible feeling’ (16). As Kadija Sesay argues, the children of migrants ‘are reminded constantly that they are “not of here” even though they believe and feel that they are’. This cultural fracture, along with her father’s punishing routine, his ‘tough love’ (267), manifests itself in Rumi’s addiction to cumin seeds – her secret offers her a modicum of control in a way she cannot access through other channels. Furthermore, it is a way she can furtively connect with aspects of her Indian ‘self’.

The relentless routine of studying mathematics at home (her father decided home-schooling was best) seven days a week left Rumi entirely isolated. However, her academic success gave her early entry to Oxford, and as she reminds herself, ‘my exam is my freedom’ (142). Rumi’s subsequent life at Oxford, renting a room in the house of a very distant relative, offers her some agency and an ‘escape from the unbearable

30 Weedon, ‘Migration, Identity, and Belonging in British Black and South Asian Women’s Writing’, p.28.
31 Kadija Sesay cited in ibid., p.30.
scrutiny of her life’ (194). On her first day she stands in front of her bedroom mirror and tries out different voices:

She glared at herself in the mirror and opened her mouth in a tight circle, crinkling her nose, ‘Yeah, you…you…fuckers!’ she wheezed with a cowboy snarl.
She stared at herself and made another face […] ‘you…cunts!
She changed tact, and used a posh voice […] ‘Oh, no, you cunts’. (191)

Again language takes on a significant function in Rumi’s life: this time, however, it is not the prohibited Hindi or punishment through enforced silence that is exemplified, but her linguistic playfulness and the use of strictly forbidden words. This linguistic transgression represents Rumi’s release from the regulatory norms of conventional femininity and provides her with an opportunity for performing identities without restriction. Preparing to find her own sense of self, Rumi also redesigns her wardrobe:

Shreene had insisted that nothing should be above the knee […] no low necks (everything came up to an embarrassing scoop or square shape just below her clavicles) […] The time had come to cut up her skirt ready for the first day. (191)

As Rumi tries to find a sense of selfhood she adopts the position of a split subject. Throughout her young life she has been the subject of competing discourses and these apparent tensions and conflicts mean that she struggles for a coherent subjectivity:

Rumi worked slowly to separate herself into two different people, with two exclusive sets of personal characteristics. She stored these covert signs of her personalities in separate parts of her brain […] the top could contain all of the information that was supposed to define her at any one time, leaving the bottom to safeguard everything that needed to be kept hidden. (199)

Like Kay’s character, Colman, in chapter 3, Rumi experiences bi-cultural pressures, and these conflicts and the ‘duality of [her] life had started to take its toll’ (199). The novel
ends with Rumi’s escape from Oxford to live in Brighton, a place which, according to her father’s friend Whitefoot, is inhabited by ‘people who’ve decided to get back to being themselves’ (260). Estranged from her parents in Cardiff, Rumi in the final scene looks out to sea whilst Shreene walks up to her for a pre-arranged meeting (without Mahesh). This scene seems to suggest that the Welsh-Indian remains socioculturally alienated, yet it can also be read positively; the liminal location (the English seashore) is a ‘signifying space’ across which multiple cultural discourses, discussions and interactions can take place. It can also be read as a ‘transitional space’ in terms of Rumi’s subjectivity and autonomy, a spatial temporality that offers a range of possibilities. Like the other texts discussed in this chapter, the story concludes with a sense of hopefulness; it looks beyond the limiting periphery towards the horizon and potentiality. Lalwani’s novel, published a decade after the successful referendum, illustrates a confident Welsh-Indian writer interrogating the ‘burden of empire’ in a Welsh context. Lalwani’s examination of the complexity of Wales and its people suggests that in this devolutionary milieu the ‘national story’ of Wales needs to be problematised and questioned and the narratives of its entire people told.

Like Lalwani’s novel, Alison Miller’s Demo concerns a young female protagonist endeavouring to realise a sense of self whilst attempting to understand the world she inhabits. Miller’s text also considers the idea of history and how events fix themselves to the individual’s as well as the national psyche. Both Gifted and Demo illustrate how identity is constructed and constituted from both inside and outside the nation. Lalwani illustrates how the ‘outsider’ is racially and violently constructed; for

32 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, pp.148-170.
33 Gramich, ‘Cymru or Wales? Explorations in a divided sensibility’, p.102.
instance, after Rumi’s disappearance, the media portrays Mahesh as a ‘money-hungry immigrant, desperate to profit from his daughter’s ability [and] an aspiring terrorist, using his fiercely trained child as a weapon to subvert the free thinking traditions of the West’ (269). In Demo, it is the characters Julian and Laetitia who construct ideas of Scottishness from their privileged English perspectives. Furthermore, like Strachan and Wooff’s novels in the previous chapter, both Lalwani’s and Miller’s texts are narratives of travel: Lalwani’s protagonist moves from Cardiff to Oxford to Brighton, each phase a sign of Rumi’s growing independence and maturity. Likewise, Demo’s main protagonists travel from Florence to Glasgow, Florence to London to Glasgow and Glasgow to Helensburgh – and again, as in Strachan’s text, journeying signifies a growing sense of subjectivity. This sense of movement and searching for space is also comparable to some of the earlier texts discussed, for instance, the novels by Trezise and Cooke.

Demo is a post-devolutionary text set largely in Glasgow and told through the perspectives of two female protagonists, Clare and Laetita. The narrative begins with sixteen-year-old Clare travelling to Florence in 2002 with her older brother, Danny, to attend an anti-globalisation demonstration. During her trip Clare meets Julian, her brother’s well-heeled English friend, with whom she has her first sexual encounter. In Italy she also meets Laetita, Julian’s wealthy English girlfriend who, after the demonstration in Florence, leaves her family home in London to live with Julian in Glasgow. The story’s alternating perspectives, from characters socially, economically and culturally poles apart, illustrates the complex and conflicting relationships that exist in post-devolution Scotland. By giving Laetitia a voice, Miller also allows Scotland to be viewed internally by an ‘outsider’.
Like several other novels discussed in this thesis, Miller’s narrative primarily employs young working-class characters to drive the story. However, what is strikingly different about *Demo* compared to, say, Hird’s *Born Free* (1999) or Rachel Trezise’s *In and out of the Goldfish Bowl* (2000) is that Miller’s protagonists are not politically disaffected but are directly engaged in the sociopolitical and economic functions of capitalist society, analysing and scrutinizing the world’s governments and how their decisions impact upon local and global communities. In this sense, *Demo* is a particularly positive novel portraying political awareness and a conscientious determination to confront international issues and injustices.

Miller’s concern with international issues is indicative of a maturing Scotland and a progressive Scottish literature. Nevertheless, it is a notably ‘Scottish’ text, and although it is also very contemporary in its subject matter and perspectives, the novel provides a sense of history. Through conversations between Danny and his father, the reader is reminded of early twentieth-century Scottish working-class campaigners who fought against imperialists’ agendas. In this way, *Demo* is also similar to *Gifted*: whilst Lalwani considers the historical legacy of the violent upheaval caused by India’s partition, Miller illustrates that Scotland’s past included revolutionaries who fought against colonising forces. This is firstly illustrated when Clare tells the reader about the fractious relationship that exists between her father and brother:

Ma da keeps goin on about Danny no havin a job. Like it’s his fault he got his books fae the Call Centre. They’re always arguin. Ma da givin it, When you gonny grow up and shoulder your responsibilities? At least the Call Centre was a job.

Danny […] gives it, So where’s your politics now? The big socialist, eh? The Big Red Clydesider. That kinda work’s crap and you know it […] Some a they boys in there have never even heard of a union. (4)
Later in the novel when Danny is explaining to Laetita about his father’s reaction concerning his failure to attend university, Scotland’s once-radical past is again mentioned:

Ma da went mental the day the results [exams] came out, did his Big Red Clydesider […] apart fae revolution, it’s education that’s gonny liberate the masses! There’s nay room for a stumer in the struggle. (193)

The references to the Red Clydesiders\(^35\) throughout the novel are important. Miller is suggesting that political activism is still part of the psyche of politically-engaged working-class Glaswegians, as seen by the massive demonstration against the war in Iraq near the end of the novel.

Danny’s character shows that the tradition of political battle is still pertinent in contemporary Scotland; as Clare points out, when Danny is ‘givin it, The Means of Production and Globalization and The Changing Economy, he sounds just like ma da’ (11). Furthermore, Danny’s Marxism and the demonstration Clare and her friends participate in at Clydeside connect the past to the present. Like the protesters marching against the First World War (a conflict, many thought, motivated by capitalist and imperial expansion) almost a century earlier, Clare and her friends are amongst many thousands demonstrating against neo-colonialist expansion:

I turn and look back. All you can see for miles through the streets a Glasgow is thousands and thousands a people. The road’s pure jammed right across. It gies me a funny feelin in the back a my throat. Farkhanda’s looked back too. They surely can’t start a war with all this opposition, she says. (265)

Miller’s representation of the political protest, in which Clare and Farkhanda are firmly involved, reclaims Clydeside from male writers who have employed the

\(^35\) Glasgow was built around the river Clyde and Red Clydeside refers to political action and sedition by workers in the city. According to Strathclyde University archives, during the period 1910-1932 massive working-class ‘protest and political agitation […] challenged the forces of capitalism and also, on occasion, directly challenged the state itself’. [Online]. Available at: http://gdl.cdlr.strath.ac.uk/redclyde/redclydocbackgr.htm [Accessed 2 May 2010]
image of working-class solidarity and opposition in an attempt to define some essentialist idea of Scottish identity, as fundamentally white, working-class and male.  

Miller extends and enriches the story of Glasgow and uses the tradition of demonstrations and political agitation to re-define Scottishness. For, as Laetitia observes, in Glasgow ‘there are Asian grocers; the African Caribbean fruit sellers […] Italian restaurants’ (196). Miller imagines a more comprehensive ‘authentic’ Scotland – one that includes both women and men, young and old, English, Scottish, Scottish-Asian. This multitudinous and hybrid culture, Alaister Niven argues, is historically rooted:

Scotland is now – and in earlier times was – a composite nation, melding together several ethnic elements […] Scotland, as far back as we have knowledge of its human history, has always been an admixture of peoples […] Scottish identity has always been constructed through processes of intercultural exchange arising from the interchange of diverse cultures, through diaspora and immigration, and the integration of immigrant communities into an essentially civic and cultural – and by no means ethnic – conception of Scottishness.  

This is a post-devolution text and accordingly Miller brings the new political configuration into the core of her examination of present-day Scotland. The politically-engaged characters are also politically enraged and they show knowledge of, if not allegiance to, politics in Scotland and beyond. They are informed and they have considered and calculated opinions; nevertheless, they are cynical about political ideologies and motives: for instance, Danny refers to the Scottish Parliamentarians as a ‘Bunch a jumped-up councillors’ (178). His judgement on the MSPs suggests that he

36 For instance, George Blake, William McIlvanney and Jeff Torrington have all used ideas relating to the Red Clydesiders to evoke an ‘authentic’ working-class, masculine-identified Scotland.
considers the powers Westminster bestowed upon ‘the Upturned Boat’ (178) are inadequate and that, in reality, England still presides. In other words, there is, as Ronald Turnbull argues, a ‘democratic deficit built into the devolution settlement.’

Moreover, Jed, Danny’s flatmate, calls the MSPs ‘a parcel a rogues’ (178) who are discrediting Scotland because of the Scottish parliament’s involvement with the neo-colonial attacks on the Middle East. The ‘parcel of rogues’ retort connects the new Scottish Parliament with the 1707 Act of Union: the poet Robert Burns’ poem ‘Such a Parcel of Rogues in a Nation’ was an angry verse criticising the Union as the work of a few greedy aristocrats selling Scotland for a handful of gold. Indeed, Danny and Jed’s demonstration flyers reiterate the dishonour: ‘GUANTANAMO BELMARCH DUNGAVEL – END SCOTLAND’S SHAME’. (178)

Miller’s examination of the contemporary political climate in Scotland depicts a nation’s anger, at a very specific time, at the apparent lack of power people have in world dominated by neo-colonial super-powers. The references to the Scottish parliament’s inadequacies (and betrayal) show the main characters’ distrust of the new political structure; it also underlines a healthy dissension, just a few years after the prolonged fight for a devolved parliament was secured. Furthermore, Miller’s novel shows that although there are a diversity of citizens engaged in both national and international politics, Scotland’s post-devolution society still has huge problems with alienation and despair. This is illustrated in a conversation Clare has with Laetitia about why the family are concerned for Danny’s safety after he left the family home following

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an argument with his father: ‘you don’t know what it’s like in the scheme.’ Two a Danny’s pals fae school have topped theirself this year already. And another yin tried last month’ (202). So Scotland in the twenty-first century may be a newly emerging nation, full of energy and enthusiasm, but significantly it still has young people suicidally wretched. Thus, Miller reminds us that the underlying problems of social and economic injustices within Scotland have not disappeared post-devolution, for as Thom Cross argues

> Serious socio-economic deprivation, mass powerlessness, alienation, extensive drug-dependency, cultural schizophrenia are all too familiar symptoms of the classical neo-colonial condition of persistent poverty.

In terms of the post-devolution landscape remaining marked by social inequality, Miller’s employment of two wealthy English characters raises some interesting questions about contemporary Scots/English relationships and how the outsider from the metropolitan centre perceives the periphery. There are ‘enduring ramifications’ of colonial bigotry, highlighted in one scene just after Laetitia moves to Glasgow. The episode involves an elderly homeless man who has asked Julian for money:

> S’cuse me, pal, any spare change?
> [...]
> Fuck off, mate, Julian said. Go and rummage in a bin
> [...]
> ‘Did you audition for this role then? [Julian] said. Archetypal Glasgow drunk? The old man’s attention was on Julian’s hand, as he returned the remaining coins to his pocket. When he raised his head [...] his eyes looked tired. No, son. I was born tay it. (145)

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40 Scottish term for a social housing estate.
Julian’s encounter with the old man reminds us of how the socially-disadvantaged have been stereotyped as ‘drunks’ and presented as the archetype of an entire nation. The idea of an ‘uncivilised’ Scottish identity clearly helped the imperial and colonial interests: how could a nation full of inebriated locals ever manage their own affairs? This is a point Bhabha raises: ‘The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types [...] in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction.’43 Later on the same day the English couple have a conversation on the subway concerning the encounter with the old man; Julian again stereotypes all Glaswegians into a crude representation:

Don’t worry, babe. It’s the Glasgow style. Even the drunks are into politics and philosophy. The whole Rab C. Nesbitt nine yards [...] On the seat across from them, a young guy was glaring at Julian [...] What you sayin about Glasgow, ya posh cunt? You don’t like it, go back where you came fae. Glaahs-gey! It’s fuckin Glasgow man. Glaz-goh [...] Fuckin English cunt, he said to the back of an Asian woman getting off in front of him. ‘Don’t worry pal. We’re no all like that.’ A guy about their age [said]. In saying that, you were a bit condescending. Rab C.’s well passé, pal. Know what I’m saying. Doesny do to patronize the good people of Glasgow […] Piece a free advice, my friend’. (146)

Denigrating Glasgow as a population of Rab C. Nesbit44 men drunkenly, but harmlessly, spouting ‘politics and philosophy’ serves to illustrate the arrogance of colonial discourse and the incessant need to construct cultural difference, to formulate the Other. As Bhabha argues, the stereotype is the subject of colonial discourse,

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43 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, p.70.
44 Rab C. Nesbit was the character created by writer Ian Pattison for the 1990s BBC comedy of the same name. According to the BBC website, Nesbit was the ‘string vest-wearing, permanently sozzled [...] armchair philosopher, living a life of near poverty in Glasgow’s Govan’ BBC [Online]. Available from: http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/rabcnesbitt/ [Accessed 6 June 2011].
a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always "in place", already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated [...] The stereotype requires for its successful signification, a continual and repetitive chain of other stereotypes. The process by which the metaphoric masking is inscribed on a lack which must then be concealed gives the stereotype both its fixity and its phantasmatic quality - the same old stories [...] must be told (compulsively) again and afresh, and are differently gratifying and terrifying each time.45

Even before Laetitia travels to Scotland, she judges it as a place inhabited by violent savages (her impression of the country is undoubtedly produced by the London-centred media and myths about the ‘hardness’ of the ‘no mean city’); as Danny points out, it is a representation that is not always correct:

did your granny really live in the Gorbals? Laetitia says to me. Wasn’t it a bit – well – rough for an old lady [...] You shouldn’t believe all you hear about Glasgow. (68)

Miller’s use of ‘a pair of fucking upper-class wankers’ (98) as part of the main narrative shows the tensions between the margin and the centre, and moreover, it importantly moves the centre to the margins. Julian represents aggressive colonial masculinity; his ‘aristocratic drawl’ (155) marks him as different. His attitude to Clare, who has fallen in love with him, suggests he has used her merely for sexual gratification and her emotional attachment is inconsequential: ‘She’ll be fine […] It’s just something that happened. A product of circumstance’ (112). In fact, Julian sees Clare as something to be conquered, territory to be occupied, as the exchange between Julian and Danny at the beginning of the novel illuminates:

she’s strictly off limits, Jules; I promised ma da I’d look after her [...] Well if Comrade Kilkenny’s decreed that his peach of a daughter’s not to be tampered with, who am I to stage a coup. (12)

45 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, pp.66 and 77.
Clare’s objectification and the men’s conversation are suggestive of what Elleke Boehmer calls ‘the nation embodied as woman’.\textsuperscript{46} Furthermore, Julian’s language is reminiscent of imperialist discourse which frequently fantasised the female body as terrain to be explored and conquered. Anne McClintock argues:

The historically different but persistent ways in which women served as the boundary markers of imperialism [...] the feminizing of terra incognita, was from the outset [...] a strategy for violent containment. If, at first glance, the feminizing of the land appears to be no more than a familiar symptom of male megalomania, it also betrays acute paranoia and a profound, if not pathological, sense of male anxiety and boundary loss.\textsuperscript{47}

Julian perceives Clare as a challenge, illustrated during a heated discussion with Clare about politics:

Julian [...] turns right round and looks at me and smiles. I look right back. I don’t smile. I keep lookin right in his eyes [...] I keep starin at him. He looks surprised [...] So she has opinions, the young Clare, Julian says. I like a woman who knows her own mind. (16)

And his subsequent behaviour also typifies a type of power struggle between men: whilst in Florence, Danny is having a sexual relationship with Laetitia which profoundly troubles Julian (Julian and Laetitia are already romantically involved with each other). The day after their arrival in Florence Julian asks Clare into his hotel room: ‘it sounds like an order but I know it’s really a question’ (38). He is ‘impatient’ (40). The following scene, from Clare’s perspective, describes what is, in fact, a rape:

Julian, wait.
It’s OK. Just relax [...]
Wait...Julian...
But he’s on top of me now [...] He prises my legs open and the next thing [...] he shoves into me...and I scream...

Julian, stop you’re hurting me.
But it’s like he can’t hear me.
He keeps bangin it into me and bangin and bangin. (40)

Several months later at a demonstration in Glasgow, Julian still employs gendered and colonial discourse:

[Clare:] I’d thought you’d be wantin to be at the front, I says. In the vanguard.
[ ...]
Only at demos on foreign soil, my dear…
Is Scotland no foreign soil, then? I says. I’m looking at him through the bars of my dreads.
Oh, the most exotic of all foreign countries [...]  
I hate it when he tries to do a Scottish accent. (264)

The language used, and the incidents themselves, suggest women are still in a vulnerable position despite the political restructuring, and that although Scotland has entered a post-devolution era, imperial domination and discourse are still deployed in the performance of power. In Anne McClintock’s words, ‘women are [still] boundary markers of imperialism.’

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Like the other writers in this chapter, Miller is fundamentally concerned with notions of identity and belonging, nationality and nationhood. Laetitia’s perspective as an ‘outsider’ makes visible how nations are racially constructed. When introduced to Jed, Danny and Julian’s flatmate, Laetitia is surprised by Jed’s ethnicity: ‘For some reason she didn’t expect him to be Asian [...] His accent was Glaswegian’(176). The reaction to Jed’s hybrid identity has obvious resonances with Lalwani’s Rumi, who was also nationally marginalised. As Chris Weedon argues, ‘racism and racialized, white ethnocentrism persist and continue to shape subjectivities and the relationship of

Jed’s state of belonging is also questioned by state authorities, as illustrated when he explains why he was unable to travel to the Florence demonstration. His exclusion is also indicative of its time and discloses an anti-Asian and Islamophobic attitude rife in the post-9/11 environment:

Aye, well, I told you the problems I had getting into France in the summer. Fuckin four hours detained at le douanier’s pleasure before they let me through. Whole a Europe paranoid about us dark-skinned brothers. If you’re no a Suspected Terrorist, you’re a Bogus Asylum Seeker, the new Bogeyman. Best you can hope for is economic migrant status and getting snapped up by some capitalist bastard to do the jobs nay other cunt wants. (177)

As well as questioning the politics and practices of a country that treats its visible minorities with obvious racist disdain, Miller brings together ideas relating to ethnicity, belonging and nationhood. Miller’s examination of the politics of identity responds to a concern raised by David McCrone in 2002:

Issues of ethnicity and national identity rarely seem to connect [...] whereas the whole vocabulary and rhetoric of ethnicity belong to the framework of a multiculturalism […], nationalism and national identity relate to constitutional politics and the devolution of power.⁵⁰

Certainly Miller’s novel engages with the post-devolution debates surrounding the ideology of nationhood and, as Graeme Macdonald suggests, this issue is becoming a central concern amongst contemporary Scottish writers.⁵¹ Indeed, Philomena de Lima argues that Scotland’s ability to address issues concerning national identity and ‘race’ is a direct consequence of the post-devolution landscape: ‘Scottish devolution has

⁴⁹ Weedon, ‘Migration, Identity, and Belonging’, p.18.
⁵¹ Graeme Macdonald, ‘Scottish Extractions, “Race” and Racism in Devolutionary Fiction’, p.81.
facilitated a focus on racism and “race” equality issues in ways that were previously absent.52

This concern amongst Scottish and Welsh writers has been ‘fuelled by a number of social, cultural and political factors’53 and like Donovan, Azzopardi and Lalwani, Miller explores the debate around ethnic and civic identities and ideas of belonging and considers the ‘racialised boundaries’54 of the nation. The character of Farkhanda, Clare’s friend, provides the perspective of a typical Scottish teenager, whose increasingly visible ethnicity marks her as different. However, Miller’s examination is much more than an analysis of ‘street racism’55 it also considers what happens when gender is implicated in the politics and ideologies of belonging and community identity and how these impact and impress upon a young woman’s subjectivity. Farkhanda’s older sister Shenaz becomes involved with a conservative division of Islam, perhaps as a consequence of the anti-Muslim feeling in the west. Her subsequent adoption of the hijab, and her insistence that Farkhanda also adopts this garment, is a clear symbolic assertion of an Islamic identity. In this post 9/11 milieu, the religious symbol has an effect on both Clare and Farkhanda:

I nearly burst out greetin the first day she came in with the headscarf on. All her lovely hair under a white scarf [...] It was hard enough for her before, some a the boys callin her Paki cow and stuff. Now it’s like: *Osama, Osama in excelsis Deo* [...] in assembly. And they run up behind her in the corridor and slap her on the bum and yell, *Jee-haad!* (225)

This passage exposes how Islamophobia and racist ideologies surrounding Asians manifest themselves in the every day. Further on in the novel Farkhanda goes from

52 Philomena de Lima cited in ibid, p.81.
53 Chris Weedon, ‘Migration, Identity, and Belonging in British Black and South Asian Women’s Writing’, p.18.
54 Ibid.
wearing the hijab to being ‘dressed in black fae head to toe. No just her hijab. She’s wearing a sorta long black coat right down to her feet [...] There’s tears in her eyes’ (250). Farkhanda’s shift from headscarf to full ‘Muslim dress’ (255) comes on the day of the demonstration against the war in Iraq and can be read as Shenaz’s insistence that they express solidarity with the people of Iraq at a time when ‘Across Europe, Muslim minorities are under threat of collateral damage from the “War on Terror.”’ Shenaz may have adopted this dress in her search for an ‘authentic’ identity and sense of belonging in a country of ‘racialised boundaries that exclude’ or she may have been making a political statement; nevertheless, what is clear is that Farkhanda is split between her parents’ heritage, her sister’s enforced adoption of conservative dress and her own identity as a young Scottish woman.

Farkhanda represents the visible cultural difference of a complex and diverse Scotland but, as Miller reminds us, Scotland is also made up of ‘invisible’ differences and conflicts. Clare and Danny also serve to complicate the notion of a fixed, inherent Scottish identity based on a particular ‘essence’. They are Scottish-Irish-Catholic and as such also face prejudice. As Clare recalls,

Big May fae Skaill Street. I used to be dead scared of her. When we were wee, she was aye out on her veranda, especially if her Robert was wi us, goin her dinger, givin it, You weans get back to your ain bit, comin over here makin trouble [...] But we wereny makin trouble [...] At the time my ma thought it was maybe cause we were Catholics. Tell her you’re a communist, ma da says. Tell her religion’s the opium a the masses and sectarianism’s a mortal sin (226).

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Anti-Catholic sentiments in Scotland were formerly associated with nationalism and ideas of belonging, so when Big May states Catholics did not belong – ‘comin over here makin trouble’ (226) – she is merely regurgitating conservative nationalist ideology. Indeed, the Church of Scotland addressed their own fears quite succinctly in a 1923 report on the matter, The Menace of the Irish Race to our Scottish Nationality.\(^5\)

Hussain and Miller contextualise the issue:

Long before there were substantial numbers of Pakistani Muslims in Scotland there were large number of Irish Catholics […] For a century after [the 1850s] the debate and multiculturalism in Scotland focused on the Irish Catholic minority and the Protestant reaction against it.\(^6\)

However, Scotland is a hyphenated nation and, as Hussain and Miller assert, in contemporary Scotland ‘forward-looking Scottish nationalists have tried to distance themselves from backward-looking sectarian divisions.’\(^6\) In terms of bigotry and phobias\(^6\) Miller makes an important point at the end of the novel. Scotland’s post-devolution position means its relationship with England has changed. This is illustrated via Julian and Laetitia who have a baby – born in Scotland and bonded with Danny and Clare’s parents who ‘offered to look efter him a couple of days a week’ (301). Miller suggests that although post-devolution Scotland may be run by a ‘parcel of rogues’ its citizens are demanding a nation based on diversity of identities, not a Scotland based on an identity that is exclusive or unitary, anti-English or ethnic-based. For as Stuart Hall reminds us:

Identities are never unified […] increasingly fragmented and fractured [they are] never singular but multiply constructed across different often intersecting

\(^{5}\) Hussain and Miller, Multicultural Nationalism, p.67.
\(^{6}\) Ibid., p.66
\(^{6}\) Ibid., p.68
\(^{6}\) Hussain and Miller assert that Scotland has many phobias including Anglophobia, Europhobia, Islamophobia and Asylophobia, see ibid., p.67.
and antagonistic discourses, practice and position [...] they are constantly in the process of change and transformation.\textsuperscript{62}

Negotiating the plurality of identities is an issue all the writers in this thesis discuss in one form or another. As discussed throughout this chapter, in Scotland and Wales, language as a marker of cultural difference has been central to ideas of identity, belonging, separation and assimilation. Language, especially in Wales, is also a profoundly political issue. Catrin Dafydd’s \textit{Random Deaths and Custard}, the writer’s first English-language novel, brings the ‘complexity of the linguistic and cultural situation’\textsuperscript{63} to the story of Samantha Jones, a young factory worker from the south Wales Valleys who is obsessed by the idea of life’s coincidences and her fortunate ability to narrowly avoid fatal accidents. The narrative revolves around the sixteen-year-old and her family and tells the story of a Valleys community in the twenty-first century from Samantha’s perspective. Like Trezise, Hird and Lalwani, Dafydd gives voice to those who have been previously silenced and marginalised; furthermore she does so in their own vernacular – something that Trezise did not attempt when writing her Valleys-based novel. By utilizing south Walian dialects, Dafydd relocates the periphery to the centre and as such has much in common with many contemporary Scottish writers like Alison Miller. Dafydd’s employment of an authentic Valleys voice is also a political stance, for as, as Jeremy Scott argues, a ‘narrative voice [that] attempt[s] to establish and emphasise a difference and distance from Standard English’ takes an anti-colonial position.\textsuperscript{64} In Janet Paisley’s novel, discussed in chapter 4, the use of Scots throughout \textit{Not For Glory} was an obvious political act designed to mark cultural difference from

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item \textsuperscript{63} Bohata, \textit{Postcolonialism Revisited}, p.119.
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England and to centre a marginalised language. Likewise Dafydd’s text illustrates a similar politics: her use of untranslated Welsh words separates her narrative from ‘English’ literature. Furthermore, Dafydd’s utilization of Standard English, Welsh and Valleys’ vernacular English represents a Wales which is linguistically diverse and vibrant and suggests Bakhtin’s ideas of the languages of heteroglossia. Indeed, Dafydd’s text can be understood as ‘dialogized heteroglossia’, which is the ‘authentic environment of the utterance, in which it lives and takes its shape’.\footnote{Mikhail Bakhtin, \textit{The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin}, ed., Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.272.} In this novel language becomes non-hierarchal; rather than conveying linguistic splits and schisms, her use of the manifold registers represents a variety of intersecting languages, asserting and integrating different perceptions on the world. As Alastair Renfrew argues:


Through narrating Samantha’s story of growing self-awareness, Dafydd’s work participates in the post-devolution debate on culture and identity and contributes to the discourse concerning the plurality of Welsh languages. Her novel endeavours to bridge the linguistic gap and she illustrates that the survival of a minority language is not only possible but culturally positive. Dafydd’s position within the politics of language is very contemporary: while she acknowledges the struggle to safeguard Welsh, she also recognises internal divisions and the relationship between language, class and geography, though she does suggest a diversity of cultures is possible. Indeed, at the
conclusion of her novel Dafydd implies that to survive as a nation, acceptance and support of hybridity and multi-lingualism is culturally constructive.

Nonetheless, Dafydd does not present the language issue as uncomplicated or easy to reconcile: from the outset she illustrates the linguistic divisions in contemporary Wales and suggests these are connected to sociocultural positions. Samantha’s deliberation on the ‘Welshy Welshies up the street’ (8), the only family in the village who speak Welsh, makes the socio-economic aspect of the language schisms clear. According to Samantha, the indigenous language belongs to the ‘poshos’ (57); thus Dafydd, like many Scottish writers, connects the language issue to class. Contemporary language use is also a matter of ‘fashion’ and therefore influenced by social factors such as age as well as class. So although Samantha was educated at a Welsh-language school and ‘liked Welsh’ (8), she gave it up because ‘it just wasn’t cool’ (8). According to Peter Garrett et al., Samantha’s position is typical: ‘Young adults in their early to midteen years [show] a decline in the supportive attitudes towards the Welsh language [...] as they move away from family identity towards peer-group pressure.’ However, linguistic variety use is complex and, as Samantha reminds us, geographical location also plays a role when it comes to speaking Welsh. On a school trip to Caernarfon, Samantha’s reflections illustrate how one part of a small nation can differ linguistically from another:

It’s bloody mad up there, mind. They seriously speak Welsh to each other and they’re not taking the piss. They actually probably say things in Welsh to each other when they have sex an’ all in Caernarfon. That’s mad that is! Innit? (15)

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As Samantha notes ‘Up there’ has culturally evolved differently from the south Wales valleys, which have been the heartland of urbanisation, industrialisation and immigration since the mid-eighteenth century. As Marion Löffler asserts,

After the 1880s [...] the Welsh-speaking, chapel-going culture in many of the industrialised areas [...] was showing signs of weakening under the influence of a flood of English-speaking immigrants and an oppressive British Education policy.68

The novel begins with Samantha introducing her family, ‘I live with Mam and Nanna. Nanna’s mad [...] She hasn’t always been mad. Just since Dad left really’(7). She also tells us that ‘Nanna likes Welshy stuff. I used to be able to speak Welsh, see’ (8) and that her uncle is ‘a paedo’ (9). The narrative is energetic and at times exhausting as Dafydd allows her protagonist to jump randomly from subject to subject; nevertheless, this gives Samantha, who is trying to make sense of her world, immediacy and provides authenticity to her articulations. The issues of language, belonging, and identity begins when Samantha reveals to her co-worker Maggie that she used to speak Welsh: ‘she was well impressed and told Chief and Chief told Penny, the boss’ (15). As a result of this conversation Samantha starts translating English into Welsh for the custard factory where she works which gives her the opportunity to use and connect both her languages. However, a visit from Dwynwen, a member of the Welsh Language Commission, to discuss Samantha’s new role reveals the complexity of Samantha’s new responsibility:

Dwynwen spoke half in Welsh and half in English. She was on another planet, mind: the things she thinks we’ll be able to do in Welsh. She wants me answerin’ the phone in Welsh and all. My arse. The thing that bugged me was that Martin was noddin back and forth pretendin’ to speak Welsh. It is awkward, mind, when people can’t speak Welsh in a room with people who

can. When she spoke to me in Welsh, I felt it was our little secret [...] She nominated me the Welsh Language Officer of Custards [...] She gave me these pins to give out to people who can understand or speak Welsh in work. Like a badge it is. The bad thing was that I know no one in Custards would wear one and that they would be at the bottom of the drawer by the end of the day. (56)

Although Samantha and Dwynwen’s conversation seems to illustrate Wales is ‘a bilingual country with two cultures in correspondence’ 69 and is suggestive of an easy communication or merging between Welsh and English, Dafydd’s text also exposes problematical aspects connected to language use. For instance, Dwynwen fails to take into account sociocultural differences: she enthusiastically expects the factory workers to identify themselves as a Welsh-language workforce while Samantha knows this is highly improbable. Furthermore, Martin’s presence and pretence reminds us that most of the population in south Wales do not speak Welsh. This highlights the complexity and contentiousness of the language issue in Wales and differentiates it to some extent from Scotland. It has been argued that the foundation of Welsh nationhood is linguistic and accordingly the Welsh language is the crucial element of Welsh national identity. 70 Yet if this is the case, a problem arises because we need to discount Martin from claiming ‘Welshness’. This position also essentialises Welsh identity. As Kirsti Bohata argues:

There are large assumptions being made about the nature of language and its relationship to culture [...] Wales has often been represented as having two cultures [based on language use in North and South] thus producing a more or less essentialist version of Welsh culture(s) as defined by language. Essentialist claims that construct language as synonymous with, or at least a vehicle of, a particular culture [...] can be persuasive, if ultimately reductive’. 71

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69 Roland Mathias quoted in Thomas, Corresponding Cultures: The Two Literatures of Wales, p.2.
70 Ibid.
However, Samantha reminds us Wales is more than ‘a bicultural situation’, for instance, Ahmed, one of her co-workers, is a Sikh.

Nevertheless, because of myriad social, economic and political problems the fact is that in the south Wales Valleys ‘nobody speaks Welsh [...] anymore’ and this places Samantha in a precarious position: the Welsh Language Commission tells Samantha, she ‘need[s] to practise [...] Welsh more now’. However, it was only the ‘posho’ neighbours ‘who spoke Welsh’ and they ‘were somewhere else to where I was’. Consequently, Samantha’s only means of practising Welsh was via the media: ‘see, I thought if I can’t speak to real people in Welsh then I best listen to the radio’. Needless to say, as a result of her linguistic isolation and the factory’s desire to use the young, inexperienced translator, Samantha’s role is short-lived. As her line manager Chief explains:

People in Cardiff, they’ve been phonin’ up sayin’ the message on our lorries is wrong in Welsh. It’s written bad. I just stood there. I wanted to cry. I was blushin’ [...] I was so embarrassed that I just bawled my eyes out. Maybe I wasn’t perfect, but I didn’t say I was. And I hadn’t tried for a job as a translator. It had just, well, sort of happened.’

In her apology Samantha tells the Welsh Language Commission,

I wanted to speak Welsh, and that I tried with people on my street but it didn’t work. I said it didn’t work like that up here [...] ‘Wy’n gwbod. Wy’n gwbod.’ She knew damn well there was no way I could practise speakin Welsh with anyone I knew.

Samantha’s isolation also illustrates the Welsh predicament of cultural and linguistic colonialism. Although Samantha’s immediate family do not speak Welsh, her grandmother’s generation were Welsh speakers and culturally Welsh-identified. This is illustrated when Samantha experiences yet another of her ‘Random Deaths’ (she

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72 Thomas, Corresponding Cultures: The Two Literatures of Wales, p.2.
inadvertently touched a socket with wet hands and as a result suffered an electric shock). She wondered if Nanna would have arranged a proper Welsh funeral for me. Like they have in Caernarfon and all those places. Bara Brith and Welsh cakes. Everyone wearin’ daffodils on their suits and my Dad singin’ ‘Calon Lân’ at the top of his voice. ‘Cos he’d be able to sing, wouldn’t he, if he could speak Welsh.’ (59)

Indeed, Nanna seems to be the only Welsh-language influence in Samantha’s life although for the most part – with the exception of watching Welsh-language programmes – the grandmother’s Welsh remains unspoken and virtually secretive. The issue of the grandmother’s connection with, yet refutation of, her mother-tongue is highlighted after her funeral, as Samantha points out that it was ‘weird really, that Nanna loved watchin’ Pobol y Cwm but hadn’t sent Dad nor Alison to a Welsh school’ (94). However, historically, Nanna’s reluctance to educate her children in Welsh was not uncommon; as Marion Löffler states, ‘great-grandparents and grandparents did not pass on the Welsh language because they saw it as a hindrance to the progress of their offspring’.73

The politics of the Welsh language and the boundaries of Welsh culture become apparent when an old friend of Nanna’s, Danny Bishop, is invited to her memorial services and through his presence her past life is partly revealed. Nanna and Bishop shared a love of the Welsh language and as a consequence they became intimate. However, their incompatible social status meant their love affair was doomed. After the funeral Bishop sends Samantha flowers and a card saying that her Grandmother was pleased Samantha was educated in Welsh:

Roedd dy Fam-gu mor falch dy fod ti’n gallu siarad Cymraeg. Brysia wella’n fuan. It said that Nanna was ‘appy I went to a Welsh school. (102)

However, as Samantha also points out ‘It was funny tho’, ‘cos Nanna never said much to me in Welsh. Always watched Welshy stuff, but never really spoke it to me’ (102-103). A similar secrecy surrounding the Welsh language exists with Nanna’s sister-in-law Anti Peg:

she sat me down and pressed the button on the remote control. Instead of watchin’ Coronation Street, she put on Pobol-Y-Cwm […]
‘How come you wanna watch this? You don’t speak Welsh.’ [Samantha said] ‘Don’t I?’ [replied Peg]. (166)

Although Nanna’s generation suffered the denigration of their language and consequently publicly abandoned it, it is also that generation who understand the need to actively preserve Welsh. This is illustrated through Bishop’s gift to Samantha:

A piece of paper slid out from the card. I read the front, and read the inside […] In shaky Welsh writin’, it just said ‘Rhywbeth bach i ti fynd ar gyrsie, cadw dy Gymraeg di’n fyw’. Something to keep my Welsh alive. I looked at the piece of paper that had fallen to the floor. It was a cheque. A cheque for five hundred pounds. (175)

At the start of Dafydd’s novel, Samantha is initially ambivalent towards the Welsh language; however, unlike her grandmother and aunt and despite the Welsh Language Commission’s ‘bollockin’ (107) she begins to admit more freely that she can indeed speak Welsh, thus showing an increasing confidence in linguistic ability and allegiance. This is illustrated at a local club Samantha attends where television broadcasters, filming a Welsh-language rock band, ask the audience if there are any Welsh speakers present. Samantha volunteers and speaks ‘On camera […] in Welsh’ (186) and she was ‘feelin’ really chuffed with myself. A bit high in a way: I’d managed to do an interview in Welsh. First time I had spoken it in yonks’ (186). So
although Samantha had previously thought Welsh was not ‘cool’ she now sees the kudos it brings by being interviewed at a club ‘by a very good lookin’ man, who looked a bit like Mike Phillips the rugby player’ (185). Through Samantha and the Welsh-language rock band, Dafydd suggests that young people are reclaiming the Welsh language and making it relevant for contemporary Wales. Furthermore, Samantha’s pleasure at re-discovering her ability to speak Welsh suggests the post-devolution generation can and will safeguard their cultures and languages, and now that ‘Welsh is slowly acquiring an overt prestige as a means of upward mobility’\textsuperscript{74} this is entirely possible.

Like Alison Miller’s \textit{Demo, Random Deaths} is very much a reflection of its time. So, as well as focusing on language, Dafydd also determinedly places Wales within a modern world context. Although her novel is not as overtly political as Miller’s text, Dafydd’s Samantha has an understanding of how global political events impact upon her family:

\begin{quote}
There was a funny story on telly today: George Bush had fallen off his horse on holiday. It would have been even funnier if the horse had fallen on him too! I reckon he’s a twat. Gareth [her brother] thinks so too – and Gareth should know. He’s in Iraq, and ‘aving a shit time […] Bush made the war and now Gareth can’t ‘ave a decent meal. (13)
\end{quote}

Not only does Dafydd illustrate a post-colonial Wales in a globalised and neo-colonial world – mirroring Miller’s protagonist’s attitude towards the then president of the USA – Samantha also forms a junction between Wales and the larger world: when she sleeps she ‘dreamed of guns, texts and wars, and Nanna on \textit{Pobol y Cwm}’ (60). Yet, the politics of home are present too. For instance, the issue of land ownership is raised, a contentious issue in both Wales and Scotland and one in which politics and economics

\textsuperscript{74} Löffler, ‘The Welsh Language in Wales: Public Gain and Private Grief?’, p.194.
have both played a part in dispossessing indigenous populations. As Samantha illustrates:

This man from London wanted to buy land in Carmarthen and build a house. Lucky bastard, I thought […] I wouldn’t even be able to rent a flat let alone build a second home. (130)

This issue of land is central to ideas of imperialism, colonialism and power structures and is discussed in a number of different ways in Welsh and Scottish texts; for instance, Azzopardi and Galloway both question the gentrification of land and its displacement of local populations and Jackie Davies refers to the drowning of entire villages. Samantha’s point is that devolution may have been won but neo-colonialists are still threatening and damaging Welsh culture, people and economy. Indeed, Welsh writer and activist Angharad Price has forcefully argued that selling second homes is threatening to eradicate Welsh-speaking culture. Furthermore, as Cymuned notes, the consequences of the ‘influx of wealthy Londoners and other English buyers of second homes are pricing local residents out of their towns and villages.’ Price argues with reference to the sale of farmhouses in a Welsh-speaking area,

It’s disrespectful and damaging. It’s disturbing to see a house like this for sale in Mayfair when it is not even being offered for sale in Wales. It’s doing cultural and economic damage.

On the surface, Dafydd’s *Random Deaths and Custard* is a lightweight novel designed to ‘have you laughing and crying into your custard’ as the description from the publisher states. However, it is much more than that: Dafydd has serious issues to

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75 Cymuned – Welsh for community – is the name of a protest group campaigning for the survival of Welsh-speaking communities.


discuss, particularly relating to Welsh language and culture in the twenty-first century. As well as illustrating that Wales is engaged in international operations and part of a supranational state, Dafydd also encourages the reader to see Wales positively as a complex nation with two main languages – a postcolonial hybridity for the new devolutionary era.

*Random Deaths* illustrates the importance of enabling an authentic voice to examine culture, language and ideas of identity. Dafydd suggests that a post-devolution landscape offers an opportunity for renewal as well as transformation, and like Ali Smith, Dafydd also raises questions concerning knowledge attainment, for instance, Samantha’s knowledge of Welsh after she left school came via Radio Wales. Smith adds to these concerns, and considers ideas of knowledge, identity and subjectivity and how they are historically as well as contemporaneously produced. For, as Joanne P. Sharp argues:

Dominant forms of knowledge are inseparable from dominant relationships of power and so are creative of the world, not simply reflective of it. This has resulted in the marginalisation and dispossession of other voices and knowledge, particularly those of women.\(^7\)

Ali Smith’s *Girl Meets Boy* is a rewriting of Book 9 of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, a narrative poem which tells the story of a girl, Iphis, raised as a boy in order to avoid paternal female infanticide. Iphis falls in love with a young woman Ianthe but because of sociocultural conventions cannot acknowledge her lesbian love, so prays to the goddess Isis to turn her into a man.\(^7\) Smith’s reworking of metamorphosis concerns the


central theme of myth and connected ideas relating to gender, sexuality, identity and subjecivity and the construction of knowledge and power in the twenty-first century. Smith asserts that what has been established as universal truths are, in actual fact, socially and historically constructed realities conveyed to us through a variety of discourses. Like Barthes, Smith’s interest concerns how society comes to accept ideological and politically-created illusions as ‘common sense’ facts which conceal a ‘whole system of values’ for, as Barthes reminds us, ‘everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by discourse.’ Smith’s novel sets out to debunk ideas of ‘Scottishness’ and stable gendered identity. The idea of gender and identity as ‘natural’ rather than sociocultural products is questioned from the outset: the first sentence in the novel reads, ‘let me tell you about when I was a girl, our grandfather says’ (3).

This is the story of Anthea and Midge (Imogen) Gunn, two young women living in their deceased grandparents’ house in Inverness. The grandparents, who were the central force in the sisters’ lives after their parents divorced and the mother moved away, decided to buy a ‘trimaran […] on a whim…[and went] off to see the world’ (22). After communication from the grandparents stopped and they had been declared ‘lost at sea’ (22), the girls inherited the house. As in many of the other novels examined in the thesis, Smith’s narrative technique gives equal voice to both her main protagonists thus allowing the emerging subjectivities to speak for themselves. The story starts with Anthea, ‘named after some girl in the past I’d never seen, a girl on a Saturday evening tv show’ (25), now back home in Inverness after studying away, recounting their old life at their grandparents’ house. She tells the reader:

81 Ibid., p.109.
we always stay at their house on Saturdays […] Midge and I, one on each knee, are on our grandfather’s lap […] So did I ever tell you about the time they put me in jail for a week when I was a girl? […] for writing words. (6)

The grandfather is an important influence in the girls’ lives and educates them in women’s history, revolution and sedition through powerful stories such as that of Burning Lily who

on the day [she] turned twenty-one […] had enough of this [and said to herself] I’m going to change things. So she went straight out and broke a window as a birthday present to herself. (10)

For Grandfather, stories are crucial; his tales were ‘just the important ones […] Just the ones that need the telling. Some stories always need telling more than others’ (17).

Smith suggests that attitudes and experiences produced through a series of individual and collective stories, some of them obscured and some distorted by the relationship between narrative, language and power, shape our lives. Nevertheless, despite the grandparents’ positive influence, both Anthea and Midge struggle to find a sense of self and purpose in a world governed by sexual politics and hierarchies of power. For instance, Anthea is alienated and estranged from her self:

I was tired of being so young, so stupidly knowing, so stupidly forgetful. I was tired of having to be anything at all. I felt like the Internet, full of every kind of information but none of it mattering […] And when I tried to access myself, whenever I’d try to click on me, try to go any deeper when it came to the meaning of ‘I’ […] it was as if I knew that one morning I’d wake up and try to log on to find that not even that version of ‘I’ existed any more, because the servers all over the world were all down. And that’s how rootless. And that’s how fragile. And what would poor Anthea do then, poor thing? (23-24)

Although Midge appears to be content, superficially at least, because she equates financial reward with happiness, ‘Thirty-five thousand [is] very good money for my age’ (57), Anthea has noticed that ‘something about Midge had changed. Something fundamental’ (20).
Smith’s novel reminds us that although devolution promised a more equitable civil society, the ‘idea that the battle has been won on women’s equality is a myth’. Her story suggests that in post-devolution Scotland injustice, corporate sexism and colonial appropriation proliferate. Pure, the company Anthea and Midge work for, is a bottled water multinational run by male bosses with ‘Anglified accents’, who ‘all looked the same’ (19). Of course, the connotations of the name suggest the company is wholesome, clean, uncorrupted; however, as Midge eventually discovers it is actually a immoral, aggressive, abusive and dangerous corporation. In the office, Midge endures a relentless onslaught of misogynistic conversations – the male employees call a sixteen-year-old work-experience girl a ‘Fucking dyke’ (68) because she does not wear make-up and they ‘think it good fun looking up pictures on the net of women fucking horses and dogs’ (64). Debilitated by the Pure environment Midge ‘pretend[s] it [is] funny like the rest of us have to’ (64). Because of her subservient position Midge feels profoundly inferior and insignificant and hence unable to challenge the entrenched sexism.

Smith’s narrative concerning the politics of language and gender begins on the second day of Anthea’s employment with Pure when she meets Robin, who is conducting an ‘interventionalist act of art protest’ (85). Robin is ‘spray-painting, in beautiful red calligraphy, right under the Pure insignia – ‘DON’T BE STUPID. WATER IS A HUMAN RIGHT. SELLING IT IN ANY WAY IS MORALLY WRO[NG]’ (43). The graffiti artist enchants Anthea because she is ‘the most beautiful boy I had ever seen in my life. But he looked really like a girl. She was the most beautiful boy I had ever seen in my life’ (45). Smith plays with ideas of gendered and

sexual identity through Robin, whose blurring of femininity and masculinity enables an examination of mythology surrounding ideas of ‘Scottishness’, identity and cultural heritage.

Robin is a subversive figure who invalidates ‘restrictive normative conceptions of sexual and gender life’.\textsuperscript{83} She serves to remind us of how we come to ‘read’ ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ through a plethora of myths that sustain a gender binary system that ‘performs a regulatory operation of power that naturalizes the hegemonic instance and forecloses the thinkability of its disruption’.\textsuperscript{84} Robin masquerades in ‘male’ Highland costume, the kilt, whilst highlighting fabrications concerning commercial myth (lies about ‘pure’ bottled water) and documenting socio-political realities (people throughout the world die because of lack of water); this is a defiant act on account of the kilt’s connotations with (heroic) masculine identity. Like Wooff and Strachan, Smith argues that gender is not an inherent or fixed characteristic but a sociocultural performance. Robin (like Iphis) is culturally-constructed as masculine because of her sartorial style: the kilt, black waistcoat and ‘the knife in his socks’ (43). This indicates how gender (and history) is constructed through an array of associations and relationships with the social, political and cultural. Moreover, Robin’s performance illustrates that ideas of nationhood are politically produced and culturally consumed. Indeed, the kilt’s enduring associations of fearless and gallant masculinity, both inside and outside Scotland, makes ‘Highland’ women invisible and obscures the political reality. After the Battle of Culloden \textsuperscript{85} the ‘kilt’ was brutally outlawed as an ‘emblem of

\textsuperscript{83} Judith Butler,\textit{ Undoing Gender}, p.43.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{85} Culloden is about 5 miles north east of Inverness. The Battle of Culloden was fought in 1746 and was the last battle fought on ‘British’ soil.
Jacobitism. The colonisers, through the British Army, then appropriated the kilt where it became ‘respectable as military dress, because in that discourse it was a badge of loyalty and achievement.’ As Pittock adds, ‘British legislation criminalised it elsewhere, and there were prosecutions’.

In view of the exploitation of the kilt by the English-based authorities (not to mention Walter Scott’s nineteenth century romantic gentrification of it) Robin’s use of it whilst spray-painting suggests she is ridiculing authority and its myth-making mechanisms. Her town-centre ‘graffiti’ highlights corporate powers’ falsifications in pursuit of profit and her act of writing politicised messages on public walls such as the Town House becomes a space for debate on equality. Her words ‘IN NO COUNTRY IN THE WORLD RIGHT NOW ARE WOMEN’S WAGES EQUAL TO MEN’S WAGES’ (134) means the ‘whole of Inverness knows about [these issues] now, if they want to’ (133).

Robin’s refusal to obey the rules of ‘the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined’ confuses Midge: she asks Robin

Tell me what it is
It’s water, Robin Goodman says [holding a glass of tap water].
No, I say. I mean, what’s the correct word for it, I mean, you? I need to know the proper word.
[...] The proper word for me, Robin Goodman says, is me. (77)

Robin overturns normative ideas of sexual and gendered identity, thus Midge is unable to categorize her (like Iphis her first name is not gender-specific) as male or female.

87 Ibid., p.158.  
88 Ibid., p.162.  
89 Butler, Gender Trouble, p.23.
Moreover, Robin’s and Anthea’s subsequent sexual relationship also ruptures the normative structures and it produces a deluge of (at times hilarious) false representations. Midge, for one, thinks,

(Oh my God my sister is A GAY) [...] (It is our mother’s fault for splitting up with our father.) (But if that’s true then I might also be gay.) (Well obviously that’s not true then, that’s not true at all). (I am definitely, definitely not a gay.) [...] (It is completely natural to be a gay or a homosexual or whatever. It is totally okay in this day and age.) [...] (They were holding hands at the front door.) (I should have known she was always weird. She was always different. She was always contrary. She always did what she knew she shouldn’t). (It is the fault of the Spice Girls.) [...] (She was always a bit too feminist.) (She was always playing that George Michael cd.) [...] (She liked the Eurovision Song Contest.) [...] (She liked Buffy the Vampire Slayer) [...] (My sister is gay.) (I am not upset.) (I am fine.) (It’d be ok. I mean I wouldn’t mind so much, if it was someone else’s sister) [...] (Neighbours might have seen [...] ) (I might have to move house) (50-7)

Midge’s lengthy, anxious and revealing deliberation concerning Anthea is suggestive of what Annemaria Jagose calls the ‘cultural impossibility’ of lesbianism and the ‘incredulousness that would deny the space of its possibility.’ Although Midge is conscious that being gay is supposedly socially acceptable she employs a stream of stereotypical rationales and assumed ‘gay’ popular cultural symbols she thinks may possibly ‘explain’ her sister’s sexuality. Midge’s judgments and opinions at this point are in parentheses, a technique that was used by modernist writers like May Sinclair to indicate unconscious thought. Midge’s repressed belief concerning Anthea’s sexual choice is unsayable or unthinkable. Furthermore, the sexually aggressive masculinity and homophobic discourse of Midge’s colleagues which claim gay women ‘lack, [they are] unfuckable, not properly developed’ (70) undoubtedly manipulates Midge’s perception. Anthea’s sexuality upsets those heteronormative binary structures which

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define (Midge) and serve patriarchal order and now ‘(Everything has changed. Nothing is the same)’ (59). There is no longer them/us, male/female, masculine/feminine, pure/unpure, natural/unnatural. Interestingly, towards the end of the novel after Midge has resigned from Pure – ‘no longer a Puree’ (131) – she accepts her sister’s choice of partner. The obvious implication here is that the Pure environment, with its capitalist multinational ‘phallic economy’ anchored in homophobic and sexist ideologies, socially conditioned Midge.

Indeed, the endemic misogynistic operation at Pure means Midge is constantly, albeit unconsciously, struggling against structures that serve to obscure the feminine and female creativity. She has problems throughout her narrative with getting people to listen to her and consequently she has little self-belief or confidence. Her ideas are appropriated by the men in the office and she is systematically overlooked or eclipsed. For instance, at the Tuesday Creative Lecture when the team is brainstorming ideas for the new water product Midge attempts to contribute:

> Water is about well-being, Midge said. About being well. Nobody heard her. It’s all about well-being, an unfamiliar Creative said on the other side of the room. I like that, Keith said. Very good point, Norm. [...] Midge looked down disheartened. (39)

Further, by endeavouring to adhere to the ideological conventions of femininity Midge is starving herself: this is what Anthea senses but does not quite grasp when she says ‘something about Midge had changed. Something fundamental’ (20). In fact, it is at one of the ‘Creative Lectures’ that Anthea realises that Midge ‘was far too thin. She was really thin’ (39). Like the grandmother in Happy Accidents, Midge’s pursuit of

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thinness is femininity culturally performed to the ultimate. This regulation of gendered identity, as both Wooff and Strachan assert in their novels, serves to obliterate the female. Judith Butler argues that

Sometimes a normative conception of gender can undo one’s personhood, undermining the capacity to persevere in a livable life [...] If gender is a kind of doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one’s knowing, without one’s willing [...] it is [therefore] a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint.92

It is only after she leaves Pure that Midge looks at her body in the mirror and starts to acknowledge her emaciated reflection:

I make myself look hard at myself. I am a lot less than an 8 now. (I can see bones here, here, here, here and here.) (Is that good?) [...] (I have thought for a long time that the way my clothes hang on me is more important than me inside them.) [...] I’ve done my asking [...] (please make me the correct size. The correct shape…THIS MUST CHANGE). (141)

As in Catrin Dafydd’s novel, language is one of the key issues in Smith’s text though her investigation of it, while taking in the historical, is mostly concerned with how language is employed to disguise unequal structures of power and encourage conformity to the status quo. Language can ideologically (mis)represent and Smith reminds us how it can be utilized to distort reality and conceal the truth. So, for instance, Midge unquestionably accepts unproven and in fact, fictitious, ideas relating to her accent:

We speak the purest English […] in the whole country. It is because of the vowel sounds and what happened to them when Gaelic speakers were made to speak English after the 1745 rebellion and the 1746 defeat when Gaelic was stamped out and punishable by death, and then all the local girls married the incoming English-speaking soldiers. (54)

92 Butler, Undoing Gender, p.1.
Although Midge is aware of the brutality of the colonial project (she mentions Gaelic speakers being punished by death) she is pleased her English-enforced speech is ‘pure’. There is, of course, an obvious flaw in this argument concerning a ‘pure’ Highland-English: in other words, untouched, untainted, unmixed, ‘natural’. Rather, the once Gaelic-speaking Highlanders have a hybrid accent due to the influx of imperial foot soldiers after the Jacobite rebellion who enforced conformity to English and accordingly transformed the local accents and intonations. Indeed, the idea of ‘speaking the purest English’, as Midge suggests, is an English invention to placate the English conscience and to gratify the locals. As Dick Leith asserts:

The speech of the Scottish Highlands, often acclaimed by the English peoples as the home of the ‘best’ English [is] often evaluated in a rather patronizing way as quaint, disingenuous or fresh [...] the sources of these attitudes may be many, but one of them may have to do with an unconscious desire to atone for the imposition of English. It is characteristic of a conquering power that they only ‘discover’ the conquered peoples when the material basis for that culture has been destroyed.93

Indeed, Smith uses the word ‘pure’ throughout her novel, especially when questioning the notion of myth: the dangerous fabrications we perceive as truth. Asked by Keith, the American ‘boss of bosses’ (36) to go to ‘base camp’, which turns out to be prefab offices somewhere on the outskirts of London, Midge starts to become conscious that the company – ‘Pure’ – is rather ‘unpure’. In fact, Pure, whose main aim is to commodify the world’s water for profit, is extreme in its dishonesty and brutally devious in its business deals: quite the reverse of its own myth. Keith tells Midge of his vision:

‘What I want […] is to make it not just possible but natural for someone […] to spend his entire day, obliviously, in Pure hands […] because Pure Product is everywhere. Pure is massive throughout the global economy’. (116-119)

In order to realise that vision Keith requires Midge to be in charge of the ‘Pure Dominant Narrative Department’ and as such she will ‘Deny Disparage Rephrase’ any media articles relating to the company’s business. The following conversation illustrates how careful use of language can distort and manipulate reality:

[Keith] explains, ‘Small body of irate ethnics in one of our Indian sub-interests factioning against our planned filter dam […] they’re ethnic troublemakers who are trying to involve us in a despicable religious war’ […]

[Midge] ‘I can’t make up rubbish and pretend it’s true. Those people in India. That water is their right’

[Keith] ‘Not so my little Scotty dog […] according to the World Water Forum 2000, whose subject was water’s exact designation, water is not a human right. Water is a human need […] We can sell a need. It’s our human right to.’

‘Keith that’s ridiculous […] Those words you just used are all in the wrong places […] It’s bullshit […] You can’t do that’

‘It’s International-government-ratified […] I can do what I like’. (123-125)

This is the crux of Smith’s narrative investigation: our world is represented to us is through language and language is intrinsically connected to knowledge and power. According to Foucault, knowledge is produced through language, which is where meaning is created and circulated; it functions to sustain or transform power relations and its shapes and influences behaviour. So Keith corrupts and changes meaning, misrepresenting in the name of global capitalism. The reality is that the future of one of the earth’s most crucial resources is being determined by those who profit from its overuse and abuse. A handful of transnational corporations, backed by the World Bank, are aggressively taking over the management of public water services in developing countries, dramatically raising the price of water to the local residents and profiting from the Third World’s desperate search for solutions to the water crisis. 

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Midge is a troubled and vulnerable character and she serves to illustrate that women in post-devolution Scotland are still struggling against unequal and abusive power relations. Moreover, Keith’s character demonstrates that Scotland is still economically susceptible to colonial strategies of exploitation and control, albeit of a different variety: the neo-colonialism of the USA. However, although Keith’s ‘authoritative’ position means that Midge is at risk, her power comes from her ability to deny both him and his ‘narrative’. Midge (bravely, since she is in an abandoned industrial estate in the middle of nowhere with no transport) refuses Keith’s global domination scheme, his financial bribes and his sexual aggression:

Fifty-five and upwards per annum, Keith says, negotiable after the handling of the first two briefs […] (Keith’s midriff is close to my eyes. I can see his trousers are repressing an erection. More, I can see that he wants me to see it. He is actually showing me his hidden hard-on.) (123)

After managing to ‘get […] back to London’ (126) and on a train to Scotland Midge feels empowered. As the ‘train crosses the border between there and here’ (128) Midge tells the world:

Listen, world out there […] I’m Imogen Gunn. I come from a family that cannot be had. I come from a country that’s the opposite of a, what was it, dominant narrative. I’m all Highland adrenalin. I’m all teuchter laughter and I’m all teuchter anger. Pure! Ha! (129)

Her newly emerging sense of self is reflected in her openness – she has named herself and no longer speaks behind parentheses.

On her return to Inverness, Midge discovers that Anthea and Robin’s political writings are inscribed on the town hall, at the castle and on the statue of Flora MacDonald (who appropriately enough aided Bonnie Prince Charles’s escape by
dressing him as a woman). Both now dressed in kilts and signing themselves alternatively as ‘the message boys/message girls’ and ‘Iphis/Ianthe’ the two women educate Inverness with statistics regarding human right abuses:

ACROSS THE WORLD, TWO MILLION GIRLS ARE KILLED BEFORE BIRTH OR AT BIRTH BECAUSE THEY WEREN’T BOYS. THAT’S ON RECORD. ADD TO THAT THE OFF-RECORD ESTIMATE OF FIFTY-EIGHT MILLION MORE GIRLS, KILLED BECAUSE THEY WEREN’T BOYS. THAT’S SIXTY MILLION GIRLS. THIS MUST CHANGE. (133)

Robin and Anthea’s actions ridicule officialdom. However, they affect much more than that; I would suggest that they are involved in disarming the ‘restricted and ultimately disabling discourse of Scotland’. 96 In other words, the women are also fighting against the prevailing attitudes that emanate from the dominant (England-based) assumption that the Highlands (and, indeed, the Scots in general) are politically detached, parochial or impassive. This is a decidedly political novel and Smith’s engagement in de-mythologizing endeavours to counter false representations and dangerous stereotypes, for as McIntyre points out:

In romanticising and mythologising an apolitical “Scottishness”, in celebrating defeat, nostalgia and sentimentiality, in applauding symbolic victory over self-determination [these discourses] displace, even actually prevent representations which would be of genuine cultural and political use within the contemporary Scottish situation.97

Of course, re-telling stories, exposing lies and uncovering the truths – as Grandfather suggests at the beginning of the novel – can transform who we are and where we come from. As Anthea says at the end of her story: ‘things can always change, because things will always change, and things will always be different, because things can always be different’(160).

97 Ibid., p.54.
Like Smith’s *Girl Meets Boy*, Jackie Davies’s first novel, *About Elin*, examines the political and historical conditions of the country Davies is writing out of and at the same time attempts to dispel some of the myths that surround ideas of the nation. As I have already argued, women writers of Scotland and Wales are increasingly concerned with the damage done to their indigenous cultures through ‘civilizing’ imperialism and many have made the preservation and the utilization of ‘native’ languages one of the key issues in contemporary writing; it is this issue of language which is central to Davies’s novel. *About Elin* is a multivocal narrative which provides competing discourses to illustrate the subjective nature of remembering and enable the villagers to tell Elin’s story from their own perspectives. Whilst aspects of Elin’s past are revealed, mis-remembered and ‘misquoted’ through the sister-in-law, the ex-lover, the retired teacher, the grocer and various other characters, the act of narrating Elin’s past serves as a reminder of their own journey over the intervening years.

Although much of the novel concerns retrospective accounts, the text’s reference point is post-devolution Wales and Davies reminds the reader of the political progress that has been made over the years. This is illustrated in a conversation Elin has with one of the characters in which she refers to the fact that, ‘Wales has changed, with the Assembly and so on’ (61). Like both Stevie Davies’s *Kith and Kin* and McDowell’s *The Picnic* (discussed below), Davies’s text suggests that in order to look to the future one has to deal with the past and break ‘the long silence’ (144). This intervention, the questioning of history and unlocking the more damaging or destructive narratives of the nation’s past, has become one of the key areas both Welsh and Scottish women writers are now actively exploring.
Elin Pritchard’s homecoming causes disquiet and antipathy in the village. The story begins with the vicar’s description of Elin which suggests her ‘alien’ status:

she looked the essential career woman, the local girl made good, who had abandoned her rural roots to get on [...] she was cool and composed [...] and thanked me in a polite, English voice. (10-14)

Elin’s migration and subsequent assimilation has rendered her unfamiliar to people in this small community; her ‘Englishness’ redefines her and her apparent remoteness means ‘she was like a stranger from another world’ (15). The second chapter is from the perspective of Glyn, Elin’s boyfriend before she left to complete her degree and embark upon a Law career in London. Glyn’s account reveals the reasons why the villagers are dismayed by Elin’s apparent rejection of her nation and also reminds us of the rather spurious nature of nationhood and nationality. This narrative recalls Elin’s life in the ‘heady days of the language campaign’ (21). Although Glyn ‘think[s] of her as a traitor to the hen iath’ (21) his recall of the ‘powerful mixture, politics and passion’ (21) which she previously represented awakens in him a resentment and an agitation he should not feel because ‘I have a young wife, a young Welsh wife and two Welsh children of whom I am proud. I should be content’ (21). His emphasis on his Welsh wife and Welsh children illustrates the gulf between the now-Anglicised Elin and her Welsh community. For Glyn, Welsh identity and the Welsh language are intrinsically interconnected and many of the villagers feel likewise; Davies’s novel seems a reasonable reflection of at least a percentage of Welsh people’s beliefs. As David McCrone comments: ‘Being born in Wales and linguistic competence in Welsh are
associated significantly with Welsh identity’. \(^98\) Though of course, Catrin Dafydd, unquestionably a Welsh language advocate, was attempting to get away from these ‘essentialist’ readings in her south Wales-based novel.

Elin’s fragmentation of self causes concern amongst the villagers. Jenny, a former friend, attempts to discover why Elin abandoned her first language:

‘Elin, what’s happened to your Welsh? You were such a campaigner for the language [...]’

[Elin replies] ‘I suppose it meant a break with the past’
‘Surely not a break from Welshness though?’ (127)

The villagers’ emphasis that language alone signifies one’s sense of belonging and nationhood may contradict the idea of a multi-lingual and multi-cultural Welsh identity which many contemporary writers promote. Nevertheless, it does illustrate that Wales is not homogeneous, a people speaking in one voice. Rather, as Davies reminds us, language is probably one of the most divisive issues in Wales. Glyn and the other protagonists are merely reflecting the anxiety experienced over dominant (Anglicised) values and ideas which overwhelmed parts of Wales and its culture. Marion Löffler offers an explanation as to why the indigenous language came to be a potent symbol of Welsh nationhood:

With no institutions and few pre-Methodist folk customs left, Welsh-speaking Nonconformity came to represent the Welsh nationality. With the decline in the twentieth century, the language became the final, most conspicuous badge of Welsh national identity.\(^99\)

This, of course, differs significantly from the Scottish situation which saw the preservation of at least some of its national institutions, and hence a separate identity


was possible after the Union; this may provide us with an explanation as to why the language issue in Wales and Scotland are dissimilar.

Elin’s exile is seen as a betrayal, not only of her family, but of the entire nation: as one of the villagers says, ‘she turned her back on Wales and the family’ (213). As a ‘woman’, Elin becomes a ‘bearer of the collective’ which as Kirsten Stirling argues ‘appears to value women’s role in the nation but it masks the political powerlessness of actual women.’ Moreover, that powerlessness meant Welsh women, were, by and large, excluded and marginalized from the professional workforce. Glyn’s recollections inform us as to why Elin left Wales in the 1960s: she had told him that

I’ve made up my mind. I’m going to live in London. There’s no place for me here in Wales. I could go on forever waiting for things to be right […] Women like me don’t fit in the Welsh academic world […] It’s too conservative, too entrenched. (21)

Elin’s views illustrate her frustration with a country that offers women ‘secondary status’. As Jane Aaron argues, ‘Feminism is still frequently viewed with suspicion by Welsh-identified communities as an alien and divisive […] phenomenon.’ However, as Aaron goes on to argue, it was English colonialism that led to Welsh culture and society being divisively gendered and in order to ‘shed colonially imposed values, a culture needs a resurgence of confidence in its capacity to define itself’. Although Aaron’s comments were made almost two decades ago, and much has changed since, they do serve as a reflection of the time Elin emerges from. So for Elin to utilise her

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103 Ibid.
‘lively’ intellect and forge a successful career a move to the Empire’s centre was a necessary inevitability. As Teresa Rees noted in 1994:

Compared to England, there are relatively few women professionals [...] Women in work in Wales [...] are in a worse position than those in English regions. They are more likely to be in a low-paid sector and less likely to be in highly paid professional [...] posts [...] it is the case that gender segregation is more extreme in Wales then elsewhere.¹⁰⁵

Nonetheless, as Elin points out, for women, London and its system of ‘old boy’ networks was also challenging.

Elin’s assimilation and evident mimicry – she dresses, talks and has acquired the habits of the English – seem incomprehensible given that she fought for the Welsh language as a young woman; as one villager sarcastically comments, ‘you should hear our precious Miss Pritchard talk. Not a trace of a Welsh accent. She doesn’t speak Welsh at all now, people say. Left it behind like the way she did the rest of us’ (212). Nevertheless, Elin has not lost her ability to speak Welsh; as with the Welsh of both Samantha in Random Deaths and Custard and Deian in Fflur Dafydd’s Twenty Thousand Saints, which I discuss in the following chapter, it just needs unearthing.

Elin’s and Glyn’s involvement in the 1960s language campaign illustrated the mood felt by those involved who believed in the fundamental need to preserve that element of their heritage, culture and identity – even if it meant incarceration. As Glyn recalls,

We painted road signs at night [...] substituting Welsh for English names. We daubed slogans on railway bridges [...] Even court had its compensations as we joined the ranks of martyrs for the cause, our language. (28)

This is an important aspect of Davies’s text: she puts the battle for the Welsh language into its historical context thus reminding us of the strength of feeling and the energy of

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.94.
the campaign forty years earlier. Glyn’s appeal that Elin should remain in Llanfadog illustrates the atmosphere: ‘What about all we’ve fought for? Why leave when the struggle’s almost won. We’ve gained equal status for the language. It’s a start, surely. And a Plaid Cymru MP’ (25). As Ismail Talib suggests, the language campaign’s successes were not insignificant given that for centuries the imperial mission systematically endeavoured to eradicate the uncivilised Welsh language. In 1866 an editorial in *The Times* stated of the Welsh that

Their antiquated and semi-barbarous language shrouds them in darkness […] they must forget their isolated language and learn to speak English, and nothing else.106

By the twenty-first century, however, as Samantha in *Random Deaths* suggests, the Welsh language is not considered ‘antiquated’ but regarded as fashionable.

Nevertheless, Dafydd’s Samantha originates from a different era; the 1960s were quite different, and Glyn’s reminiscences remind us of the brutality of the imperial machinery:

October 1965. Tryweryn. That watershed of Welsh protests when the mayor of Liverpool came to open the new reservoir serving his city […] how much we hated the rape of our land, the uprooting of families, the subordination of everything we had and were to the needs of our greedy neighbour. (27)

Glyn’s account of the political situation concerning land is echoed in the work of many other women writers, such as Catherine Merriman who examines the exploitation of Welsh land in her novel *State of Desire* discussed in chapter three of this thesis. Like Merriman’s protagonist, Glyn’s vocabulary is emotive – words such as ‘rape’ and ‘subordination’ clearly show the sense of being used and abused by colonial powers.

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As in other texts discussed, such as Davies’s *Kith and Kin* and McDowell’s *The Picnic*, *About Elin* is also concerned with family history and familial disintegration. Much of the Llanfadog villagers’ distrust of, and annoyance with Elin is based upon the fact she never returned to care for her elderly parents – a role usually expected, if not forced upon, the daughter of the family. However, Elin’s departure and reluctance to return are not merely part of a feminist assertion; rather she felt there was no alternative, as she tells her niece: ‘At the time […] it was a matter of survival’ (116). It is only when Elin speaks for herself that we learn why she emigrated: her family was not a stereotypical pastoral family but was in reality seriously dysfunctional. Tad ‘made our life hell at times’ (259) and Mam ‘was a gentle soul who had all the life crushed out of her. She hardly spoke at home except in whispers’ (259). The mother lived in fear for herself and her daughter but was ‘too crushed to manage more than survival’ (265). However, and significantly, the mother did not want the neighbours discovering the brutality of the family’s life: ‘Mam would have died rather than let anyone know how much she was terrorized […] It was important no one found out’ (260). The haze of untruths and hidden fears that characterise the family’s past demonstrates how power, gender and nationality intersect in complex ways. Mam’s rationale for sacrificing both herself and daughter resulted from the apparent necessity to keep intact the ‘iconography of the family […] as the figure for national unity’. ¹⁰⁷ For as Anne McClintock argues:

the family offered an indispensible figure for sanctioning social *hierarchy* within a putative organic unity of interests. Since the subordination of women to men […] was deemed a natural fact other forms of social hierarchy could be

depicted in familial terms to guarantee social difference as a category of nature.\textsuperscript{108}

Davies does not provide ‘an idealistic representation of Welsh rural life’; \textsuperscript{109} as Elin says to the vicar, ‘sorry to spoil the rural idyll, but not all country childhoods are perfect’ (259). It is during Elin’s visit to her parents’ graveside that the past and the present converge; Elin recalls her childhood and starts to vividly evoke the incidents that made her leave Llanfadog: ‘I want to escape but Tad is between me and the door, close enough to grab me if I walk past, put his hand between my legs or down my blouse’ (276). It is during episodes of rape and abuse that Elin ‘learnt to switch off from my body, pretend it wasn’t me Tad was pawing and invading’ (277).

Elin finally allows herself to examine her past which had hitherto been unmentionable: as she admits to herself, ‘I have spent most of my life blotting out painful memories’ (299). Although Elin reveals the psychological pain that has ruled her life, the novel ends with optimism and hope; she realises that ‘for years I have played down my Welshness but it’s still there’ (288). Elin’s Welsh ‘essence’ has resurfaced; she says to herself, ‘\textit{un peth ar y tro} – God I’m thinking in Welsh’ (297). And, although she tells the vicar her life is still uncertain – there are ‘lots of imponderables. Decisions to make’ (251) – she affirms, ‘the nationalist in me isn’t dead, just sleeping - like the serpent in Llyn Tegid’ (283).

‘Home’ according to Rosemary Marangoly George, is a place of gendered identity and patriarchal power structures and operates as ‘an ideological determinant of

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., p.64.
\textsuperscript{109} Siobhàn Kilfeather, ‘Disunited Kingdom’, p.17.
the subject.\textsuperscript{110} For Elin, a return home meant reclamation of her past and self from memories of paternal abuse and community misrepresentations, similarly ‘home’ for Lesley McDowell’s protagonists in her first novel, \textit{The Picnic}, connotes alienation and repression, yet it too provides a space to recover lost identities. Set in Scotland and Canada, McDowell’s novel explores gendered, sexual, and national identities across three generations of women and interrogates the constraints placed upon women from dominant societal structures. These issues are also examined by Lalwani, Cooke and Stevie Davies; like them, McDowell is interested in the socio-historical context of people’s lives and the way in which certain conditions and environments shape and influence individual existence – an issue that is emerging as significant in contemporary Welsh and Scottish women’s writing.

\textit{The Picnic} concerns a family still trying to come to terms with their mother and grandmother Rubina’s disappearance on a family picnic in Canada many years earlier. This bipartite narrative structure allows the two main protagonists, Lily, the mother who is in Canada and Sadie, the daughter who is in Scotland, to articulate their conflicting perspectives. Like Jackie Davies’s text, the main stylistic focus is the use of flashback, a device which illustrates how the past imposes upon the present.

The novel begins in 1995 with Sadie, a twenty-six year old academic in her first teaching post; she is apprehensive of her new, male-dominated environment and infuriated at its insularity and sexism. Her reflections on an ‘ill-judged remark by some obsolete professor the day before’ (5) about her academic ability are disturbed by a phone call from her mother – ‘Sadie is not pleased to hear her voice. She can’t hide her displeasure’ (6). From the outset, McDowell sets up a narrative articulating tension

between the mother and the daughter and as a result deconstructs and complicates female identities within a patriarchal structure – a point I will return to. The anxieties and pressures felt by Sadie are caused by both personal and professional relationships. Professionally, Sadie is isolated and uneasy; the university is a bastion of a tradition that excludes women; ‘the bathrooms smell of old men [...] the corridors are frigid and cold’ (53). At the departmental meeting it is noted that

the conference room is full today - fifteen men and one woman are gathered. And Sadie, the one woman, is not here to serve tea and biscuits but to speak about students and essays. (74)

However, it is not without spirit and humour that Sadie registers the imbalanced situation: as she surveys the room, she asks herself: ‘who the hell knew there were so many shades of brown?’ (77). As the meeting gets under way and ‘another Obsolete Professor’ (75) discusses the department’s ‘aims and objectives and mission statements’, Sadie says to herself, ‘mission statements? What the hell are mission statements? When did this place turn into fucking ICI?’ (75).

Sadie’s relationship with her mother is also troubled; as the omniscient narrator explains, she ‘left home[...] she will never admit it to herself but it is there, [...] she came here to this tiny ancient university [...] to get away from her mother’ (13) Sadie’s decision to move from Glasgow parallels her mother’s move years earlier – Lily left Canada for Scotland in order to escape her own mother. The source of Sadie’s irritation is her mother’s refusal to discuss the family history:

what began for Sadie as a small child’s curiosity about grandparents and aunts and uncles and cousins became a teenager’s cruelty when she wanted to bait the woman who insisted and demanded and disapproved of anything she did. (11)
In terms of female identity and subjectivity, the depiction of tense and conflicting intergenerational relationships between the women in McDowell’s novel makes for an interesting analysis of the ideologies of femininity. Like many of the novels already discussed, for instance, Trezise’s *Goldfish Bowl*, Cooke’s *The Glass House*, and Murray’s *Happy Accidents*, McDowell’s text questions and ultimately discredit, the traditional ideas of femininity and the maternal through the confrontational and antagonistic bonds between mothers and daughters. This, according to Anne Fogarty writing in an Irish context, is a consequence of internal and external unequal structures of power:

The figure of the mother [...] becomes associated with the trauma of the past that can neither be buried not resolved, and with the struggle of the daughter to create an identity in the face of overwhelming sense of illegitimacy and disempowerment [...] The figure of the mother and daughter act [...] as sites of contestation in which notions of female identity are put to the test, aspects of patriarchal oppression are unearthed, and unresolved conflicts with the female psyche are enacted [...] the emphasis on struggle [...] counters the calcified, static and outmoded [...] wholeness [of femininity] insisted upon by patriarchal culture.'

The friction surrounding the family’s past is not resolved and in adulthood Sadie attempts to turn her interest in her grandmother’s life story into a professional investigation. Sadie’s ‘life-writing’ project is part of a female tradition and has obvious political associations in terms of enabling the articulation of the domestic domain and allowing women’s voices to take on significance. This centring of marginalised perspectives as a strategy of resistance makes ‘the personal political’ and enables

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women to ‘write themselves into history.’ It is a strategy that the author and her protagonist are evidently aware of:

Monique Wittig [...] Alice Walker [...] Nancy Miller [...] Rita Felski [...] Writers and theorists about the family who have elevated the personal and the confessional to positions of importance within academic studies – that is what Sadie wants to do [...] How wonderful it would be to discover and write about her own personal history– well, Lily’s and Rubina’s. (28)

The subsequent chapters alternate between Lily’s and Sadie’s perspectives. Chapter two concerns Lily and follows her journey back to Canada to visit her sister Amy who is in a coma after a car accident. Anxious about both her own future, as well as her sister’s, Lily tries to prepare herself by thinking about the last time she saw Amy – the day of the picnic in 1973. This incident is the crucial turning point in the family’s life: after the mother Rubina disappears the family disintegrates, barely communicating for twenty years and Lily, who was planning to emigrate to Canada with her husband and young family, stubbornly remains in Scotland. Amy’s accident causes Lily to examine her childhood which, like Elin Pritchard’s memories, has remained suppressed. Although Lily, like Elin, abandoned her family she still requires roots/routes to enable a new way of thinking of herself and her family, to facilitate connection with the self. As she admits to her sister, ‘I need you [...] Don’t leave me. I cut myself free. I know I did. Of all of you. But all it’s meant is that I’m adrift. I don’t know where I’m going.’ (85). While Lily reminisces to her unresponsive sister, Sadie, who has remained in Scotland, endeavours to uncover her grandmother’s past and has, unbeknown to Lily, started to contact Rubina’s old acquaintances.

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Like Davies’s novel, *The Picnic* focuses on the past; however, McDowell does not provide us with uncritical nostalgia, and what is interesting about the narrative is the way in which historical detail is dealt with. Scotland, as I argued in the Ali Smith section, has been habitually misrepresented in literature, both internally and externally. The internal misrepresentation is a consequence of ‘the Scottish Discursive Unconscious’, a phrase Colin McArthur coined to suggest an ideological condition afflicting the Scottish population who seem unquestioningly to accept stereotypical notions of nation and nationhood. McArthur suggests that writers have had an ‘unconscious predilection’\(^\text{114}\) for ‘lachrymose elegiacism in Scotland’\(^\text{115}\) which not only contradicts the facts but hinders Scotland’s progress as a nation. This idealistically mournfulness captures Lily’s mind: ‘I could still remember it [Scotland] - only in a foggy sort of way. Romantic, a Brigadoon version’ (117). However, McDowell does not depict Scotland as a Romantic idyll or a humble place inhabited by either dim-witted but agreeable Highlanders or the likeable, macho, hard-drinking men – the other ‘pernicious Scottish discourse [...] in which women are banished to the margins’.\(^\text{116}\) Rather McDowell’s narrative calls attention to the poor housing, the poverty and neglect which constituted the daily experiences of Scottish people in the decades after the Second World War, a consequence of the economic and political hegemony centred in London.

The family’s emigration to Canada meant they became part of the ‘Scottish Diaspora – a very grand name for a not very grand flitting’ (112) as Lily observes. For Rubina and her family, like the real-life emigrants, moving abroad offered people more


\(^{115}\) Ibid., p.32.

\(^{116}\) Ibid., p.28.
prospects and ‘advancement [which] surpassed the opportunities at home.’ Lily’s memories recall the unemployment and hardship in her homeland of the 1950s: her mother ‘tried to remind [us] how little we had […] When we lived in Glasgow’ (153). By contrast, Canada offered ‘a land of white houses, grass and opportunities’ (153) and for the young Lily moving meant ‘no closes and no creepy dinnes’ (153). McDowell’s text serves to remind us of the precarious position Scotland was in as a supposed ‘partner’ in the Union, for once its usefulness as a part of the Empire’s machinery was over the ‘region’ was economically neglected, and as a consequence, urban centres like Glasgow, in particular, had many deprived areas. Hence, according to Daniel Bertuax and Paul Thompson, these ‘flittings’ were relatively common:

\[\text{when the Canadian census-takers asked about ethnic identification [this] recorded 3,355,000 people in Canada claiming Scottish ethnic origins [which] reflects the disproportionate numbers of Scots who left […] for Canada.}\]

In terms of gender, nation and identity, the most significant and valuable aspect of McDowell’s novel is her examination of a concealed and censored element in Scottish society – lesbian women in the post-war years. The construction of Scottish identity has not allowed for women’s presence, let alone a lesbian woman’s presence, as Esther Breitenbach argues: ‘the identity of Scottish women has been bounded, or restricted.’ However, through the characters of Rubina, Sadie and Lily, McDowell not only illustrates the marginalisation of women in Scotland and examines how women have been represented, misrepresented and defined, but she gives women agency and enables them to articulate their own experiences. Like Fflur Dafydd’s and Jackie

\[\text{117 Daniel Bertaux and Paul Thompson, Pathways to Social Class: A Qualitative Approach to Social Mobility (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2009), p.203.}\]

\[\text{118 Ibid., p.201.}\]

Davies’ texts, this is herstory. McDowell’s novel illustrates the cultural and socio-economic difficulties faced by Scottish women in the insular and austere years post-war years and brings to the fore the ‘dual nature of women’s life’ (316). And like many of the novelists examined in this thesis, McDowell questions the ideology of domesticity and the construction of womanhood which ‘stressed the morally redemptive [...] role of motherhood’.120

The second section of the novel is set in the early 1950s and is in the voice of the young Lily. It is here that Rubina’s double life is revealed. In Canada, Rubina initially seems contented: ‘Mammy has a job now too [...] and it was only her second day at the butcher’s but she was laughing’ (160). Clearly escaping from the confines of the domestic is compatible with Rubina’s temperament. However, it is not long before Rubina is discontented for she is ‘putting whiskey in her tea’ (162) and then ‘Mammy went away’ (179). During Rubina’s absences from the family home her husband admits he is ignorant of her whereabouts: ‘I don’t even know where my bloody wife is’ (179); however, her break from the domestic space gives her the freedom to be herself. During one of Rubina’s ‘rests’ (179) Lily sees her mother at an ice rink ‘laughing as another lady holds her up’ (188) and months later when Lily reveals to her mother she saw her, Rubina violently reprimands her daughter then subsequently promises she ‘won’t be going away ever again’ (198).

This duality of life is similar to the situation depicted in Happy Accidents, in which the Grandmother’s secret life with her female lover is concealed within her hidden love letters. It is during Lily’s flashbacks that Rubina’s relationship with Mrs McIver in Scotland is recalled: ‘Mrs McIver comes into the house every day [...] Lily

sees her mother kissing Mrs McIver’ (139). The liaison within the domestic setting is indicative of the women’s lives which were by and large contained within this space; nevertheless, it also illustrates a covert rejection of the ideology of the family. Mrs McIver is in fact central to Rubina’s life: Sadie’s research discovers that although her grandmother emigrated to Canada she remained emotionally connected to Mrs McIver. The letters, written in code, reveal the unfulfilled lives of Mrs McIver and Rubina. In order to keep their relationship hidden ‘in case [Mrs McIver’s] drunken husband back in Scotland should one day come across them’ (317) the two women developed different personae when discussing (presumably) intimate details. Their fantasy characters enabled them to be themselves whilst ostensibly performing the role of dominant femininity for ‘outsiders’. Nonetheless, they also illustrate the restriction and limitations placed upon women and ‘the poignancy of two young women from the same tenement in Scotland giving themselves the alter egos of two of the most glamorous film stars the world has ever seen’ (317), as Sadie says.

McDowell’s narrative reminds us of the insurmountable challenges faced by women during this period; it depicts a very different environment for lesbian woman from the possibilities offered by Strachan and Wooff in their post-devolution setting. Furthermore, within the socio-historical context, it is possible to understand how unfeasible it would have been for Mrs McIver and Rubina to have an open relationship or to reject marriage and children. Family, marriage and children were central in the construction of womanhood, and indeed, in the construction of the nation. As Eleanor Gordon argues,

Discursive construction of the family mediated people’s experience of family life, informed local and central state policies and produced regulatory discourses which sought to eliminate aberrant behaviour by penalising those
whose behaviour deviated from dominant cultural constructions of family life.\textsuperscript{121}

In fact, to challenge the dominant discourse of femininity was perilous. Single women were ‘often constructed in the mid-twentieth century as connoting marginal, or deviant gender identity [because] single women did not fulfil contemporary norms of femininity relating to marriage and motherhood.’\textsuperscript{122} Hence, lesbian identities were ‘conspicuous by their absence’.\textsuperscript{123} An identity that did not conform to the accepted ideology was dangerous. Everyone ‘knew’ ‘marriage was ‘natural’ and ‘the best job for a woman’.\textsuperscript{124} So when Lily says ‘good girls don’t. They don’t abandon their men and kids’ (94) she is merely echoing the established ‘facts’ found in self-help literature as well as women’s magazines. For Rubina and Mrs McIver the situation would have been more complex, for, as Yvette Taylor points out, working-class lesbians are in an ever more precarious position because ‘problems […] are compounded by class.’\textsuperscript{125}

Ideas of identity and belonging are also played out through the trope of the diaspora. Assimilation into another culture has meant that, for Amy at least, her sense of self is fluid and unfixed: ‘Scottishness’ is not an innate identity. Amy sounds Canadian, as Lily comments: ‘I couldn’t get used to the accent at first […] you, Amy, not a trace – nothing Scottish left in you at all’ (20). However, preserving a sense of ‘original’ identity remains important for some of the migrants, although as the school teacher states they were ‘all Canadian now’ (173). Like Joss Moody in Kay’s \textit{Trumpet} whose

\textsuperscript{121} Gordon, ‘The Family’, p.258.
\textsuperscript{123} Rebecca Jennings, \textit{Tomboys and Bachelor Girls: A Lesbian History of Post-War Britain 1945-71} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p.77.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
accent becomes more marked outside Scotland, Charlie, one of Lily’s friends, ‘wears a tartan scarf every day to show everybody that he is Scottish. Charlie likes being Scottish’ (178). Nevertheless, Charlie’s idea of belonging and identity is performed through a piece of nostalgic touristic material that signifies to ‘outsiders’ what it means to be ‘Scottish.’ As I have already argued, a sense of belonging to ‘an imagined community’ is still clearly relevant in a contemporary context but as Scottish and Welsh women writers are asserting, it needs to be an inclusive community and nationhood identity has to be heterogeneous and not a ‘closed category’. David McCrone asserts,

In terms of our national identity, who we are and are judged to be in a particular context depends on how well our claims are regarded by those around us. Being considered not ‘one of us’ means being an outsider whether one wants to be or not. National identity may lead ultimately to social inclusion or exclusion.126

As previously discussed, language and accent are particularly pertinent to how identity and belonging are determined; like Catrin Dafydd in Random Deaths, McDowell explores these issues in the context of class politics. The ways in which accent and language are both internalized and responded to by others is illustrated during a meeting Sadie has with a visiting academic, Madeleine Bower. Bower is ‘one of the country’s most famous female academics […] the same Madeleine Bower who wrote about women’s voices when a woman’s voice in literary criticism was an accident, nothing intentional at all’ (232). Nevertheless, empowering women by articulating their experiences seems nothing more than an academic exercise for Bower, since it is Bower who silences Sadie: when Sadie attempts to discuss her own research Bower dismisses it, suggesting personal writing is out-of-date, and consequently both rejects and suppresses Sadie. Moreover, Sadie ‘feels suddenly self-conscious about her

accent – she sounds like someone she doesn’t want to be, someone she isn’t’ (236). Indeed, Sadie’s entire meal with the professor and her colleagues is punctuated with her concerns about ‘[her] accent which is now disturbing her’ (236). When she talks ‘she feels suddenly vulgar’ (238) and Bower, Sadie believes, ‘has heard Sadie’s voice, she has made a judgment, she knows where “Sadie belongs”’ (238). By contrast, Professor Bower comfortably belongs to the professional classes because she has a ‘deep and full and round-vowelled’ voice (237). It would seem that Sadie is experiencing the ‘symptom of a “cultural cringe”’, a direct result of the ‘increasingly marginalized’ language; ‘Scottish culture and history were judged according to English standards, and thus frequently appeared deficient, provincial, inorganic.”  

Like the marker of a ‘national identity’ McCrone discusses above, accent is also an indicator of where one is placed in the socioeconomic hierarchy. In terms of an accent and a culture that has been under the control of a standard that is not Scottish, the Scottish voice has been devalued, externally and internally, and is indicative of inferiority. Of course, it is worth bearing in mind that Sadie lives in pre-devolution Scotland, and her embarrassment is indicative of the cultural malaise people were experiencing in the mid-1990s.

The novel ends with Lily starting to forgive her mother and to forgive herself. The past has been confronted and Lily realises that in order to move forward past events and lives need to be more than confronted – they need to be understood. Deciding to look for her mother, Lily invites her daughter over to Canada to help her search for the missing Rubina and reconcile an abandoned life. The novel’s conclusion is really a

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beginning and as in many of the novels discussed in this thesis there is a sense of hopefulness, albeit tentative.

The writers discussed in this chapter have all questioned ideas pertaining to gender, nation, identity and belonging and illustrated the many complex ways in which these categories of identification and organisation interrelate. However, adding to these concerns, the authors emerging from this period also address intergenerational as well as class conflict. They also remind us that our signifying systems, such as language, remain a site of struggle and contestation especially for women and other non-dominant groups. The differences and disparities raised are not necessarily resolved and hierarchies and power structures have not collapsed; nevertheless, what the writers all suggest is that there is now a space in which to deconstruct images of the people and community that do not truly reflect or embody those who have been hitherto on the margins. One of the key issues to emerge in this chapter is a growing sense of the necessity to think beyond the sanctioned interpretations of our selves and our nations. There are opportunities, these women writers suggest, to challenge national, sexual and gendered identities and to reflect on and respect the many different pasts that have shaped these nations. The histories that these women writers have revealed are not always easy to deal with: rape, loneliness, exclusion, maternal cruelty and abandonment, as well as struggles between genders, age and ethnicities. And furthermore, despite devolution’s promise of a more equitable civil society, many of the writers in this chapter remind us that ‘the idea that the battle has been won on women’s equality is a myth’. 128 Nevertheless, as the quotation at the start of this chapter suggested, though devolution may not solve the problems of the past, it does provide the

128 McMillan and Fox, ‘Has Devolution Delivered for Women?’, p.27.
opportunity to delve, less self-consciously, into the stories of those misrepresented or overlooked in the writing of our narratives of the nation.
Devolution is not a single defining event but a process.¹

The cultural and political landscapes of Wales and Scotland has changed considerably since the process of devolution began: a decade indeed makes a difference. In 2007, Wales experienced its first ‘rainbow’ government, a coalition between Labour and Plaid Cymru, and Scotland saw its first Scottish National Party government in political history. Moreover, the devolution ‘process’ focused attention on gender and equality issues, and both governments, ostensibly, endeavoured to promote egalitarianism. In fact, the Welsh Assembly ‘has an absolute duty to promote equality of opportunity in all aspects of its policy making and implementation,’² although in Scotland it ‘has [been] more voluntaristic.’³ Female political representation in both Scotland and Wales increased, peaking in 2003 with equal representation in Wales and a ‘modest progress towards parity’ in Scotland with women taking 39.5 per cent of the seats before declining during the rest of the decade, and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has been broadly optimistic concerning the future. The EHRC Director for Wales, Kate Bennett, discussing their commissioned report by academic Paul Chaney, states:

³ Ibid.
The report finds that under devolution strides have been taken towards equality, and equality has given strength to devolution. We see an equalities agenda taking shape that is distinct from Westminster and more suited to the everyday needs of Wales.\footnote{Channey cited in Kate Bennett, ‘Equality and Devolution: The First Ten Years and Moving Forward’, Equality and Human Rights Commission’ [Online] Available from: http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/wales/news-in-wales/equality-and-devolution-the-first-ten-years-and-moving-forward/ [Accessed 2 March 2011]}

In Scotland, the EHRC report suggested this was the time to ‘reflect on and celebrate the progress that has been made [and to] critically analyse what […] can be learned for the future from the Scottish and Welsh experience’.\footnote{Equality and Human Rights Commission, ‘An uncertain mix: equality and Scottish devolution’. [Online]. Available from: http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/Scotland/an_uncertain_mix__equality_and_scottish_devolution.pdf [Accessed 2 March 2011]}

In the case of fiction writers, the decade since devolution was an impressive one: Scottish and Welsh women authors showed increasing diversity, determination and energy in both skill and subject. Louise Walsh’s \textit{Boxing Pretty} (2008)\footnote{Louise Walsh, \textit{Boxing Pretty} (Bridgend: Seren 2008).} defied the über masculine world of boxing by telling the story of a female boxer from the Welsh Valleys; Rachel Trezise won the Dylan Thomas Prize in 2006 for \textit{Fresh Apples}; and Deborah Kay Davies won the Wales Book of the Year award in 2009 for \textit{Grace, Tamar and Laszlo the Beautiful}. Scottish women writers such as Alice Thompson\footnote{Alice Thompson, \textit{The Existential Detective} (Uig: Two Ravens Press, 2010).} and Louise Welsh\footnote{Louise Welsh, \textit{Naming the Bones} (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2011).} were both pushing boundaries in genre fiction, and Ali Smith\footnote{Ali Smith won the Whitbread for \textit{The Accidental} (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2006).} and A.L. Kennedy\footnote{A.L. Kennedy, won the Costa Award 2008 for \textit{Day} (London: Vintage, 2008).} both won international prizes. In a Welsh context, Kathryn Gray argues,\footnote{Kathryn Gray, ‘Editorial’, \textit{The New Welsh Review}, 87 (Spring 2010), p.2.}

The Noughties has represented perhaps the most successful and accomplished period both within and without the border as has been seen for some considerable time. Young Turks. Old Hands. An energised critical culture, too. A renewed sense of credibility, optimism and possibility prevails in Welsh literature in English.\footnote{Kathryn Gray, ‘Editorial’, \textit{The New Welsh Review}, 87 (Spring 2010), p.2.}
The intellectual and creative wilderness into which many feared Wales and Scotland would inevitably fade after 1979 did not materialize. Rather, these nations’ writers have evolved into self-assured and assertive communicators examining the local, national and international world around them. Although much has changed since that first failed referendum, concepts of identity, belonging and constructions of nations and nationhood are still central in Welsh and Scottish women’s writing in the emergent cultural and political environment. In fact, as Lunan and MacDonald assert:

questions of national identity and the ideological construction of nation have never been more relevant as, across the world, old empires are fundamentally challenged and new territories of trans-national allegiance constructed.12

These new challenges and the problematizing of identity formations in a reconfigured trans-national political landscape has become an important issue in the literature produced by Welsh and Scottish women in the decade since devolution. The two novels examined in this final chapter, Fflur Dafydd’s Twenty Thousand Saints (2008)13 and Leela Soma’s Twice Born (2008),14 both explicitly address the political, social and cultural developments within the devolutionary landscape of their respective nations. Importantly, these texts not only illustrate the diversity within that place and space but also the past, present and emerging tensions and difficulties. Both writers place those who traditionally inhabit the margins in national movements and ideologies of the nation at the centre of the struggle for autonomy. Thus, like Davies, McDowell

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13 Fflur Dafydd, Twenty Thousand Saints (Talybont: Alcemi, 2008). All subsequent references will be to this edition and appear in parenthesis in the main body of the text.
14 Leela Soma, Twice Born (YouWriteOn.com, 2008). All subsequent references will be to this edition and appear in parenthesis in the main body of the text.
and Miller in the previous chapter, these authors rewrite the national narratives of the past as well as the present. Dafydd’s and Soma’s literary representations provide an ‘enunciating space’ from which to illustrate the illusion of historical authenticity. Bhabha’s ‘postcolonial, critical discourse’ which discloses the ‘staging’ of history and historicity narratives encapsulates Dafydd and Soma’s imaginary pre- and post-devolutionary landscape:

a vision of the future is the belief that we must not merely change the narratives of our histories but transform our sense of what it means to live, to be, in other times and different spaces, both human and historical.\(^{15}\)

Fflur Dafydd’s first English-language novel locates politics at the heart of its narrative in its exploration of Wales and Welsh subjectivity.\(^{16}\) In terms of its concerns with language alienation, the ideology of nation and identity formations, Dafydd’s novel has much in common with many of the other texts examined in the preceding chapters. Twenty Thousand Saints is set on Bardsey Island and revolves around the concerns of its permanent and transient residents during one summer in 2007. The central protagonists, Viv, her son Iestyn, with Delyth and her son Deian, had moved to the island in 1979, ‘four weeks after the referendum and the devastating news that Wales had said no to self-government’ (130). The families’ exile was the direct consequence of the untenable political situation. According to Viv, ‘Wales had forced them ‘to leave the mainland’ (164). Eighteen years later and the day after the ‘bittersweet triumph’ (214) of the second referendum Delyth disappears and, although her body is never

\(^{15}\) Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.256.

\(^{16}\) *Twenty Thousand Saints* has been reviewed as a re-incarnation of Dafydd’s earlier Welsh language novel *Atyniad* (2006). However much has been changed in translation. In fact, Dafydd writing in *The Western Mail* (October 2008) says that in fact, ‘it is not a translation but a new novel’. There are different characters, it tells a different story, and Dafydd has changed the structure and ‘turn[ed] [the] plot on its head’.
found, Iestyn is imprisoned for her murder on circumstantial evidence (they were sexually involved). As a consequence of his mother’s disappearance, Deian is then taken from the island by his father to live in England. Unable to cope with the tragic situation Viv decides to become a nun to enable her to ‘safeguard herself; keep [...] people out’ (25). It is only towards the end of the novel, after Iestyn’s release from prison, that the reader discovers more about Delyth’s disappearance: Iestyn proposes to his mother that Delyth in all probability killed herself in order to help the fight for an independent Wales. Over the years Viv had persistently refused to go back to the mainland and resume the struggle so, implausible as her self-sacrifice may seem, ‘[Delyth] had to do something drastic [...] For her it wasn’t about ending it all. It was about starting something’ (215).

*Twenty Thousand Saints* spans the critical stages in contemporary Welsh history – the 1979 and 1997 devolution referenda and the symbolic tenth year of the Assembly. As Julia Edwards and Laura McAllister assert, this period ‘reflects a number of important changes in the pattern of women’s representation within Welsh politics.’

Indeed, the importance of this novel lies in Dafydd’s gendering of the nation and the national struggle, for as Edwards and McAllister state, ‘historically Plaid Cymru’s representation at every electoral level has been overwhelmingly male’. With the character of Viv, in particular, Dafydd is writing women into the centre of Welsh politics, reminding us that despite ‘huge gaps in our knowledge of women’s involvement in Welsh politics’ women did play a key role in Welsh politics from at

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18 Ibid., p.162.
least the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, up until at least the 1980s they were seen as mainly fundraisers and providers of general administrative support for campaigns and electioneering. It is these dominant images of the past that Dafydd resists. For if it is possible to employ literature as an ideological apparatus to represent and empower dominant values Dafydd’s novel exposes the silence imposed by, and the suffering caused by, patriarchal and colonial structures; her literary representation purposely gives women an overt political role during the first referendum, and depicts the important contributions they made. As Iestyn reminds Viv:

you were a team, once, remember. You were always the notorious one in those campaigns, the front women, the figurehead [...] you were the only one who could really change things. (216)

Through Viv, stories of the political and cultural struggles prior to the Labour government’s initial promise of a referendum are shown. For instance, like Jackie Davies in the previous chapter, Dafydd draws attention to the Welsh language campaigns for roadside signage, which, as Viv reminds us, was ‘a small, yet colossal feat’ (239). And, like Mary Jones’s novel in chapter three and McDowell’s and Davies’ in chapter six, Twenty Thousand Saints provides an understanding of the oppressive and difficult stages in the nation’s past. As I showed in chapter three, the impact of the 1979 Thatcher government’s social and welfare ‘reforms’ saw poverty levels increase and consequently the 1980s was a bleak time for many people in


See Charlotte Aull Davies whose account of the setting up of the Welsh Nationalist Party points out that Mai Roberts should have been among those founding ‘fathers’ since she was instrumental in bringing the two Welsh movements, Home Rule Army and Y Mudiad Cymreig, together to progress the nationalist cause. Charlotte Aull Davies, ‘Women, Nationalism and Feminism’, in Aaron, Rees, Betts and Vincentelli, eds, Our Sisters’ Land: Changing Identities of Women in Wales, pp.242-258, p.242.


22 Said, Culture and Imperialism, pp.73-229.
Scotland and Wales.\textsuperscript{23} For women in particular it was still a time of widespread inequality – in both the private and public spheres. And although Welsh women were challenging the traditional systems which created disparity and adversity, they were still expected to be, as Viv reminds us, the ‘good little housewife’ (131). Dafydd’s women resist patriarchal ideology which endeavoured to limit and restrain women’s socio-cultural struggles and she provides us with strong-minded, independent and political female characters who had ‘fire’ (162) and ‘made a [political] splash […] at the time’ (209).

Dafydd’s literary representation of Welsh women’s political history rewrites dominant structures. Thus, the men in her narrative are insignificant, irrational and by and large, invisible: for instance, we are told through Viv that her ‘partner was a traitor’ (131) who voted against self-government: ‘he voted no to spite me more than anything, just like Jeremy [Delyth’s partner]’ (185). The men’s insecurity, symbolised by their no-vote for Welsh self-government, is symptomatic of colonial status and suggests the men were subconsciously deflated and defeated, and hence some conspired with their own subjugation. In fact, as Stephen Knight suggests, ‘[s]ome people are too comfortable with colonialism to even identify it, or are more hostile to what they see as the threat of the natives to separate themselves from the English viewpoint.’\textsuperscript{24} Or as Franz Fanon has said, ‘The condition of the native is a nervous condition.’\textsuperscript{25}

Like Jackie Davies and Miller’s texts, Dafydd reminds us that historically women faced numerous sociocultural obstacles, and their political endeavours became a public ‘fiction’ (206). Patriarchal and colonial inscriptions failed to represent women as

\textsuperscript{23} Harvie, \textit{Scotland and Nationalism; Scottish Society and Politics 1707 to Present}, pp.219-236.
\textsuperscript{24} Knight, \textit{One Hundred Years of Fiction}, p.xiv.
authentic, active subjects and consequently, women’s lives were ‘not going on record’; thus they became prey to ‘the fabrications of representations of historical reality’. So although Viv and Delyth were at the forefront of the Welsh political scene in the 1970s, years later on a radio programme it is ‘his story’ that is again being told; once more the media attempts to manipulate and obscure women’s experiences and centrality in the fight for nation and language. Listening to ‘one of those endlessly fashionable reunion programmes’ (208) about the 1979 referendum on Radio Cymru, Viv ‘recognised one voice intimately […]’ Lewys, the man who’d helped her and Delyth during their campaign’ (208; my emphasis). Lewys is now a Welsh Assembly Member and during his discussion he attempts to re-write the past:

Viv was stunned to hear her name mentioned on the radio…He spoke about her with precision […] she had obviously become a mere fact to him, a historical appendix. He’d said something about political extremities […] he said, this particular individual wasn’t politically astute enough to see how things would pan out. (209)

Lewys’s suggestion that Viv and Delyth were not politically skilful indicates that entrenched sexist attitudes still permeate the newly devolved political environment – despite the Assembly’s ‘absolute duty to promote equality’. Moreover, Lewys further marginalises Viv by suggesting she was ‘extreme’; his contention implies she had already positioned herself on the periphery and consequently had no place in Wales’s political institutions and public life. Naturally, the AM’s comments enrage Viv and ‘she barks at the radio’: ‘you weren’t worried about how things would pan out when

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you were shoving your hands down my tan tights’ (209). This particular memory of their campaign reminds us of the interplay between gender, sexuality and nation, for as Tamar Mayer states, ‘nationalism becomes the language through which sexual control [...] is justified and masculine [sexual] prowess is expressed and exercised’. In her last conversation with Lewys just after the 1979 defeat Viv recalls, he ‘shouted at [her] down the phone […] You’re turning your back on us’ (209) and she reminded him that not only were they dominated by a foreign power but they were defeated by their own people. So, rather than being politically dense as Lewys implied, Viv’s exile was a consequence of her unwillingness to be further subjugated or to acquiesce. She tried to explain this to Iestyn years later: they moved to ‘the periphery’ because ‘[t]hey’d colonised us so well that we’d started believing we didn’t want our own freedom. You can’t stay in a country that doesn’t want its own freedom’ (185). Clearly Viv is attempting to escape from the psychological effects of colonial oppression, manifested in a sense of inferiority which leads to self-alienation and ‘identification with the colonizer’. Fanon argued this was a fundamental characteristic of colonial domination and Kirsti Bohata rightly suggests that his analysis is valuable when considering the Welsh experience:

The psychological analysis of the colonial situation offered by Fanon [...] is useful in understanding the Welsh experience, where the Welsh sense of inferiority [...] is instilled (in part) by the internalization of negative English/British perceptions and constructions of the Welsh, as well as by a version of history which shows Welsh defeat as an inevitable phase in the progressive march of civilization. 30

29 Bohata, Postcolonialism Revisited, p.23.
Unlike the men in her life, Viv, at this point, is mentally robust and refused to bear the burden of colonialism: she understood the political scene and comprehended the aftermath. Indeed, at this juncture the contemporary political climate for women was bleak: according to one activist, ‘in politics the situation is bathetic [...] it seems to me that the feminist position in both parties [Plaid Cymru and the Welsh Labour Party] has been steadily eroding’.\(^{31}\) So, Viv’s outlook was not ‘extreme’; in fact her stance reflected the concerns expressed by many activists at the time. And her position was clear: she was relocating because the island ‘wasn’t some pathetic colonised nation. Wales was attached to England, and Bardsey wasn’t’ (209). In many ways, Viv and Delyth’s rejection of the mainland was also a rejection of patriarchal structures which ideologically incarcerate and sustain a discriminatory and specious system. As Viv explains to Iestyn, ‘me and Delyth wanted so much more than an ordinary life in Mynythno can give you’ (185). This topographical detachment from the mainland is also a feature Strachan employs in *Negative Space*; it suggests that spatial separation from the dominant structures of the mainland is the only way to open up a constructive space for women.

The geographical severance and the habitation of an alternative, predominantly female space, ‘where men were scarce’ (7) is initially positive for Viv: ‘she had everything she needed here’ (27). However, the liminal space does not mean complete equanimity; even years later Viv remains so stubbornly distraught due to the 1979 devolution humiliation that she cannot return to the mainland because of what that geopolitical space signifies. Dafydd’s depiction of the inconsolable Viv shows the extent to

which the failed vote compromised people’s lives and reflects the zeitgeist. As Andrew Edwards and Duncan Tanner state:

The overwhelming rejection by Welsh voters in 1979 was one of the most traumatic events in Welsh political history. In the aftermath[...] of the result, few tried to confront, let alone objectively evaluate, one of the most painful events in Welsh history.32

The duplicity of her country’s inability to support autonomy is central to Viv’s consciousness. Moreover, her reluctance to mentally migrate from the 1979 disaster had a destructive effect upon her relationships. When Deian was young he could hear his mother and Viv arguing over their self-imposed exile: ‘his mother’s passionate reasoning would spill over into crying, and she’d be telling Viv […] they’d turned their back on Wales, that they shouldn’t be here, where they couldn’t change a thing’ (164). So for all the ‘political and productive potential of margins,’33 Delyth suggests the unvoiced periphery cannot transform patriarchal and hegemonic structures. She wanted to fight from within. She was worried ‘about being forgotten. About life [and] Wales passing her by’ (187). Certainly, after the defeat of 1979 women were in fact energetically questioning and challenging the Welsh sociocultural and political landscape and consequently party politics, nationalism, and women’s roles in subsequent campaigns were shifting.34 Furthermore, the Welsh language movement Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg had continued the campaign ‘for the inspiring and worthwhile cause.’35 As Marion Löfler pointed out in 1995:

34 Charlotte Aull Davies, ‘Women, Nationalism and feminism’ in Aaron, Rees, Betts and Vincentelli, eds, Our Sisters’ Land: Changing Identities of Women in Wales, pp.242-255.
35 Angharad Tomos, ‘Personal voices: the politics of identity’ in ibid., p.266.
the rate of decline [in the number of Welsh speakers] has slowed down considerably in the past twenty years [...] and further campaigning in the 1980s onwards, involving a growing part of the population, led to the passing of the Welsh Language Act of 1993 [...] Action [...] snow-ball like, spawned more action, influenced more people and has to date changed the linguistic trend and the whole atmosphere in Wales.  

It is this atmosphere – the emergence of a new sense of Welsh consciousness and self-belief – that Iestyn attempts to convey to Viv: ‘Wales isn’t like it used to be. We’re strong now. Stronger than ever. The language is strong too. People don’t have to live on the margins anymore’ (220). However, Viv’s ‘stubbornness’ and her ‘private grief’ have ultimately deprived her of the capacity to recognise such changes; her anger made her ‘become invisible’ (220) and this obscurity impedes her ability to evolve and develop. This is in contrast to Strachan’s Stella for whom the spatial separation opened up radical new possibilities and enabled reclamation of identity and subjectivity. As argued in preceding chapters, there is a complex connection between gender, space and place; Viv’s estrangement from the mainland/male-land serves to remind us that Welsh identity had frequently and habitually been constructed male. However, Viv’s isolated situation has alienated her from contemporary Wales, and, as Dafydd illustrates through Iestyn, the nation has moved on and matured over the intervening years. Hence, Twenty Thousand Saints depicts a modern, progressive and vibrant Wales where women now have a more positive place in which to negotiate female identity and subjectivity. The new governing body has essentially transformed politics in Wales, particularly in relation to gender. As Fiona Mackay asserts, the political equality in Wales was groundbreaking because

36 Marion Löffler, p.192-5.  
37 Marion Löffler uses this term to discuss the loss felt by Welsh speakers with regard to the decline in the language; however, I think it works twofold with the character Viv: her personal grief concerns both losing Delyth and Welsh language politics. Ibid., p.195.
In contrast to international patterns of women’s chronic minority status in political institutions and public life [...] women achieved their goal of equal representation in Wales, taking up 50 per cent of the seats at Cardiff Bay. This world first thrust the National Assembly for Wales into the international limelight.38

Viv’s isolation is eventually interrupted as the media start to regularly transmit programmes highlighting public interest in the new Wales. For instance, a radio programme discussing ‘Devolution in Wales’ enables Viv to understand some of the transformations: she is ‘struck by how much the contributors cared about what was happening in Wales. Their voices were lit somehow, on fire, bursting brightly out of her transistor’ (211). The programme illustrates a politically-engaged, passionate nation and moreover, the programme’s contributors conversed in a Welsh language that was both professional and contemporary. Their language had not been annihilated as Viv had feared: rather, ‘their Welsh was slick, urban, rhythmic’ (211). This portrayal of a modernised Wales and modernised Welsh language is similar to that depicted in Catrin Dafydd’s text, and yet, interestingly, it is markedly different from Davies’s About Elin, which atmospherically illustrated a more conservative attitude to space, place and language. As well as illustrating a commitment to Welsh language, reclaiming it as a part of their struggle for cultural and self-definition, these writers are enlivening the debate concerning culture given that the diversity of their fictions and their representations serves to remind us that the nation, the people and the Welsh language are heterogeneous.

Indeed, that idea of the nation transforming is central to Dafydd’s text. When Iestyn is attempting to convince his mother that Delyth disappeared in order to re-

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energise Viv politically, the conversation revolves around change and renewal. In an attempt to pressurize Viv into confronting her past in order to envision a future, he argues: ‘how things change, how things always change’ (213). Iestyn’s assertion concerning change and progress is also touched upon in other post-devolution Welsh texts, for instance, Azzopardi, Stevie Davies and Wooff draw attention to recent changes in Wales’s sociocultural and political landscapes. Iestyn’s return to their island (and hence the past) allows him to remind his mother that ‘you used to love Wales, you used to say it was all that was worth fighting for, that its weaknesses made it what it was, made us who we are’ (214). However, for Viv the present is haunted by personal and political tragedies which have obscured her sense of self. As Homi Bhabha argues:

> Anxiety links us to the memory of the past while we struggle to choose a path through the ambiguous history of the present [...] a restless apprehension about who one is - as an individual, a group or a community.39

Iestyn’s insistence that his mother tackle the issues that have dominated her life in order to enable her to resume the political struggle eventually allows Viv to look beyond her many boundaries. The stasis that has invaded her being, like Strachan’s Stella, has alienated her. But now, she starts to reform her fragile identity and admits to Iestyn that she ‘never really was [a nun]’ (184). Moreover, she starts to acknowledge her hitherto concealed desire for Delyth, symbolised by ‘a kiss that still lingered’ (183).

Like many of the Scottish and Welsh texts already discussed, Twenty Thousand Saints stresses the importance of language and its connection to identity and belonging specifically in its relation to nation and nationhood. One of the main arguments concerning colonialism and its iniquitous affect on an entire people and culture relates

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39 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, p.xix.
to language; as Ashcroft, Tiffin and Griffiths argue: ‘language becomes the medium through which a hierarchal structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of “truth”, “order” and “reality” become established.’\(^{40}\) For Viv, Welsh culture post the 1979 referendum was likely to become increasingly battered in a country that was chained of its own volition to the coloniser, and because ‘language is [a] major component of identity and representation’\(^{41}\) she was convinced that linguistic domination and coercion would undoubtedly result in loss of identity and alienation from the self. Accordingly, the move to Bardsey ‘where everyone spoke Welsh […] seemed like the only option’ (185). Viv’s rationale for moving her family draws a parallel with the writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s analysis of language as a conduit of domination. He asserts the English language is:

\[
\text{the medium of cultural domination as it was the language of colonial power. As such English was the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner.}^{42}
\]

The idea of language disabling, confining and imprisoning is examined in Dafydd’s text through Deian, a melancholic character who represents the postcolonial subject haunted by loss and disappearance; he feels ‘nothing but emptiness’ (31). Deian is an archaeologist, whose dig on Bardsey is to supposedly ‘find the remains of the twenty thousand saints’ (94) but in reality he has been asked by ‘the board’ (31) to ‘choose a site of little archaeological interest, and to keep churning up the emptiness until it was deemed a suitable site for their new pet-cemetery’ (31). In order to enthuse his volunteers but keep hidden his ‘true, pathetic quest’ Deian sneaks animal bones,

\(^{41}\) Childs and Williams, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*, p.193.
\(^{42}\) Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o cited in ibid., p.195.
stones, flints, and ‘a copper bracelet that contained a hint of something medieval’ (31) into the soil. Deian’s covert activities reminds us of the ‘performance’ of history; a device, invention or idea that ‘impels the “past”, projects it, gives its “dead” symbols the circulatory life of the “sign” of the present, of passage’. Moreover, his futile archaeological digs, an ‘exercise in nothingness’ (31) reads as a metaphor for a loss of self; and this subconscious quest for identity is due to the loss of his ‘mother’ tongue and matronymic displacement. The island shelters the ghost of his younger ‘Welsh’ self and annual trips ‘home’ enable him to study the past in the hope of finding his own narrative.

He still came here, each summer, to brood. To look for things. And to regret the fact that the language had been lost – in his stubbornness, somewhere on the A55 back to Preston, such a dismal way for a language to die. No, not die. Go missing. Just like his mother. (59)

Indeed, much is made of the connection between Deian’s loss of his mother and his loss of the Welsh language, as the following conversation with Greta illustrates:

‘She spoke Welsh, then, your mother?’ Greta asked
‘Of course. So did I. Unwaith.’
‘You spoke it?’ Greta smiled.
‘Yeah, I did once. It’s, it was, my first language. Why’s that so funny?’
‘It’s just that you sound so English.’
‘My Welsh just…faded’
‘Why do people let that happen?’ Greta let out. ‘For someone just to lose a language like that […] happens all the time with Welsh, it’s like they think it isn’t really important’.
[...]
[Greta] ‘Wouldn’t the language be […] a path back to her? You must still remember it.’
[Deian] ‘It’s kind of …locked…’ (56)

43 Bhabha, The Location of Culture. p.254.
The conversation raises several points in relation to language and postcolonial subjectivity: firstly, Deian’s immediate response to Greta’s questioning – ‘of course’ – suggests the answer is obvious. ‘Naturally’ Delyth would have spoken Welsh – she was Welsh after all. Secondly, Deian’s change from present tense to past tense (‘it’s’, ‘it was’) illustrates his relationship with past/present formations: trapped in the past he has momentarily forgotten his linguistic predicament. His first language is ‘locked’ because, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o argues, the colonial power incarcerates the spirit as well as the native tongue. Furthermore, Deian’s hesitation in answering (the ellipsis) also suggests he is finding it difficult to elucidate to Greta, and to himself, exactly what happened to his ‘mother’ tongue. Greta’s emphasis: ‘you spoke it [...] you sound so English’ suggests that for her language, nationhood and identity are interrelated. Further, her statement concerning the failure to preserve an indigenous language is also useful in terms of a postcolonial understanding and reminds us that for many, language is key in terms of maintaining a distinct cultural identity and resisting the centrality and power of the hegemonic culture.

Deian’s mother and his ‘mother’ tongue are symbolic representations of the (colonised) nation: his exile to England signifies the ‘loss’ of his nation and hence identity. His alienation is the outcome of his emotional and physical dispossession; indeed, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, Deian’s state of being is characteristic of the postcolonial subject:

A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by *dislocation*, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or ‘voluntary’ removal for indentured labour. Or it may have been destroyed by cultural *denigration*, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model.\(^{44}\)

It is not until Iestyn returns to the island after his acquittal that Deian is able to confront the past and thereafter recover a sense of self. During the first moments of their reunion Deian cannot communicate; his inability to articulate is caused by guilt both ‘for not having performed [in court] as well as he should have, for letting his friend down’ (104) and for losing his Welsh, elucidated later on in the narrative. Despite having been confined for ten years it was Iestyn who had moved on, both in terms of language and spirit, and it was he who ‘broke the silence’ between the two friends. In contrast to Iestyn, Deian’s estrangement renders him silent: ‘He willed those words to come back, but felt he was shouting in a dream and no sound would come out’ (106). The issue of language loss and its connection to colonial space is raised during the first minutes of Deian and Iestyn’s reunion:

Well it’s fucking weird, Deis, I’ll give you that. I’m speaking to my best friend in a different language…Are you sure you’ve got, you know, *dim Cymraeg o gwbl?* […] How the fuck did you manage to lose your Welsh after a few years over the border and mine stays intact after ten years at Her Majesty’s Service? […] Fuck, Deis, I can’t believe we’re talking to each in English. *Tud laen!* (106)

Iestyn relates his friend’s linguistic impairment to the overall annihilation of Welsh on the island specifically, and also more generally to its loss of Welsh culture as a whole:

Suppose that’s what this island’s like now – all colonised by the English […] She thought we’d be so safe here. Boatman speaks English, shouting obscenities to a boat full of people who couldn’t give a shit about the language. English holidaymakers all over the place, even the Welsh support English football teams, can you believe it? (106)

Iestyn’s concern that colonial imposition has resulted in an insidious devastation of Welsh culture reflects the fears felt by many after the 1979 defeat. Yet, despite the burden of colonialism and an increasingly globalised world, Iestyn’s fears are, by and
large, unfounded: both the culture and the Welsh language have endured. In the capital there has been a renewal, as he tells Deian: ‘They were all bloody speaking Welsh in Cardiff when I came out […] And I get here and I can’t find one Welsh speaking fucker to talk to’ (107). Iestyn’s response to his island-home reminds us of the shift in power relations and political structures since devolution; rather than the periphery signifying the place to preserve culture, it has become the location of continuing colonial relationship where ‘language [continues to be] a place of struggle’. This is illustrated through Viv’s acquiescence to the visiting nuns who dictate to her which language should be spoken because it was ‘the ultimate crime, conversing with God in Welsh’ (49). According to Sister Mary Catherine, Welsh ‘is ungodly’ and consequently only ‘two languages – English and silence [should be spoken] – that’s how God defines bilingualism’ (102). The nun’s justification for imposing English on her sisters has parallels with Mahesh’s imposition in Lalwani’s Gifted: English is the supreme language. Furthermore, by adopting the identity of a nun – the ultimate in feminine subservience to the patriarch – Viv allows elements of the dominant structures to invade her island. This not only further marginalises her, but has also allowed her grief-stricken self to be assimilated into an alien culture, as Iestyn says to her: ‘You used to have fire, mother [now you] and your little colonised comrades [are] reading the Bible together in English’ (162).

Towards the end of the novel Iestyn takes Deian on a scramble round the other side of the island’s mountain, ostensibly to view the seal caves. However, Iestyn’s actual intentions are to investigate his theory relating to Delyth’s disappearance. Iestyn

also seems to want to help Deian find a way back to his roots. The ‘back of the mountain’ (190) is symbolic; it is the place Deian and Iestyn spent much of their childhood exploring, and it is also the place where Delyth vanished. Years earlier Deian attempted to visit the area but he ‘lost his courage’ (191). It was a place that signified loss: ‘the back of the mountain had become too painful for him chafing him with memory’ (191). And indeed, it is at the midpoint of the climb that Deian’s Welsh is unearthed:

‘Welcome back,’ Iestyn said [...] it wasn’t until then that Deian realised he’d said the whole of the last sentence in Welsh. He felt something, right then, on the edge of the mountain, the sea beneath him laughing, the language rolling around in his mouth once again; a curious moment of balance. (193)

The excavation of his mother tongue gives Deian a sense of equilibrium. It also offers a sense of hopefulness suggesting that a space has now been opened up for the rebirth of the indigenous language. It is with this focus on renewal and hope that Dafydd closes the novel. Whilst Iestyn decides to ‘stay on [Bardsey] for a bit [...] I belong here’ (130), Viv returns ‘on an emotional journey’ (241) to the mainland. It is here, at the heart of the newly devolved Wales – a Wales that ‘had been prising itself away from the mainland at its border’ (243) – that Viv realises her nation can survive as a diverse cultural and linguistic space. She observes that ‘it seemed strange, yet thrilling, that two realities could co-exist like this within the same country; the long-forgotten saints of Enlli, and the more unorthodox saints of Saint Mary Street’ (241). And almost as if to illustrate this point Viv then turns to the Millennium Centre and reads ‘In these stones horizons sing [...] gwir fel gwydr o ffwrnais awen’ (242). This bringing together, mixing and merging of the two languages is constructive and valuable in enabling us to comprehend the heterogeneity of people and cultures inhabiting and creating the nation.
In fact, according to Bhabha, it is this type of blending and fusing that enables cultures to survive: it is ‘by living on the borderline of history and language, on the limits of race and gender, that we are in a position to translate the difference between them into a kind of solidarity.’ This sense of renewal and new beginnings is also present in Deian. As he travels back to England, ‘he muttered to himself in Welsh, enjoying the new slick feel of those words on his lips’ (242) and as he arrived at his house in Preston his restored language and connection with his culture determine his future: he walked back to his car because he was going ‘Home’. The final image the reader is left with suggests Deian’s emerging selfhood as he looks into his car window which ‘reflected only himself’ (251).

The notion of devolution as a positive force which can transform and transmit new ways of being and enable cultures not only to continue but to progress positively is also a key issue in Leela Soma’s Twice Born. Soma, like Dafydd, examines cultural identities and how they intersect with gender and politics, though Soma expands upon these issues by questioning how class and ethnicity are implicated in the construction of the nation and ideas of belonging. It is worth mentioning here that although Twice Born was published by an internet company rather than through the traditional route, the online publishing company has the endorsement of the English Arts Council and Soma won the Margaret Thomson Davis Trophy for Best New Writer 2007 to enable her to complete Twice Born. Nevertheless, publishing through an internet company has left the text with some particular problems: it has not been through a rigorous process of editing or proofreading, and consequently has several obvious errors, some spelling and typing mistakes and some repetition in the copy. However, having said that, in terms of

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46 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, p.170.
this thesis the text is important because Soma’s writing clearly engages with the new political climate and deals directly with the effects of Scottish devolutionary politics.

Like Dafydd’s novel, and indeed many of the texts discussed in this thesis, *Twice Born* is a narrative about geographical and emotional interchange and tells the story of Sita, a young medical graduate from Madras who has agreed to marry Ram, a newly qualified doctor living in Glasgow, and ‘the suitable boy her parents had arranged for her’ (11). Although Sita has ‘some misgivings’ (19) about the arrangement and is somewhat concerned with Ram’s emotional reticence, she hopes ‘living in Scotland would kindle the romance that was missing’ (19). However, much to Sita’s consternation the reserved Ram remains emotionally uncommunicative throughout their marriage. Nevertheless, their life with their daughter Uma and the Indian community in Glasgow is settled – until a new partner arrives at Sita’s General Practice. Neil makes ‘the deep recesses of her soul stir’ (10) which causes Sita to examine her identity, her community and its traditions, and consider to what extent she could tolerate ostracism if she were to choose a life away from Ram.

*Twice Born* begins in 1999, ‘[t]wenty years to the day since Sita arrived in Glasgow’ (8) on the day Neil began work as the new partner at the surgery, and of course, the same year the Scottish Parliament reopened. It ends in 2008 with Sita, Neil and Ram’s lives irrevocably changed and with Scottish politics considerably altered: the traditional foothold of the Labour Party in Scotland has been removed and the Scottish National Party Government is sitting in Holyrood. Like Dafydd’s novel, Soma’s text reflects back on the past to help understand contemporary cultural and political influences and hence critically examines the narrative of the nation. Soma puts Scotland into a socio-historical context examining the political turmoil of 1979 after the
first referendum failed, and the subsequent election of Margaret Thatcher’s right-wing government. As the story progresses Sita looks back to her life in India and her journey as a young woman settling in this ‘grey land’ (35). The novel then moves through the 1980s, the 1990s and on to contemporary devolved Scotland where Sita is in her forties and her daughter Uma has left the family home, graduated from university and married.

Soma’s novel is valuable in terms of this thesis’s central investigation regarding post-devolution writing in Scotland given that she parallels the narrative of Sita’s life and her increasing independence with the story of Scotland and its increasing autonomy. So, in many ways, although it is Ram who is the party-political enthusiast in the novel, the story of Scotland’s past, present and future is experienced through Sita. Like Dafydd’s *Twenty Thousand Saints*, Soma illustrates how a small country subsumed under the cultural and political control of its larger neighbour can, given the opportunity, mature and evolve into a self-assured nation. Where *Twice Born* differs radically from Dafydd’s text is that it engages directly with the position and the view of the immigrant experience; Sita’s perspective enables a rational evaluation of the politics of location and provides an alternative perspective of Scotland and ‘Britain’. Her fresh viewpoint makes her conscious of difference and thus disparity; as Sita observes, ‘the contrast to London was sharp, the poverty evident. The place reeked of old coalmines, a grey area, with grey roughcast houses with grey people’ (35). The redundant village in Lanarkshire where Ram is first employed shocks Sita and effectively illustrates the deprivation and desolation of those economically neglected locations; as she comments to Ram, ‘This is not what I expected of the first world’ (35).

In the first section of the novel Soma, like Lalwani in the previous chapter, reminds us of the racial discrimination immigrant people experience when trying to
settle in a new country. The difficulties first arise whilst Sita and Ram are looking for rented accommodation in Glasgow and encounter property owners unwilling to rent to the couple because they are Asian:

Years of education, democracy, freedom and affluence haven’t freed people from their deepest fears, thought Sita. The liberal west of her dreams and the reality did not add up. (53)

This brings to mind Charlotte Williams’ argument discussed in previous chapters concerning racism in a country that has itself been subjugated. Through Sita’s observations, Soma exposes some of the ways in which nations and their inhabitants ‘Other’ people, and importantly Soma asserts this Othering is also a part of Scottish history, an element of Scotland’s narrative that has hitherto been evaded. As Rowena Arshad points out:

Scotland has avoided the realities confronting racism as a door-step issue as most reports on racial harassment and racial crime have been largely drawn from evidence in England and Wales. As statistics are now being disaggregated [...] the belief of Scottish egalitarianism and friendliness may well become another national myth.47

It is in the devolutionary climate that ‘the skeletons in Scotland’s “race” cupboard’ are now being examined both in fiction and through academic research.49 Carla Sassi implies Scottish subjugation of other ethnicities is tied to its own colonisation: she argues that, ‘Racism and ostracism against coloured people did not appear and root in Scotland until after the Union of 1707, when Scots became heavily involved in the slave

48 MacDonald, ‘Scottish Extractions: “Race” and Racism in Devolutionary Fiction’, p.85.
trade’.  

Whether Sassi’s contention is accurate or even useful, and whether we can lay the blame solely at England’s door, is debateable because, as Cant and Kelly assert, ‘there has been no time in Scottish history when the Scottish population has remained closed’. As Alastair Niven argues, ‘Black people were present at the medieval Scottish courts [...] it is clear that for centuries its much smaller black population is likely to have been the object of [...] potential hostility’. However, regardless of the accuracy of Sassi’s argument what is undeniable is that Scottish history, and by extension the history of racism, has not been taken seriously until relatively recently. Rather, Scottish history was perceived as a ‘fringe subject [and] students were advised to stay clear of it and do “real history instead.”’

Like Lalwani and Miller’s novels, Twice Born reveals some of the self-made myths that imply the subjugated nation is free of racism or that internal prejudices refer only to ‘the ‘invisible minorities – the Irish/Catholics.’ As Eileen, Sita’s friend says:

‘Come oan Sita, there’s nae [racism] problem here. There’s a lot of it doon in England’ said Eileen
‘We’ve had to put up with a lot,’ added Clare, ‘My family was Irish. The Irish were abused and even to this day the term tinkers is used in the papers…’
‘Aye, sectarianism is rife’ [says John, Eileen’s partner].

However, Eileen’s belief that Scotland is non-racist is discredited when she becomes subject to rabid racist conduct after marrying an Asian: as the narrator says, ‘None of Eileen’s family were present [at the wedding]. They could not get over her giving up

51 Cant and Kelly cited in Macdonald, ‘Scottish Extractions: “Race” and Racism in Devolutionary Fiction’, p.95.
her faith and marrying a “Paki”’(121). The inequitable and discriminatory aspect of the immigrant’s life is discussed further at Ram’s and Sita’s monthly ‘pot luck’ party, a social occasion with other Indian families. The omniscient narrator sets the scene:

Most were doctors [...] who had worked hard as had all first generation immigrants. They specialised in areas they did not want to, like the unpopular Geriatrics. Some ended up accepting General Practice even though they had their hearts set on training for cutting-edge surgery, finding that their colour came in the way of career prospects [...] They had so many problems that meeting up and airing them was therapeutic. They recalled racist incidents, name-calling, being stared at or not served in shops [...] Most of them brushed these aside. (100)

Although the divisions are clear, and the reality of life for Sita and Ram in Glasgow is challenging, Sita frequently draws attention to the similarities between Scotland and India. For Sita cultural connections and transcultural contacts are positive forces; as she says to her father ‘there are so many connections between Madras and Scotland but there is very little we are aware of [...] how little we know about the strong connections between our countries’ (140). Those positive links present themselves in Sita and Ram’s first house which is a home of cultural fusion:

She had deliberated a long time over the contrasting things [...] Scottish and Indian prints [...] The lounge with its pale walls and autumn colours was a natural place for the Scottish paintings and prints [...] The dining room with its rich red and gold [...] was perfect for Indian prints. (90)

Sita’s life and her sense of self in Scotland derive from both her cultures: she is ‘racially and genetically [...] one with the environs in India but in her heart, mind and soul, she knew she “belonged to Glasgow”’(227). So for Sita, ideas of home, belonging and identity are not inherent nor, importantly, are they singular. She comments to her friend Eileen that her wardrobe and her kitchen cupboards are like the ‘United Nations’ (108) and states, ‘This is the reality of my life. Everything is a bit of India and a bit of
Scotland’ (120). Indeed, Soma suggests, like many of the other writers discussed in this thesis, that the ‘nation’ needs to accept and value hybridity in order to evolve culturally, socially and politically. Of course, this embracement of a multi-voiced and fused nation as positive force which creates unity more than homogeneity has engaged many diverse elements of culture – religious, linguistic, sexual – and can be found in the work of, for instance, Wooff, Murray, Catrin Dafydd and Lalwani. And Soma, like Donovan in chapter four, shows that ethnic synthesis is a culturally constructive condition. The connections Soma’s protagonist persistently draws between her Indian culture and Scotland enable her to establish herself in her new home-land: she ‘[s]lowly [...] gained confidence, almost like the Clyde merging with the Adyar River of her Madras. The cold grey of Glasgow cooled the humid heat of Madras’ (68). Moreover, Sita’s ‘merging’ of Scotland and India reminds us of the cultural connections forged by the imperial project by nations both within and beyond the British Empire. As Ruth McElroy argues in a Welsh context, (but her argument can also be applied to Scotland) the British Empire produced interesting connections and relations between ostensibly disparate nations subjected to and dominated by ideas of cultural superiority emanating from the imperial centre:

Wales and India both had to find ways of responding to English cultural, economic and political power. It is in this mutual condition of response to and negotiation of English power that we can find revealing connections between nations that fell under the sphere of British Imperial power and control.  

Although the birth of Sita and Ram’s daughter, Uma, brings with it a new set of concerns such as adhering to traditions of Indian culture whilst allowing her freedom

56 Ibid
and independence, Uma is a truly hybrid child – embracing both Scottish and Indian cultures. In fact, Uma makes visible Homi Bhabha’s theory of the ‘international culture’ which is founded on ‘inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity’. Bhabha’s assertion of the vitality and value of the ‘inter’ is positive and constructive for an evolving nation and works effectively in relation to both Uma and Scotland:

It is the ‘inter’ – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space that creates the burden of meaning of a culture. It makes it possible to begin to envisaging national and anti-nationalist histories of ‘people’. And by exploring the Third Space we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as others of our selves.

Ram’s expectations for his only child are substantial – Uma will make his, and by extension Scotland’s, aspirations and political dreams possible: Uma will be ‘My little Scot Nat. Uma, [he tells her soon after her birth] you’ll need to fight for independence’ (107).

Interestingly, although Ram is restrained emotionally and at times utterly detached from Sita’s emotional needs, his allegiance to the Scottish National Party and the ‘Scottish cause’ (101) is passionate and absolute:

What little free time he had he spent helping the Party [Sita] resented this. The Devolution Referendum was now the event that Ram was working for. (96)

Ram’s character refutes the ideology that suggests that a person’s identity, loyalty and sense of nationhood are derived from their blood-line, a singular history, or the passport they hold. Rather, the constructed nature of both nation and national identity excludes the ‘myth of origin’ and shows that the nation is an ‘act of the imagination’ which can therefore be by choice, fluid and inclusive. Ram is Scottish by choice and his political

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57 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, p.38.
and emotional loyalties and visions are Scottish. Through the character of Ram, Soma offers a positive representation of nationalist politics, one that is not based on inherited ownership of land and people, a criticism that has often been levied at nationalism and nationalists. As Donald Wesling suggests, nationalist ideology can be dangerous and divisive:

Since identity for the nationalist, as for the racist, needs to be stable and predictable [...] these idealised entities of nations are obsessed by blood lines, skin colour, language-groups.60

Certainly, discourses of nationhood have been restrictive;61 however, Wesling’s assertion is rather dated and simplistic. It does not take into account different ways in which ideologies of nation and nationhood are understood for, as Hussain and Miller rightly argue, ‘many circumstances prompt nationalism. And nationalism has many ambitions. Hence, the myriad distinctions’. 62

Nevertheless, the historical process of colonisation and imperialism made certain that the discourse of imperial nationhood was supported and sustained by white, heterosexual, patriarchal structures.63 This is a concern I return to throughout the thesis – the exclusion of women, ethnic minority groups and the gay community from ideas of national identity as they have been hitherto represented in Scotland and Wales. However, in Born Twice identity is chosen and consequently it can therefore be

61 For instance see Esther Breitenbach, Alice Brown and Fiona Myers, ‘Understanding Women in Scotland’, *Feminist Review*, 58 (Spring 1998): ‘Needless to say, despite the fact that the issue of nationalism has been an important factor for debate in Scotland [...] women in Scotland have been largely excluded from this discussion’, pp.44-65, p.61.
63 There are writers and academics who point out that women have been involved in the nationalist movements in Scotland and Wales since the 19th century and of course this is true. However, my argument is that it is the discourses relating to the institution of national identity for purposes of empire building (ie. ‘British’) have excluded the actions of Scottish and Welsh women, gay and ethnic activists and have at times fed racist ideologies. See for instance the writings of Charlotte Williams, Christopher Harvie, A.L. Kennedy, Janice Galloway who discuss being locked out of ideas of nationhood.
pluralistic and hyphenated: one can be ‘twice born’. By creating her protagonist as an Scottish-Indian-Nationalist, interested ‘in the good of the country’ (101), Soma is contributing to the discourses concerning nationalism and multiculturalism, a debate that is well overdue. As David McCrone points out:

issues of ethnicity and national identity rarely seem to connect [...] whereas the vocabulary and rhetoric of ethnicity belong to the framework of multiculturalism [...] nationalism and national identity relate to constitutional politics and the devolution of power.  

Like Dafydd’s novel, Soma’s post-devolution text is, by and large, hopeful and positive regarding the nation; thus she offers us a Scotland that embraces ‘civic nationalism [which] is more tolerant of diversity, and is marked by a recognition of different ethnicities, even multiculturalism’. As the leader of the Scottish National Party Alex Salmond argued, ‘we [in Scotland] follow the path of civic nationalism.’

Like many of writers examined in previous chapters, such as Dafydd, Smith and Wooff, Soma also suggests that culture is both a ‘function of and a source of identity [and is] one of the most powerful agents of resistance in post-colonial societies’. It is through *Twice Born* that Soma enables us to read our culture differently, to acknowledge cultural differences and connections and understand Scotland and its people in new divergent ways. Identities are formed and shaped by a myriad of cultural and political experiences; Ram’s identity, for instance, has evolved with his relationship to the place and space he inhabits. In many ways, the nation for Ram defines who he is: the first time he met Sita (at her parents’ house in Madras) he

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66 Alex Salmond cited in ibid., p.5.
introduced himself simply as a supporter of the SNP, ‘the Scottish National Party. It’s a political party fighting for Independence’ (16).

Like Dafydd, Soma refers directly to the first referendum and suggests that the political proposal caused an energized anticipation. As Ram tells Sita,

‘[these are] exciting these times are for Scotland [...] The Nationalists are vociferous in the Parliament. There is so much to talk about the devolution referendum. I’m sure everyone would want to read up on it in an informed way.’ (99)

Yet while both writers illustrate the excitement and the disappointment of the period, they nevertheless deal with the 1979 referendum in different ways: Dafydd depicts the detrimental effect in personal terms, while Soma reminds us that the outcome was the downfall of the Labour Party and the subsequent eighteen years of Conservative rule. The circumstances and conditions created by this situation was one of the main reasons the Scottish National Party emerged from the political margins. Between 1979 and 1997 the right-wing ideology of the Tories ensured Scotland understood its subordinate position as a colonised country. As Ram explains to his father-in-law, Margaret Thatcher was detested:

People in Scotland hate her. She’ll introduce the poll tax soon. People are fed up voting for Labour in Scotland and getting a Tory Government to live under. (137)

Moreover, as Neil Davidson states, the Thatcher and Major years meant that for many Scots the only solution seemed to be a national one, in the form of a devolved Scottish parliament or an independent Scottish state. [These years according to some writers such as Tom Nairn] had the effect of awaking a nationalism that was missing presumed dead but in fact merely sleeping.68

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Although Soma may aim to show Scotland as a nation based on civic egalitarianism, like Trezise in her 1980s-based text she also illustrates the extensive class inequality and deprivation that existed. Seen through the eyes of Sita, Glasgow, Scotland’s largest city, is a site of both wealthy verdant suburbs and slum-dwelling disparity and despair:

the conditions of life on the peripheral estates that she had read about, some newspapers referred to them as ‘Jeelie Piece’ estates [...] were shocking [...] In total contrast, she now lived in the leafy suburb of Bearsden. (69)

The desolation depicted shows the consequences of ‘an intensely polarizing government’ that left much of Scotland (and, of course, this is equally true for Wales) economically depressed after the traditional industries the ‘Empire’ was built upon were made obsolete. Like Fflur Dafydd in her examination of the political landscape of the 1980s and the 1990s, Soma also goes some way in explaining why ideas of nationhood started to come to the fore. In addition to the politics of nation, Soma, like Lalwani, Catrin Dafydd and Paisley, also discusses the use of language and dialect and how it can both empower and inhibit. Soma’s initial focus on language is from the perspective of the newly migrated Sita who stumbles over its unfamiliarity:

The language, the ‘glesca patter’ was a challenge. The glottally-stopped words often seared her heart with unfamiliarity. That uncertain anguish of the ear of an educated immigrant became more heightened when she treated her patients. On the bus she heard words and phrases that were unfamiliar – ‘windae,’ ‘going for my messages’, ‘I’m flitting today’, ‘wissae’ – though she was amused with ‘are ye awright, hen?’ (68)

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69 Jeelie Piece is a jam sandwich - ‘Jeelie Piece estate’ refers to housing estates where children lived on inexpensive jam sandwiches because parents could not afford a nutritionally-balanced diet. It is also worth noting that the housing estates are always on the periphery of the city and more often than not they are without decent facilities such as greengrocers and supermarkets.

Sita’s reflections show that she finds the Scottish language and idioms confusing and alien. However, the language is not ridiculed as ‘bad English’ or the utterance of ‘the unwashed and the violent.’ Rather, the protagonist describes what she hears without value judgement; Sita’s perspective is one that understands difference and the diversity of identity. Nevertheless, the divisive nature of the politics of language and articulation are clear enough; this is illustrated in an episode which takes place during a book launch Eileen and Sita attend in Bearsden public library – an affluent Glasgow suburb. While Eileen and Sita look for a seat, Eileen comes across ‘old neighbours […] Sadie and Aggie from Maryhill’; the ‘two women [are] huddled in the corner’ (144). Undoubtedly, the women from the housing estate feel awkward and ill-at-ease among the ‘smartly dressed women’ (145) and not only do they ‘huddle’ – taking up as little space as possible – they ‘sit in the back row, close to the door’ (146). During the conversation with the two women from Maryhill – a ‘Jeelie Piece estate’ – Eileen code-switches:

Sita noticed that Eileen switched from proper English to her dialect when she spoke to them. ‘Bit like me talking in Tamil with my parents or family and then switching over to English when I need to,’ thought Sita. (144)

Sita’s comparison between the Tamil language and that spoken in Scotland is an interesting one; for instance, both languages have been labelled inferior by colonial endeavours. The inferiorization of Tamil occurred because, as Vasant Kaiwar and Sucheta Mazumdar suggest, Sanskrit was glorified as it ‘enshrines the highest ideas of

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Consequently, ‘Tamil […] was marginalized as a “vernacular language”’. Both languages, and here I am referring to Scots rather than Glasgow dialects (or Anglo-Scots), have suffered the same fate. Furthermore, the apparent necessary change that Eileen made to her utterance when speaking to her ‘estate’ friends as opposed to the ‘professional’ Sita, brings to mind the idea of the term ‘Caledonian Antisyzygy’ – the division that Gregory Smith ‘saw as a fundamental Scottish dualism’. Although this theory has come under much criticism for its apparent suggestion of essentialising of Scottishness, the idea of language schism is relevant here, especially if class-divisions are taken into account. These tension and splits come from still perceptible colonial attitudes which suggest, sometimes at subliminal level, at other times more overtly through ideological state apparatuses such as the media and educational institutions, that Scots should speak English because Standard English is more cultured. The tensions arise when Standard English is not spoken at home or in the playground. As we have seen in Dafydd’s text, English cultural domination has determined the acceptable language.

The social divisions are clearer still in relation to the two Maryhill women, especially in terms of language and class. Sadie and Aggie are at the book reading because the author, Morna, is ‘learning [them] tae reed and writ better’ (145). In Scotland, language and class status are bound together in a way which disempowers people – throws them into silence. So, when Eileen and Sadie’s conversation is interrupted by laughter from somewhere else in the room – specifically the ‘two smartly

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74 Ibid., p.129.
75 For instance, ‘flitting’ is Scots but ‘windae’ is Glasgow vernacular.
dressed women’ discussing ‘the dreariness of the life in the peripheral estates’ (145) that Morna’s book depicts (and where Sadie and Aggie live) – Sadie quietly ‘wondered about their words’ (145). These were words that apparently represented her home – for instance, ‘feral children’ (146) but words that she was alienated from because of their mis-representation: ‘What are they oan aboot?’ she whispered to Aggie’ (145). After the reading the audience is invited to ask Morna questions on her book, and Sadie marveled at how so many were able to ask Morna all the questions and the calm way she answered them. She was dying to ask her why she had written only bits that showed the worst of Maryhill. She did not have the nerve. (147)

So although Sadie was on familiar terms with Morna and states that the tutor was ‘such fun in class’ (148) she did not have the confidence to ask why her estate was so badly represented. Clearly, Sadie’s silence is a consequence of the uncertainty and insecurity which comes from her class status as well as the inferiority complex derived from ideas relating to the value of Scottish nationhood.

Sadie and Aggie are contrasted with the woman in the front row in ‘her £200 boots and costly winter coat […] her confident style’ – the woman who is the first to question Morna. Afterwards when Sadie speaks to Morna alone she ‘wished she could speak posh, clearly, like the others’ (147). Sadie’s words are painfully poignant thus making Soma’s point overtly political. Sadie is coherent, expressive and lucid when she asks Morna, ‘Surely there’s mair to oor area than jist problems hen, ye know that’ (147). However, Sadie’s way of expressing herself is different from the ‘posh’, thus anglicised, residents and is therefore seen, internally by herself as well as externally, as flawed and deficient. Steve Murdoch makes an interesting point when he discusses the Scots language. He states:
Researchers studying the Scots language have pointed out the linguistic insecurity that exists in Scotland especially among the speakers of urban dialects of Central Scots [...] research into attitudes towards urban dialects in Scotland concludes that in Britain, cultural pressure has established Standard English as the medium for written language which leads many people that speak Scots to believe that they are speaking English incorrectly. This in turn may lead to the phenomenon of linguistic self-hatred expressed in shame and distaste for one’s own dialect. 77

That experience of linguistic and cultural insecurity is also raised by a number of other Scottish writers, for instance, McDowell and Donovan. This negative internalisation has emerged because of ideologically-imposed ideas of legitimacy and civilisation and as in the case of Lalwani’s Mahesh, the sense of inferiority experienced has transpired politically through the colonial process. The poet Tom Leonard examines the politics of language superbly in his volume *Intimate Voices*:

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this is thi
six a clock
news thi
man said n
thi reason
a talk wia
BBC accent
iz coz yi
widny walht
mi ti talk
aboot thi
trooth wia
voice lik
wanna yoo
scruff, if
a toktaboot
thi trooth
lik wanna yoo
scruff yi
widny thingk
it wuz troo. 78
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Leonard’s argument that the language issue is intrinsically connected with that of class and cultural imperialism is illustrated in Soma’s text through the Bearsden library scene. An ‘improper’ accent, Leonard contends, can lead to accusations of falsehood and criminalisation – and silences Aggie and Sadie. Irrefutably, language is an extremely political issue and this is particularly so in subjugated nations like Scotland and like Wales where language is a double encumbrance signifying class and nationality.

Soma also points out that colonial ideology which claimed the ‘civilizing value of the English language’ cuts across class and nation, as a conversation between Sita and her ‘Indian’ friends illustrates. Sita and Lata discuss the contradictory, duplicitous and ultimately racist approach of the controlling power which insisted upon native assimilation:

[H]ave you noticed how the French accent and mistakes are considered sweet? [...] but an Indian accent is considered too primitive’. ‘These Pakis never learn right, do they? Is often flung at us.’ ‘Did you hear that the Home Secretary is introducing English lessons for citizenship to help the immigrants integrate? That’s a laugh. I wonder how many of the 500,000 Brits in France and Spain learn the lingo to integrate when they buy properties there [...] Two hundred years stay in our subcontinent was only to plunder the riches, but there was no connection with the people at all. They did little to integrate’. (171)

Soma’s literary representations show the complex and multifarious nature of cultural and political marginality and like Dafydd’s novel, Twice Born explores some of the consequences and responses to a nation and its people endeavouring to leave behind centuries of colonial legacy. Nevertheless, Soma depicts the second referendum, that critical turning point in ‘British’ politics, very differently from Dafydd. So while Ram tells us of the ‘success of the Scottish Parliament’s referendum [...] 78% of the Scots have voted yes. Scotland was on its way to its Parliament after three hundred years’

79 McElroy, ‘Circuiting Empire, Romancing Difference’, p.3.
(164), Dafydd’s protagonists endure death and imprisonment immediately following the ‘yes’ victory. *Twice Born* suggests that following devolution, Scotland was a nation reborn and moreover, as Uma reflects, it is the young and diverse generation of Scots who are constructing ‘This [...] new Scotland’ (172). Indeed, this ‘new’ nation is illustrated at a family wedding where

the theme had all the Indian, Scots and Irish bits to it. Irish to show David’s [the groom] family roots. The little cakes on each of the tables had been decorated with tiny Scots, Indian and Irish flags. (172)

As Uma watches people dancing she deliberates, ‘the whole atmosphere was one of a meeting of minds, culture and genuine happiness’ (172). Clearly, Soma has much hope for the new political and cultural landscape. Moreover, this expectation and hope is also shown through Sita with her increasing independence and self-assertion. As the protagonist grows progressively more frustrated with her life and marriage she embarks on a relationship – ‘not adultery, only fleeting thoughts and a few months of infatuation’ (214) – with Neil. It is at this point that Soma clearly makes parallels with Sita’s life and Scotland’s situation. When Neil tells her they ‘need to think about their future’ (209) Sita escapes to her car and as she sits contemplating her life a radio programme discusses the future of Scotland and the way forward for the new parliament: ‘All these years of Ram’s extolling of the SNP cause made her conscious of these new beginnings for Scotland’ (211). These new beginnings for Sita involved gaining ‘inner strength [so] she could face the future’ with Neil (228).

The final chapter closes in Glasgow 2008 with Ram deliberating, with ‘smug satisfaction’, that since ‘the SNP had won the last election in Holyrood [...] An Independent Scotland seemed to be a closer reality now’ (231). Throughout *Twice Born* Soma demonstrates how the political and the personal intersect. Ram and Sita
were trapped in a mutually dependent relationship because of a multitude of cultural and economic factors. By extension Soma is suggesting that Scotland was likewise. Nevertheless, a second chance, being ‘twice born’, opens up new possibilities for the future for Ram, Sita and Scotland. Soma’s writing conveys a devolved Scotland that imagines a multiplicity of identities: the young Glaswegians successfully straddled ‘their identities of the twin cultures.’ (215), Sita was ‘entwined in the two cultures enriched by the Indian womb that nurtured her being and the Scottish cradle now that nurtured her soul, her heritage and future’ (237); and Ram ‘felt all the years of his hard work as an activist in the party had at last born fruit’ (231). It is a powerful celebration of a modern autonomous nation.

The two novels discussed in this concluding chapter encapsulate the devolutionary milieu. Both writers emphasise the relationship between past and present and how they interrelate to enable a vision for the future. Dafydd and Soma are conscious of, attentive to and engaged with the history, culture and politics of their respective nations and address such issues as the way in which the political, the social and the cultural interact with gender, class and ethnicity. They also underline the wretchedness, desolation and struggle of a nation attempting to progress from a dependent colonized state. While there are obvious difference in how Dafydd and Soma perceive devolving identities, both writers have opened up the sphere of experience, thus challenging the historical narratives of their nations; their dialogue suggests that a receptive understanding of difference is the way forward whilst pointing out the ‘ironies of history – that those who suffer oppression are none the less capable of becoming oppressors themselves’. \(^{80}\) Like most of writers examined in this study, Soma and

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\(^{80}\) Esther Breitenbach, Alice Brown and Fiona Myers, ‘Understanding Women in Scotland’, p.56.
Dafydd are optimistic about their nations’ political and cultural futures. Though both writers have suggested that a sense of nationhood and belonging is complex and multifaceted and open to internal and external challenges, they both finish their novels with a central comparable conviction: Scotland and Wales need to surmount fear and prejudice and understand the value of difference and diversity. As Edward Said has asserted:

It is more rewarding – and more difficult – to think concretely and sympathetically, contrapuntally, about others than only about ‘us’. But this also means not trying to rule others, trying not to reclassify them or put them in hierarchies, above all, not constantly reiterating how ‘our’ culture or country is number one (or not number one, for that matter).  

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81 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.408.
Conclusion

A State of Becoming: Nation, Devolution and Women’s Literature

Stories can change lives if we’re not careful. They will come in and take the shirts off our backs. Tell the right stories and we live better lives.¹

In May 2011 the people of Scotland directed their nation towards full independence by voting the SNP into the Scottish Parliament as the first majority government since its reconvention.² In April of that year, the referendum for increasing the National Assembly’s power saw Wales voting decisively for further autonomy and a month later the newly elected minority Labour government announced a name change: the Welsh Assembly Government would henceforth be referred to as the Welsh Government thereby, symbolically at least, giving it a more authoritative persona. These radical political events have functioned to further distance Wales and Scotland from Westminster. Developing in accord with these changes, contemporary literature in Scotland and Wales has increasingly shown that it is not limited by former structures. Since the process of devolution began, women writers in both nations have been reflecting the far-reaching changes that have occurred locally, nationally and globally, articulating new ways of being that had hitherto been largely absent from their nations’ literatures. Although there is much still to be done in terms of sociocultural, political

and economic parity for women, a degree of cultural and political space has been opened up in which women are no longer obscured or invisible. In Wales, for instance, Gwyneth Lewis was appointed the first National Poet for Wales in 2005 and in 2008 Gillian Clark was selected for the post; in 2006, Rachel Trezise won the Dylan Thomas Prize, in 2010 Tiffany Murray was longlisted for the Everyman Wodehouse Prize and in 2011 Tessa Hadley was longlisted for the Orange Prize and Deborah Kay Davies was chosen by John Mullan of The Guardian as one of ‘the twelve best new novelists of the future.’ In Scotland Ali Smith won the Whitbread in 2005, A.L. Kennedy won the Costa prize in 2008, and in 2011 Liz Lochhead was appointed Scots Makar.

There is a palpable sense that literature in Wales and Scotland is in a state of becoming: it is bold and adventurous, diverse and fluid. As this thesis has shown, a new generation of writers is emerging: the majority of the texts examined in this study are first novels. These fresh voices are narrating the nation in their own distinct way from a multitude of different contexts and backgrounds. The range of writing that has appeared from Scotland and Wales reveal the ‘zigzag of contradictions’ necessary in a re-emergent nation. For instance, Woff and Strachan depict the conflicts and tensions between sexuality and nationhood, while Donovan’s, Miller’s and Lalwani’s texts convey cultural, ethnic and generational oppositions and clashes.

The concerns that connect the texts in this thesis include language, nationhood, gendered identity and female agency. These writers have consistently reminded us that women, and especially women from ‘peripheral’ nations, have been systematically

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4 The Scottish equivalent of the Poet Laureate.

written out of history, denied a coherent subject position and been limited and bound by ideological conventions not only within the UK but within their own nations as well. Nevertheless, as chapter three illustrated, from the late 1990s a noticeably upbeat tone to the writings started to emerge; for instance, while Jackie Kay’s *Trumpet* shows the utter destructiveness of regulatory normative categories which prescribe approved ways of being, she concludes her narrative with Scotland’s diverse, yet hidden, history being unearthed and ultimately with a tentative acceptance of different ways of being ‘Scottish’.

In subsequent chapters the confidence and emergent literary vibrancy of Welsh and Scottish women novelists in asserting a right to be ‘Welsh’ and ‘Scottish’ in a variety of modes becomes increasingly apparent. So while the writers in chapter 4 have a tendency to look back and at times evoke a sense of despondency, the writers in chapter 5 show an increasing conviction and certainty in confronting limiting and restrictive national paradigms. In this chapter, Wooff, Murray, Strachan, Cooke, Davies and Donovan offer us a diversity of identities not shown hitherto, more specifically, many of their works include unequivocal statements about the right to be gay and ‘Scottish’ or ‘Welsh’. What is more, the writers in this chapter de-centre the narrative of the nation and widen it to geographical spaces beyond the ‘capitals’ of Cardiff, Edinburgh and Glasgow. [New sentence here I think] Thus the focus shifts to Newport, the Welsh/English border county of Herefordshire, Perthshire, Orkney and the Gower Peninsula. This ‘reclamation’ of previously marginalised space provides an interstitial perspective and de-centres power structures, shifting representations away from the metropolitan centre. The texts discussed in chapter 6 reflect progressively maturing cultures. Their narratives validate a plurality of identities and experiences thus offering
a broadening of the national and the personal. With civic identities at the heart of the new forms of government, the writers have the confidence and, importantly, the space to show the manifold intertwined and conflicting ethnicities that make up the nation. Finally in chapter 7, a decade after the process of devolution began, the writers have reached a point where they can look back and see the distance they have come. Their narratives are long reflective gazes looking at the journey we have taken and showing an understanding of the transitions that have occurred. Both Dafydd and Soma depict the personal and political turmoil during the wilderness years and remind us of the struggles ‘minority’ identities endured to forge the nation. Ultimately, their texts celebrate the cultural and political achievements of their respective nations.

The postcolonial and feminist framing of this thesis has enabled me to consider Wales’s and Scotland’s shared histories of marginality and subservience; as I have argued throughout this study, women’s relationship with national identity has changed since Scottish and Welsh writers started to deconstruct the structures and narratives of the nations. Their writings are similarly inspired by the impulse to dismantle identity myths and they do so in stimulating yet, at times, quite disparate ways. The women writers discussed illustrate that although devolution has been delivered, perceived and managed differently within each nation there are some clear cultural connections and parallels of experience as well as differentiations. Furthermore, all the writers, from Azzopardi to Soma, occupy an anti-colonial stance; they all in some way resist essentialist identity discourse by re-imaging national identities and showing shifting notions of belonging in a reconfigured geopolitical climate. As Zoe Strachan asserts ‘there are a lot of Scotlands out there, and many of them haven’t been represented yet.’

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6 Zoe Strachan interview, see Appendix C., p.411.
One of the salient narrative strategies employed by both Scottish and Welsh women writers is the construction of the multi-vocal, non-linear and contrapuntal text. It is through this textual approach and a sustained political focus on complex, multifaceted histories and perspectives that women writers in both countries have consistently challenged hierarchical power structures. And through the representations of experience depicting the complexity of lives lived in Wales and Scotland these writers remind us of the mutable, variable and manifold pasts, presents and futures available to Wales and Scotland. The texts’ preoccupation with giving ‘voice’ is also shown through the two dominant themes to emerge: language and female subjectivity. A key concern in post-colonial and feminist theories, language as a cultural and political tool can be employed both to alienate and liberate; it is our main means of identification, connection and conflict. The texts examined in this thesis have shown, convincingly and cogently, that without a language to suitably and accurately express oneself and one’s perception of the world, the subject suffers estrangement and the inevitability of ‘not having a fully realized self’. Although their distinct historical experiences mean that writers in Wales and Scotland have generally considered language in quite discrete (although in politically connected) ways, there is a persistent concern amongst these women writers examined in this thesis to show that in order to resist sociocultural domination, language has to be used strategically as a means of cultural resistance. Likewise, in terms of gendered oppression, writers like Murray, Wooff, Smith and McDowell illuminate the force of androcentric language practices which frustrates and encumbers female articulation and experience.

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In the Welsh novels, one predominant theme is the struggle to safeguard Welsh, and this has been explored by both pre- and post-devolution writers, for instance, Mary Jones in chapter three, Jackie Davies in chapter six and Fflur Dafydd in chapter seven. However, Dafydd’s text which portrays Welsh as energetic and thriving is notably different in tone from Jones’s Gothic novel of despair and desolation. The language issue in Wales is extremely complex and it has, until relatively recently, served to divide the nation internally; however, post-devolution writers like Catrin Dafydd and Nikita Lalwani suggest that contemporary cultural challenges require differences to be accepted as well as alliances formed to enable a move beyond alienating and polarizing structures. Through the medium of English, many of the Welsh women writers have portrayed the relevance of, and the continued struggle to preserve, their indigenous language in an increasingly transient world. At the same time, other writers testify to the continued marginalisation of anglophone Welsh women’s voices within the English literary canon and participate in the struggle to be heard and valued in English.

In Scotland, language is also a complex affair with a geographical and historical partition between Gaelic, Scots and English. Although a full analysis of the topic lies outside the scope of this thesis, it is worth noting that the post-devolution years in Scotland have constituted an ‘exciting era’ for Gaelic.\(^8\) The language is no longer in terminal decline and has been supported at government level with the 2005 Gaelic Language Act; ‘an increasing number of Scots [support] the language’ as an important constituent of contemporary Scottish life,\(^9\) and, as both Catrin and Fflur Dafydd have shown with regard to Welsh, Gaelic ‘even has an aura of cool about it among [...] young

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\(^8\) Michelle MacLeod, ‘Gaelic Prose Fiction in English’ in Schoene, *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, p.149.

\(^9\) Ibid.
people’. In terms of this thesis, the Scottish writers examined are all profoundly concerned with ‘voice’: how to authentically represent the place and people they fictionalise. They have inherited the Scottish tradition of using language as a deconstructionist tool to undermine the apparent inherent value of ‘English’ and they employ Scots, vernacular and demotic polyphony to probe gender subordination and identity politics. Regardless of their ideological stance and the approach employed, all the writers discussed in this thesis, from Barker to Soma and Donovan to Fflur Dafydd, have used their work politically and strategically in order to articulate the experiences of the subaltern, to validate a multiplicity of perceptions and to remind us of the struggle against imposed cultural uniformity. Living in colonised countries in which the struggle over language is ongoing and overt has sensitised its writers to the power of discourse. In the context of women’s writing gender inequalities and the uniformity of the imperial gendered and national stereotypes have become the focus of a sustained attack in which the weaponry is language and the battlefield is discourse.

The conclusions that can be drawn from this study are that devolved writers have many faces and a multitude of voices; the writers examined in this thesis have resisted and ruptured cultural hegemony and dominant discourses as they relate to the politics of representation. Although there are disparities, as a consequence of their sustained internal and external marginalization Welsh and Scottish women share specific core viewpoints and ideas on nation, nationhood, and the politics of space, home and belonging. Women writers of the post-devolution years have represented the continued limitations placed upon women, despite improved political configurations. Nonetheless, their protagonists’ spirited struggles show the possibilities of travelling

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beyond polarizing structures of gender and nation. As for the literature of the future, current developments suggest that literature by women continues to be stimulating and radical; hitherto hidden histories are being discovered which necessarily persist in rewriting the national narratives. For instance, Eleanor Thom’s superb novel *The Tin-Kin* (2009) tells the story of Scotland’s travelling community, excluded from the history of the nation and appallingly maltreated because of their difference. In Wales, Sarah Broughton’s *Other Useful Numbers* (2008) is a lesbian story concerning the search for self and reminds us of the precariousness nature of life. These multiple and heterogeneous voices further illuminate a world of potentialities; it is but to be hoped that the Scottish and Welsh governments, supported by the will of their respective peoples, can culturally and economically protect the literary spaces that have started to open.

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12 Sarah Broughton, *Other Useful Numbers* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2008).
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Appendices

Since so much of the material discussed in this study is very recent and there is little critical analysis available as yet, I contacted a number of the authors and asked them if they would be willing to be interviewed. In the event, three full interviews were carried out and on the following pages I provide transcripts of these. The information was collected via email and the dates and responses are given in each of the individual appendices. The purpose of the interviews was to gain an understanding of ‘up and coming’ post-devolution writers’ views on their contemporary social, cultural and political climate. Hence, the questionnaires were designed to try and draw out ideas concerning nation and identity in post-devolution era.
Appendix A

Interview with Rachel Trezise conducted via email on 07/04/2007

Q1. *In and Out of the Goldfish Bowl*, your first novel, tells the tale of a young woman growing up in the south Wales valleys. It is very descriptive in terms of its post industrial location. Was placing it in a space that you are familiar with important for the feel of the narrative?

When I started writing the book, I didn’t ask myself this question. Because the book is a very thinly veiled autobiography, it would have seemed bizarre to set it anywhere other than where the action happened. I’d read Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, before deciding to write it and there was a lot of description there about the American south that merged with the author’s story. I found parallels in myself and Angelou – sexual abuse and repression, and in the American south and the Rhondda – poverty and repression, so describing the Rhondda seemed a very natural process.

Q2. The protagonist, Rebecca, survives in the midst of and in despite of the poverty. The story is at times a bleak and unrelenting picture of poverty, neglect and despair in the south Wales valleys. Was it important to write honestly about the area that you grew up in?

I wouldn’t have realised that there was any other way to write it. The voice in the novel was a very natural one. I was sixteen when I started writing it and had hardly read any fiction and had not studied any creative writing. One of the books I had read was *How Green Was My Valley* which I thought was total guff, and *Goldfish Bowl* was
a reaction to it but the poverty and bleakness was not exaggerated. It was important to me that people outside of the south Wales valleys understood what was really going on.

Q3. Your novel references the very specific problems associated with the south Wales valleys, for instance, the economic capacity and strength of coal mines and subsequent economic collapse of the area after the mines closed and a generation of miners were made redundant. It also depicts the aftermath of that Westminster decision: entire communities blighted with unemployment, drugs and alcohol. Do you admit there is a political factor to your writing?

Of course, but only in as much as how politics effect characters. In Goldfish Bowl I was writing about myself and the real people around me, and about what they did. I wasn’t consciously thinking: So and so got made redundant from his job, so that turned him into an alcoholic and that made him uncaring and aggressive, and that made him rape a child, and that can be all be entirely blamed on Thatcher, or anything like that. I was telling a story, and the background of that story happened to be the forced disbanding of the trade unions. Writing which deliberately disregards politics teaches its reader nothing.

Q4. Scottish writer Ali Smith said, ‘Stories can change lives if we’re not careful. They will come in and take the shirts off our backs. Tell the right stories and we live better lives.’ Is that what you set out to do in Goldfish Bowl?

There’s so much going on in Goldfish Bowl, it’s incredible now when I think about it. I suppose I was trying to do that, to give an example of how certain decisions made by certain people have consequences. I wasn’t conscious of it at the time; I was
just trying to get this primal scream of a story out of myself. If I had been I would have addressed these issues more forcefully, but then I’m also glad that the writing is extremely raw, because that adds to the effect, that takes the shirt off the back. (Strange you mention Ali Smith since my current novel is about a stranger who moves into a south Wales valley and mesmerises everyone living there with his beauty and carefree-ness. It’s also set in 2003. I’ve been avoiding *The Accidental* for all those reasons but finally gave in last month, and now I feel terrible because I’ll never be half that good).

**Q5. Goldfish Bowl seems to emphasise the importance of writing and the concept that scripting one’s own history is an important means of survival. Do you think this is especially true for women (whose voices were/are often silenced by the voices of men)?**

I’m not sure about the gender aspect, but coming from a poor background, writing was very important to me. Because I was interested in politics and poetry, and all the things people from a poor background are encouraged not to be interested in, I didn’t have many people I could talk to about literature or about my day to day feelings, so I started writing them down, and that was a means of survival. For some reason, I’ve always refused to see myself as unequal to the opposite sex, perhaps because of sexual abuse, I’m very defiant about equality, and I refuse to adhere to gender stereotyping. After *Goldfish Bowl* was published, I heard that my publisher (a man) was actively seeking a story from a woman from the valleys because up until then there wasn’t one; a happy accident.
Q6. The historian Deirdre Beddoe has argued that in Wales, Welsh women have been culturally invisible; do you think this is still true today?

It’s changing obviously, as noted above, but in that instance, it was a man who stepped in to bring about that change. There’s a statue in Tonypandy in the Rhondda of a mining family, well known to anyone who lives here. I met the son of the sculptor recently who told me that his father made the wife and the baby for free because the council commissioned him, and would only pay him for the miner. The artist insisted that that was only half of the Rhondda’s mining history and he did the woman and child off his own back. That was, I’m guessing, the late 1980s, so it’s obviously not changing fast enough.

Q7. Women’s writing in terms of recognition and its acceptability into literary culture has advanced considerably in the last 30 years, yet the growth and development of women’s writing is still inadequate and not acknowledged as much as writing by men. Do you think that now we have a Welsh assembly that could mean that publication and publicity, financial recourses and acceptability into the mainstream for all writers is a possibility?

I would hope that it wouldn’t be. I’m not a huge fan of positive discrimination. I think writing should be judged on its merits whether it’s produced by a man or by a woman. Kate Mosse said that she set the Orange Prize up to publicise good writing by women because men wouldn’t read women’s fiction. Men still don’t read women’s fiction and frankly that’s their loss, but the Orange Prize is still a good idea because it rewards good writing. I wouldn’t like to think that the Assembly was giving money to art just because it was by a woman, or just because it was by a Muslim, or a Christian or
even someone from a disadvantaged background. There are lots of bad writers around, and they come in all colours, creeds and sexes.

Q8. According to the writer John Williams, over the last few years Wales has been revitalised; he cites the Welsh Assembly and the 1999 Rugby World Cup and the transformation of the Butetown and the docks into the bay as proof of its rebirth as a nation. Can you see your Wales in that rejuvenation? Is Williams’s optimistic outlook specific to Cardiff?

Well, the answer is in the question. The Welsh Assembly, the Millennium Stadium, the Millennium Centre and Cardiff Bay are all structures located in Cardiff. The Valleys are about an hour away by train. The train costs £6. It probably costs about £60 from Holyhead and Cardiff house prices prevent people from the valleys getting to live there, so the world is still happening elsewhere. In fact, when I’m in Cardiff, I’m hard pushed to hear a Cardiff accent on the streets. Like London, Cardiff is becoming a city which misrepresents the rest of its country, rather than represents it, because young people who come from generations of Cardiff families are forced to buy property in Newport or the valleys.

Q9. Williams also talks about a literary renaissance taking place in the world of Welsh fiction. Do you think devolution has cultivated a sense of cultural renaissance in Wales?

No. I think the renaissance was already well under way. Because we didn’t have devolution we were forced to speak for ourselves, to oppose decisions made in
Westminster on the page. We have yet to discover what kind of cultural affect the Welsh Assembly is going to have in Wales.

**Q10. It has been suggested that political autonomy means writing can be literature primarily and not a voice for a nationalist movement. Do you agree? Is your work influenced by the political climate?**

Maybe in time, Welsh writing will become literature. For some people it always has been anyway, John Williams for instance writes about Cardiff as a social landscape rather than a political one. But in the valleys, it’s a little more difficult because it’s hard to see what the Assembly is doing for us. I think there’s a big issue with the Assembly celebrating a Welsh minister for old people, while there was a suicide cluster of young people going on simultaneously in Bridgend that the Assembly were very slow to react to. That is a story I would like to address, and would, if I wasn’t so busy trying to write literature. So in a way political autonomy makes writing even more political. Patrick Jones, for example, is a valley poet who is still very angry about the way the valleys have been disregarded.

**Q11. With the establishment of the Welsh Assembly there is now a measure of political autonomy in Wales: we are now moving away from the shadow of the powerful neighbour. Moreover, the renewal of independence has seen significant changes in the gendered composition of government with 50% of representatives in Wales being women; do you think that this has made a fundamental change to you as a person or as a writer?**
Personally, I think this has made a fundamental change to me as a person and a female; issues addressed in Wales rather than in London are bound to be more beneficial to the people involved in the issues who live in the area affected. Of course I am in favour of devolution and I hope it means that my voice is represented in the Welsh Assembly. As a writer, see above. The Welsh assembly must spread wealth and opportunity fairly around the country, otherwise Cardiff becomes the powerful neighbour to the rest of Wales.

Q12. Following on from the last question… ‘South Wales, as a nation has become adept at not expecting very much.’ Is that now starting to change? Are people starting to imagine a new way of being?

Yes. That quote was taken from the beginning of the book where Tower was fighting British Coal and nobody thought they could pull it off. And of course they did, so what I was alluding to, is the fact that we were slowly and quietly becoming more confident, even without devolution. With devolution, things should improve even faster. Aside from the Welsh Assembly, the way we are being portrayed on Welsh and national television has improved (Belonging, Dr Who, Gavin & Stacey, Ashes to Ashes, etc.) Also in Dial M, I said something like, the difference between me and a lot of people my age who were on the dole, was that I had allowed myself to aspire, and it seems as though Wales as a nation has done that now.

Q13. Do you think that more women in positions of power means that those that live marginal lives will be better assisted? Does the rainbow politics in Wales at the moment give you hope?
It does and it doesn’t. Of course rainbow politics and equal representation of the sexes is a good thing, but on a personal level there is only so much politics can do to change people who live on the margins of society. There is a huge amount of work to do regarding equal pay, encouraging more women to become senior lecturers and judges, doctors, chief execs, etc.

Q14. In 2004, Francesca Rhydderch writing in the NWR commented that ‘the door remains firmly closed on the majority of women’s writing coming out of Wales.’ That doesn’t seem to be the case with yourself. Have things changed for Welsh women writers over the last few years, or have you just been one of the lucky ones?

I’m lucky but I’m also very determined. I work hard to produce the work I want to create and then relentlessly push it at people. It isn’t an easy job. Rejection is everywhere. Clare Potter, a poet friend of mine, is hugely talented, and has a wonderful book of poetry out called *Spilling Histories* which I think should be right up there in the mainstream but she’s not prolific. She had a baby recently and told me that she uses her child as an excuse not to write. I think that maybe the difference. I don’t completely agree with Francesca’s sentiment. There are Welsh women writers out there doing very well, Sarah Waters, Trezza Azzopardi. I think the issue is a publishing one, not a gender one. London publishers want good, high impact writing and a lot of women decide not to rise to that challenge, or do and fail. (I don’t mean fail as a writer but fail to fit a marketable publishing niche).

Q15. For the last 3 decades the writers Menna Gallie, Jennifer Rhead, Jill Miller, Catherine Merriman and Gillian Clarke have focused on the material, sociological,
economic and political conditions of women; their often alienated protagonists were seen as struggling to find a sense of self. Some of your protagonists seem to do the same as those of your literary grandmothers. Do you think that now, with the new beginning and the destabilisation of London, Welsh women are finding new ways of being, and new ways in which to express this new confidence and defiance (perhaps evident through the wide array of themes, genres and styles of writing)?

I’m not sure. Those themes, genres and styles of writing have always been there, so I don’t know why people would be more inclined to use them now and not before. I’m not sure if this question applies to me as an author, or my protagonists/characters. A sense of identity is always hard to come by. My experience of Wales is that there are many parts of it: an American Wales, a Welsh Wales, an English Wales, and it’s never been easy working out which part I belong to or if I belong at all (because I’m part Cornish and part French), and many of my characters feel the same way, and there are stereotypes and genes and nurture to deal with as well, and that’s probably the same the world over, like my friend who lives in London, who is half Pakistani and half Finish and is married to a Welshman. She’s a Londoner sometimes, Scandinavian other times, Asian at other times. (Have I answered this question? I don’t know.)

Q16. According to John Williams, Welshness is what you make of it, do you agree with this assertion? What does being Welsh in 2007 mean to you?

Everything and nothing. Personally I’m very proud of being from Wales. Wales is a fierce underdog which instilled me with passion and belief. But as a writer, I hate being described as a Welsh writer, because, touching a little bit on what I said about
Fran’s comment, Welsh writers seem to go for kitchen sink dramas, and not high impact, solid, good stories. I have a lot of things left that I want to write about, which are not just about everyday stuff in the Welsh valleys, and every time I see that Welsh writer label slapped in front of my name, I think people will expect me to be someone who only writes for a Welsh audience, but I always try to write for an international audience.

Q17. *Goldfish Bowl* seems to break down accepted myths about Wales and the Welsh and rebuilds them in new and more appropriate and honest ways. Is it important to you to destroy stereotypes? Have you steered clear of religion, sheep and mountains on purpose?

No, not on purpose, I stayed away from it because those things weren’t important to the people who live in my books. Teenagers from the valleys see sheep on the mountain and grass and all that aesthetically pleasing stuff all the time, but when you look at it so much, you start to take it for granted, to see through it, and concentrate on what’s happening in your head. It’s a question of art imitating life. I write about people honestly, because I’m scared of misrepresenting them, because I love people and everything about them. In real life, there aren’t many stereotypes, but there are some, and if they crop up I use them too.

Q18. It seems to me that your novel *Goldfish Bowl* examines Wales from a marginal perspective and intends to establish a Welsh identity and culture that is separate and dissimilar from that of England. Does the rant about the Windsor
clan illustrate how people of the Valleys view the distant royals, in terms of lives and location?

It’s more life than location. It’s a class issue rather than an issue with England because I’m sure people in Manchester and Sheffield, and the London inner-city view the royals in exactly the same way. Also, it’s a very personal opinion. There are royalists in the Rhondda, but Royalty is something I’ve never personally been able to get my head around.

Q19. Is growing up in a place like the Rhondda still a handicap?

Yes, unfortunately, not because it is a place in Wales, but because it is a place in Wales where unemployment is still very high, and education and healthcare is still very poor. Generations of people have lived on sick benefit and good role models are hard to come by. The Rhondda, and Merthyr and Aberdare, are still poverty traps, which is why we need the Welsh Assembly, and we need the Welsh Assembly to do a good job of distributing its funding and opportunities to the areas which need them most. These days, it’s okay to be Welsh, but it’s never okay to be at the bottom of the pile.
Appendix B

Interview with Laura Hird conducted via email on 02/02/2008

Q1. Your first full-length novel, *Born Free*, was published the same year as the Scottish parliament resumed after a lengthy 300 year absence. Would you say that your writing is informed by the political climate?

I’m not an overtly political person, although, like my characters, my life in every way is affected by politics, socially and subtly.

Q2. The title seems to suggest that there is an innate, rightfully expected freedom?

I meant it more in the sense that the characters are free when they are born, but enslave themselves throughout their lives via work, relationships, responsibilities, roles, debt, low self esteem, addictions, without even being aware of it/seeming to care.

Q3. *Born Free* was published by the small independent outfit Rebel Inc, was it important for your work to be published outside London?

I was a great admirer of Canongate and with what editor Kevin Williamson had done with Rebel Inc magazine so I was delighted to be one of his earliest publishing projects as far as the imprint was concerned. I have had offers to jump ship from several London publishers over the years but prefer to stay with Canongate both through pride that it is a thriving and adventurous Scottish company and the simple pleasure of being able to pop into the office when I’m passing and see how things are doing.
Q4. According to the writer Kevin MacNeil, *Born Free* is ‘quintessentially Scottish…: funny but dark, malevolent but life affirming, poignant…’. This ticks all the boxes for traditional Scottish fare. Did you set out to write a Scottish book, or did it come naturally?

No, I didn’t set out to write a Scottish book, although I did want to write a novel set in the parts of Edinburgh I know best. To immortalise them in some small way. I think if my writing ticks the boxes of traditional Scottish fare it is only because I am Scottish myself, it’s in my bones and therefore I imagine I express myself, and my characters, in a rather Scottish way.

Q5. *Born Free* tells the story of an Edinburgh working-class family struggling to live with each other. It is very much a contemporary urban fiction, giving a strong sense of time and place. Was locating the novel on familiar ground important for the feel of the narrative?

Yes, as I said, I really wanted to write a novel set in parts of Edinburgh I know best and which I’d never seen mentioned in fiction before. The sense of place was therefore almost like a 5th character to me. I still pass certain parts of Edinburgh that I featured in the novel and feel like the incidents I made happen there are part of my own life and past (which I suppose they are).

Q6. Each chapter is devoted to the point of view of one particular family member thereby allowing for different judgments and perspectives. It is an interesting technique to use, and I suspect a difficult one to employ. Was it important for you
(and the development of the narrative) to show multiple perspectives, to show different ‘truths’ and ‘realities’?

Yes, I enjoyed playing with the different ways people perceive things and how they lie and interpret the truth.

Q7. The family are called the Scotts – are they representative of Scotland itself?
Are the family’s conflict and disaffiliation symbolic of Scotland’s complexity?

Not deliberately but in the sense that they have a tendency to fight against themselves, have low self esteem and keep themselves going through a mix of black humour and alcohol abuse, I suppose they have certain things in common with Scotland itself.

Q8. Clearly cultural identity is not homogenous in *Born Free* (I’m thinking about your illustrations of the disparate catholic/protestant/Celtic/Rangers, and Angie screaming: ‘KEEP AWAY FROM MY FAMILY, YOU FENIAN BASTARDS’.) Again, are you showing the complexity of Scottish culture by including conflicting identity?

Conflicting identity is something I think has always been very much part of the Scottish personality. Sadly, this often expresses itself through football and sectarian intolerance rather than making us take a long, honest look at ourselves and celebrating our complexity.
Q9. A.L Kennedy has said that ‘our history has become nightmarish – our fiction reworks past fears into terror we call our own. And if any sense lingers that we are suffering for our past sins, that our self loathing can never be entirely adequate, we can chasten our imaginations with stories of doom and damnation…Our history of silence and lies is making us consistently outspoken. Our fears, rather than isolating us, are leading us to communicate and – for good or for ill - our traditional access to alternative realities is providing unlimited scope for shocking, uplifting and unparochially Scottish fiction’. Do you agree? Has Scotland’s history enabled you to write forthrightly about underage sex (and sexual fantasies), drugs, alcohol abuse…?

I just write about life as I see it.

Q10. Would you agree that there is a political factor to your writing?

It’s political in the sense that it is what I hope is an honest look at people’s lives and their place within the society they live in.

Q11. Scottish writer Ali Smith has said, ‘Stories can change lives if we’re not careful. They will come in and take the shirts off our backs. Tell the right stories and we live better lives.’ Do you agree?

I think stories have always been a good way to make people consider different ways of living and to look in a more open minded way into the lives of people we’d sometimes rather choose to ignore or not care about.
Q12. Women have been culturally invisible in Scotland: this can be exemplified by Hugh MacDiarmid’s assertion that ‘Scottish women of any historical importance or interest are curiously rare’, or by the work of artist Andrew Moffat (which hangs in the National Gallery). His iconic group portrait of Scotland’s poets is an ‘imaginary vision of the major Scottish poets and writers of the second half of the twentieth century gathered around the central figure of Hugh MacDiarmid’. There are no women writers or poets in his ‘vision’. Other examples would be the polls and shortlist for events such as World Book Day which claim to list books that ‘say most about Scotland’, and where again, women writers are largely absent. Do you think this is still true today? Has the ‘new Scotland’ allowed for more voices, more diversity?

I think there are certainly many more women writers working today than there have been in the past. There is also a refreshing diversity in their many voices. I would say that aside from rare exceptions, most of these women (and many male writers) have other jobs to help finance their writing. I also think there are a great many women out there using writing for personal rather than financial reasons and not necessarily seeking publication. Quite simply, the act of writing allows them to express things about themselves they have no other outlet for.

Q13. Following on from the last question, women’s writing, in terms of recognition and its acceptability into literary culture, has advanced considerably in the last thirty years, yet the growth and development of women’s writing is still inadequate and not acknowledged as much as writing by men. Do you think that now we have a Scottish Parliament that could mean that publication, promotion and publicity,
financial resources, and acceptability into the mainstream for all writers is now a possibility?

I think all good writing will eventually find its way out there for itself. I think Government initiatives on such matters rarely work and can lead to writers and readers feeling patronised. Some tax incentives along the lines of what they have in Southern Ireland for ALL writers/artists wouldn’t go amiss though.

Q14. There is much talk about a literary renaissance taking place in Scottish fiction. Do you think devolution has cultivated a sense of cultural renaissance in Scotland? Is there a renewed energy to Scottish culture?

Yes, I think we have a much stronger and prouder sense of ourselves as a vibrant part of a new Europe rather than the poor relation of England we used to see ourselves as. Across the arts I think there’s a real urgency, openness to collaborate and sceptical excitement about the future.

Q15. It has been suggested that political autonomy means writing can be literature primarily, and not a voice for a nationalist movement. Do you agree? Do you see evidence of this happening?

I’m sure we’ll find another chip for our shoulders soon enough.

Q16. Following on from the last question, is your work influenced by the political climate? By depicting rundown housing estates, drug and alcohol abuse, truancy are you making a point that the Scottish parliament, set up and largely run by
white middle classes, for the benefit of white middle classes has made no difference to the folk living on the margins?

It’s not all the Government’s fault. We need to take a bit of responsibility for ourselves sometimes.

Q17. With a measure of political autonomy in Scotland, we are now starting to swiftly move from under the shadow of the powerful neighbour. Moreover, the renewal of ‘independence’ has seen significant changes in the gendered composition of government. Do you think that this has made a fundamental change: 1) to you as a person. 2) to you as a writer.

I tend to think more about it when I’m away from Scotland and see how people around the world are viewing the changes going on in Scotland. I think there is still a lot of indifference to everything within Scotland itself. I don’t think the majority of people can imagine much outside their own boxes.

Q18. The Scottish Arts Council, which gets the vast majority of its finding from the Scottish Parliament, has recently been merged with Scottish Screen to form a new arts funding body for Scotland. According to Culture Minister Linda Fabiani, The Creative Scotland Bill will help "cultivate and support the best of Scottish arts and culture and will firmly place creativity at the heart of the nation’s life". A recipe for disaster? Does government subsidy and funding suppress or restrain creativity? Should writers be revolutionary outsiders?

I hope the merger will continue to allow SAC to do what it’s done in the past and help provide funding for individual projects.
Q19. For the last 3 decades Scottish women writers have focused on the material, sociocultural, economic and political conditions of women and their often alienated protagonists were seen as struggling to find a sense of self (ie. Galloway, Spark, Kennedy). Interestingly *Born Free* has both the male and female protagonist damaged and struggling… Do you think that now, with the new beginning and the destabilisation of the Centre (London) Scottish women are finding new ways of being, and new ways in which to express this new confidence and defiance (perhaps evident through the wide array of themes, genres and styles of writing)?

They seem to be but I don’t know how much of that is down to the factors you mention.

Q20. *Born free* seems to me to break down accepted myths about Scotland and the Scottish and re-builds them in new and more appropriate and honest ways (I’m thinking about your systematic elimination of the idea of the tartanry, kailyard, romantic glens and bagpipes mourning in the background .... ). Your novel depicts a Scotland where mothers are ‘on jellies’ and children truant, get bullied, get pissed and shop lift. Is it important for you to destroy stereotypes?

I’ve never liked stereotypes. I don’t think my depictions were news to anyone. I do try to write in as honest a way as possible.

Q21. Following on from the last question, Vic seems to be the opposite of the Scottish ‘hardman’ (a la McIlvaney). Was it important to rewrite this stereotype?

13 *Born Free*, p.31.
Yes, I’d never much liked the Scottish ‘hardman’ stereotype (though I do like McIlvaney). It is certainly not representative of the culture I grew up in myself which I always saw as being more of a matriarchy. The history of Scotland has always been populated by feisty, strong women and weak, ineffectual men.

Q22. It has been argued that Scotland’s language(s) and dialects are still marginalised and underrepresented in a country which still clearly bears the sociocultural legacy of three hundred years of Anglicisation. Your work, Born Free, Hope, as well as earlier writings disregard Standard English. Was representing people through their own tongue a political act? What were your motivations?

I generally just write in the voice that seems right for the character.

Q23. If you had to pigeonhole yourself (as academics tend to do!) do you see yourself as a Scottish writer? A women writer? A Scottish women writer?

I would say that the category I feel most comfortable in and feel any kind of kinships with is Scottish writer.

Q24. Writer Andrew O’Hagan has suggested that singing A Man’s A Man at the opening of the Scottish parliament, ‘was sending out a message that if we fail it is because of an insufficiency in dreaming’. Do you agree?

Yes, as I said before, it really disappoints and saddens me that so often people can’t seem to see beyond the banality of their own lives and push themselves a bit. To even strive to dream would be an improvement.
Q25. It is now nine years since the implementation of the Scottish parliament...what are your thoughts? Has this political process been useful in terms of supporting arts and culture? Does it make Scottish writing more sustainable?

I think its greatest impact on arts and culture has been the international attention it has drawn to Scotland as a whole.

Q26. If ‘literature is one of Scotland’s principal national assets’ (SAC) how do we nourish, encourage and support future writers (especially women)?

Offer some form of funding to allow independent bookshops to stay open, so that Scottish literature is not classed as “specialist” by English owned conglomerates. Edinburgh in particular has lost nearly all its remaining independent bookshops (aside from Word Power) over the last few years. Continue to support organisations like the Arvon Foundation and individual projects.

Q27. What does being Scottish in 2008 mean to you?

I feel incredibly proud to be Scottish, to live in Scotland and to have the opportunity through my writing to travel widely within my country and see all its many complexities and contradictions first hand. It is an exciting and beautiful place to be part of and I regularly count my blessings that I had the good luck to be born here in the first place.
Q1. *Negative Space*, a story about love, loss and discovery is a universal narrative, but is very much Scottish, and at times very West coast (I’m thinking of the graffiti on a wall in Finnieston – ‘PRODDYLAND’). You depict the diverse country supremely well – the Presbyterian accent, Ailsa Craig, Victoria Infirmary, Necropolis, the tenements, pubs, and the classic Glaswegian ‘a roll and tattie scone’… How important is location to you?

Thank you! I think I’ve partly answered this elsewhere, so all I’ll say here is that I find the particular always has far more resonance than the universal; in fact, I don’t think those universal themes can ever really emerge from anything other than a specific story about a specific character. Location was hugely important to me in *Negative Space*, partly because I was engaging with realism in a way that I wasn’t with *Spin Cycle* (though it too ended up set in Glasgow, just a slightly different version of the city). And now I’m writing about fictionalised locations, though they do I hope represent parts of Scotland.

Q2. I hope you don’t mind me saying, but at times *Negative Space* reminds me of Janice Galloway’s excellent, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*. What influences your writing/ your way of thinking/ your choice of topic?

Again, thanks! But I think the answer to this is probably too broad to be of much use...
Q3. Literature in Scotland seems to be flourishing. From an insider’s perspective, what is the literary scene in Scotland like at the moment?

I touch on this later on – I think!

Q4. Is Scottish fiction changing? Is it moving away from the cultural stereotype macho west coast urban grittiness?

It has to change to survive, in the sense that it has to remain innovative and interesting. The past is always with us, but if we re-present it, we have to find ways of re-presenting it that are fresh. Our narratives are changing, and the people who are able to write these narratives down are – slowly – changing too. There are a lot of Scotlands out there, and many of them haven’t been represented yet.

Q5. Your main protagonist in Negative Space, a life model, is nameless until near the end of the narrative. Why?

There are various things that the character is unable to name within the novel, to do with her feelings and her identity. Avoiding using her name was a way of expressing that, and of signposting when her attitudes – to herself, and her situation - begin to change.

Q6. Negative Space explores difficult subjects, the protagonist often feels used and abused (and disapproved of) Is it still important to write about the inequalities of women’s position?
For me, yes, it’s important to write about women. That said, at the moment I’m writing about men, but the social background is still there, and there are female characters!

Q7. At one point in the narrative you use the idea of the doppelganger. This phenomenon of the double has been critically examined as the Scottish literary technique employed to examine and discuss the split identity of the Scottish character (being Scottish but speaking English, being Scottish but being ruled by England and so on). Were you using this literary tradition consciously?

Yes, but more in the sense that it’s a nod to the gothic than the specifically Scottish Hogg/Stevenson idea of the doppelganger. Of course they’re part of that tradition too – but I was thinking more of psychological and maybe even psychoanalytical metaphors. It certainly wasn’t as a comment on the Scottish character.

Q8. Talking of Scottish literary traditions... Negative Space, I would say, is characteristically Scottish... humorous but dark, touching, malevolent but ultimately uplifting – distinct from the English literary tradition. Did this writing ‘Scottish’ come ‘naturally’?

That’s very kind, thank you! The ‘Scottishness’ I’m sure is natural, in that it wasn’t particularly intentional or contrived. Elements of my language and my environment (at that time) probably filtered into Stella’s story in quite a natural way, but the actual process of writing itself, that isn’t so natural; especially maybe in creating and trying to sustain such a particular first person voice over the course of a whole novel. The Scottish setting was important to me, the landscape of the city and of Orkney,
though I tend to see Orkney’s history (prehistoric) as much bigger – more universal -

than just Scottish. Oddly though my more literary and philosophical influences at the
time of writing the novel were almost entirely European. Part of the endeavour was to
try to apply them to a female character, and to throw her against the social structures of
Scotland (especially Glasgow and the West Coast) made that even more interesting for
me.

Q9. Scottish writer Ali Smith said, ‘Stories can change lives if we’re not careful.
They will come in and take the shirts off our backs. Tell the right stories and we
live better lives.’ Do you agree?

Yes, stories can change lives, though I’ve got such a sharp streak of cynicism (or
realism, as I like to call it) that I find it hard to look at that statement with optimism.

And it’s never in my mind when I write. As for telling the right stories and living better
lives . . . yes, reading, storytelling, art in general enhance our lives, make us human. I
don’t know if she intends there to be a moral dimension there or not; I’m inclined to
think that although art and morality might flirt with each other they shouldn’t consider
getting married. Ali Smith’s approach to storytelling in her writing is really interesting
though. I admire her work. Hotel World and The Accidental more even than the stories,
though I often use her short stories in teaching.

I’m fascinated by how we create and tell and retell our own stories. That
motivates a lot of my work – maybe even most of it. I thought at first it was memory,
but actually memory and storytelling are so bound together it’s hard to sever them.
Q10. It has been suggested that political autonomy means writing can be literature first and foremost and not a voice for a nationalist movement. Do you agree? Is your work influenced by the political climate?

I see literature as art, first and foremost, and I’m uneasy about the idea that any kind of art has responsibilities other than those imposed by art itself (or Art, as people say when they want it to have more gravitas). Having said that, no art, perhaps writing least of all, exists in a vacuum, sealed away from social, political and cultural influences. Social and cultural influences are important to me, and unavoidable, but political ones, less so. I think that would be different if I lived elsewhere in the world. And sometimes it’s disappointing to read work that seems to ignore or make cosy political or social climates that are anything but; though that’s the author’s prerogative. As for me, I’ve never tried or felt obliged to be a voice for the nationalist movement in Scotland.

Q11. Do you think devolution has cultivated a sense of cultural renaissance?

Perhaps, in that I think that sense exists and is encouraged by various people and organisations. But I’m not sure how valid it is; there seems to be a bit of a scramble to gather together everything that can be marketed as Scottish culture (the preferred term might be ‘cultural production’, which makes me feel vaguely nauseous) and herald it with fanfares. Of course nobody’s going to complain about their work being trumpeted, but I suspect that ultimately, a post-Devolution Scotland with a truly robust culture might require us to up our game as writers. Which is no bad thing!
Q12. Has the reconvening of the Scottish parliament made a fundamental change to you as a person or as a writer?

No – sorry!

Q13. Women have, until relatively recently, been culturally invisible in Scotland (this can be illustrated from Hugh MacDiarmid’s assertion that ‘Scottish women of any historical importance or interest are curiously rare’, to the work of artist Andrew Moffat which shows an ‘imaginary vision of the major Scottish poets and writers of the second half of the twentieth century gathered around the central figure of Hugh MacDiarmid’. Oddly, there are no women writers or poets in his ‘vision’. Again, in polls and shortlist for events such as World Book Day which claim to list of books that ‘say most about Scotland’ , women writers are largely absent) . Do you think this is still true today? Has the ‘new Scotland’ allowed for more voices, more diversity?

Scottish women writers tend to have been forgotten about or if they reached superstar status, like Muriel Spark, hastily appropriated by other literary traditions. (And with women writers, sometimes the gendered call to arms might be stronger than the national one). That I’m not a fan of Hugh MacDiarmid probably comes as little surprise! My favourite contemporary Scottish writers – particularly prose writers but also a few poets - are almost all women at the moment. It’s heartening that publishers are picking up on writers who’ve been neglected a little, like Agnes Owens, and reissuing their work. But Scottish writing tends to be viewed obliquely, through real and imagined windows on Scottish culture. I think that can lead to masculine narratives
being favoured, or seen as more representative of Scotland as a nation. That’ll change, I assume. And those new voices are starting to call out . . .

Q14. Writer Andrew O’Hagan has suggested that singing A Man’s A Man at the opening of the Scottish parliament, ‘was sending out a message that if we fail it is because of an insufficiency in dreaming’ Do you agree?

It’s a lovely sentiment but I think there might be other reasons for failure . . .

Q15. It is now nine years since the implementation of the Scottish parliament…what are your thoughts? Has this political process been useful in terms of supporting arts and culture? Does it make Scottish writing more sustainable?

Can I reiterate my answer to Q11? I feel uncomfortable about the ways in which art is appropriated as ‘cultural production’, and the ways in which ‘cultural commissioners’ arrive at judgements (Roz - if you want to know more about this, look at some of the responses to the Literature Forum – the writer Jenni Calder is very involved and might be useful to talk to). The language bothers me. Most artists need funding at some point in their life (and I’ve been very lucky in that regard, receiving bursaries from the SAC) but I worry a little about interpretations of ‘cultural entitlement’ and how many boxes need to be ticked for artists (in any discipline) to receive funding. Again, it goes back to my beliefs about what art is for; the responsibility of the artist is to make good art. Good art is an end in itself, an end which necessarily enriches our culture. Other outcomes (to do with society and audiences) are happy, but optional, extras.
Q.16 According to the SAC, ‘literature is one of Scotland’s principal national assets’. What are your thoughts on how we (as a nation) nourish, encourage and support future writers (especially women)?

Support people financially while they make art, whether through bursaries or subsidised studios or whatever (though incidentally, I don’t believe in tax breaks for writers). Spend as much on artists as on arts administrators . . . It’s unfortunate really, but money is the only answer. And money that buys time, not money that comes on the condition of other work. I know writers in residence who’ve ended up teaching and doing admin five days a week. Don’t cut funding to Scottish publishers either (actually, I think it’s too late for that one), or to libraries (ditto). Encourage reading in schools . . .

Q.17 Is Scotland and Scottish writers becoming more internationalists in outlook?

I hope so!

I’m resistant to anything that closes Scotland as a culture and a community, and I think there’s a risk – mostly unintentional - of that happening post-Devolution. There’s excitement in the process of figuring out what we want our new Scotland to be, and in interrogating what it means to be Scottish, but I wouldn’t like that to become an exclusive focus, or something that leads to the perpetuation of clichés. Already – in Britain as a whole as well as in Scotland – we tend to shut out other cultural experiences. For example, we’ll read travel writing that stems from a familiar worldview, but we’re far less keen to publish and promote books in translation. Sometimes the new Czech writer might be saying more important things, in a more innovative way, than the new Scottish one. And I hold up my hand, I can only read books in English.
Q.18 In Gendering the Nation, Berthold Schoene argued that to be gay and Scottish are ‘mutually exclusive conditions’. Is this still true in 2008?

Much less so, I’m glad to say. Look how many female Scottish writers are gay! Openly gay male writers seem thinner on the ground and I’m really not sure why, nowadays. Some aren’t perhaps as well known as they should be, like Ronald Frame and Fred Urquhart. It’s also worth considering how writers who might identify as straight are now exploring themes of sexuality in interesting and thoughtful ways – in the past I’ve written about Alan Warner and Irvine Welsh in that regard but recently I heard James Robertson reading from his novel in progress and it sounds fascinating. A culture’s approach to sexuality is pertinent not just because it’s important in itself, but also because it can be an acute measure of other things.

Q.19 Following on from the last question, is it time for Scottish writers to confront hegemonic literary representations and reconsider sexuality and gender? Should writers problematise constructions of Scottish masculinity and femininity?

Oh yes: bring it on! I mentioned reflecting what’s happening in the wider social context, and I think perceptions of women are very problematic at the moment. Negative Space came out six years ago, but if I was writing it again today, a woman of Stella’s age would probably have about six times as much pressure on her to conform to particular ersatz notions of femaleness. And that isn’t just a Scottish issue.

Q.20 A.L. Kennedy describes public reading as “a very Scottish thing…part of the up-front culture…all Scottish writers come through this tradition of saying
something to other people”. You have participated at a number of readings, do you agree with Kennedy’s assertion?

Public reading is part of all literary culture now, and it’s hard to avoid. And to varying extents, all writers are saying something to other people. It’s just a question of who they imagine addressing and their preferred means of doing so. It’s strange for a novelist like me though; what appeals to me about reading is that lovely, intimate relationship between me and the book I’m reading. Sometimes it’s so intense that I don’t even like reading a novel in public. So having the author read aloud to an audience can seem unnecessary, or artificial. AL Kennedy is a great performer though, which has led her towards doing stand up now too. I’d never do that, but writing can be lonely and I confess that whatever I think about the reasons behind public reading I really enjoy the interaction with readers, and the glass of wine afterwards. Poetry is different: it relies on sound and needs to work aloud, but again I often prefer that intimate connection with printed words on a page.

Q. 21. Was devolution necessary for the survival and development of Scottish culture?

I don’t think anyone can answer that yet. I’m pleased that devolution occurred, but I expect a lot more from the Scottish parliament than has so far been delivered; besides, we still can’t help looking towards London, whether we’re talking about politics or the arts. One of my concerns is that nationalism can lead to conservatism and insularism. And I don’t think we can afford to rest on our laurels, in terms of our artistic culture. So we’ll have to wait and see. What art is produced, what new voices are heard,
how we work internationally. Scotland needs to encourage new ideas and dialogues, and accepting new citizens has to be part of that.

**Q.22 Is being Scottish a predicament or a blessing?**

Good question! Both. Spending time living in Germany has confirmed that I feel that Scotland is my home, but being Scottish seems to me both a safety line and a tether. Keeping that tension is useful though, for my work.

**Q.23 What does being Scottish in 2008 mean to you?**

It rarely crosses my mind unless I’m overseas and people ask about it. Which is a good thing, I think. I wouldn’t like to become too self-reflexive.