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Gender and nation: debatable lands and passable boundaries

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'Debatable lands' and 'passable boundaries': both concepts are emblematic of the kind of inevitably shifting, multi-dimensional perspectives that are found in any consideration of nation and gender.¹ Homi K. Bhabha writes of the 'ambivalent margin of the nation-space' and 'the ambivalent, antagonistic perspective of nation as narration' (1990a: 4). These 'ambivalent margins' are contained in the Scottish metaphor of the Debatable Land. Originally the term was for that area 'holdin to be Debateable Lands betwixt the twa nations of Scotland and England', and very specifically defined as 'now forming the Parishes of Canonbie in Scotland and Kirk Andrews on Esk in England' (Carlyle 1868: appendix 33, 1). It became first a term for the Scottish/English borders as a whole, which were fought over and consequently neither static nor entirely definable. Its subsequent manifestation is as a metaphor for any borderline state or idea.² Women's writing in particular is often assessed in terms of borders and margins that provide those tropes of liminality used to point up a fluidity and an ambiguity identified with the position of women in society. Maggie Humm, for example, adopts such terms in ways that echo the Scots concept of debatable land:

The border is not only a question of place which assumes some one dimensional literary plane without hierarchy or class but of *difference*, since in looking at literary borders we find asymmetry, absence and marginalisation ... Border women are not decentred fragmented individuals but writers who have begun to cohere a core identity by entering the transitional space between self and other. The border is the trope of difference and potential conflict, between races, between cultures and between sexual preferences. (1991: 6)

Nation, region, gender, class and sexuality: they all produce their own boundaries and we pass back and forth across them throughout our lives, all of them constructed by our circumstances and our societies' expectations. These multi-dimensional perspectives are in a perpetual state of flux, with oppositions and alliances in constantly shifting relationships, both within ourselves and with others. Edward Said writes in *Culture and Imperialism* of the great many languages, histories and forms that circulate '[in] the cultural discourses of decolonization' (1993: 280). It is this same kind of plurality, circularity and interconnection that occurs in the conflicting discourses of nation, region, gender, sexuality and class. These discourses also provide the problematic 'contours' in what Said refers to as our 'imagined or ideal community' (280). His notion of literature and culture 'as hybrid ... and encumbered, or entangled and overlapping with what used to be regarded as extraneous elements' (384) also applies to society's conflicting demands on our loyalty, creating particular and, at times, clashing demands on our commitment. The question is how conjunctions and disjunctions between the marginality of our femaleness and of our nation are to be figured. This idea of a double marginality was expressed by Joy Hendry in her image 'The double knot in the peeny' (1987a), invented to describe 'the double disadvantage suffered by Scottish women writers in being firstly Scottish and secondly female' (1987b: 291). Suzanne Hagemann writes that 'beyond their historically specific situation, woman and Scots are paradigms of marginality' (1997: 323) but this seems too mechanistic a separation of women and Scots, positioning them in a binary relationship, as though Scots are all male; it imposes too formulaic a narrative structure on the national history, risking exactly that kind of rigidity which excludes gender from the nation's narrative.

If nationalism is a post-rationalist or enlightenment substitute for religion, with fake-historical roots to legitimise it, as Benedict Anderson argues (1991: 11), then given the patriarchal, male-centred nature of Christianity and most other world religions, and the oppressive nature of their relation to women, it is inevitable that the construction of the idea of the 'nation' should have been equally male-centred and patriarchal, manifesting itself in the traditions of warrior nations, warrior clan systems, with women as bearers of warriors or symbolic female figures of nationhood – the equivalent nationalist muses to the traditionally female poetic muse. The Irish poet Eavan Boland problematises this within the Irish context:

Within a poetry inflected by its national tradition, women have often been double-exposed, like a flawed photograph, over the image and identity of the nation. The nationalization of the feminine, the feminization of the national, had become a powerful and customary inscription in the poetry of that very nineteenth-century Ireland. 'Kathleen ni Houlihan!' exclaimed McNeice. 'Why/must a country like a ship or a car, be always/female?' (1996: 196)

Anderson, despite seeing nationhood as a socio-cultural concept, a given, like gender: 'everyone can, should, will "have" a nationality, as he or she "has" a gender' (1991: 5), nowhere examines the role of gender in nationhood. His national movements are run by men, for men; historically accurate perhaps, but his lack of examination is unimaginative in relation to half of the populations of his imagined communities.³ His view that 'the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship' (7) shows that 'he ignores the significance of gender in his analyses. The very term horizontal comradeship, although theoretically gender-neutral, brings with it connotations of masculine solidarity' (McDowell 1999: 195). His five pages of bibliography cited only seven or eight articles or books by women. Is this because women were not attracted by the study of the 'nation' because of the patriarchal nature of the states embodying nations? Perhaps we imagine a different community, one in which we are not represented by Britannia, the 'motherland', or Kathleen ni Houlihan. Ellen Galford's cantankerous Pictish Queen, 'Albanna, She Wolf of the North', rising up from Arthur's Seat in our hour of need under Thatcherite rule, described in her novel *Queendom Come* (1990: 7, 11), is much closer to an imagined possible saviour for women than Robert the Bruce or William Wallace.⁴ Boland has articulated the problems for Irish women writers, in particular, of 'fictive queens and national sybils' (1996:135). When she began writing, 'the word *woman* and the word *poet* were almost magnetically opposed' (xi, original emphases) and she wrote *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time* 'to probe the virulence and necessity of the idea of a nation' which intersected 'with a specific poetic inheritance', in turn cutting across her 'as a woman and a poet' (125). She had found that

the Irish nation as an existing construct in Irish poetry was not available to me ... all too often, when I was searching for such an inclusion, what I found was a rhetoric of imagery which alienated me: a fusion of the national and the feminine which seemed to simplify both. (127–8)

Problems created by systems of representation for the nation are only one aspect of the issue of identification. Region, gender, nation,

sexuality, class (as well as work and family) also produce particular and conflicting demands on our loyalties, creating a shifting sense of priorities and commitment. It is not so much that class, region or gender intersect with nation, as that they interrogate and problematise it. There is no need to be an international Marxist or Catholic or feminist believing that loyalty to class, religion or gender is supra-national, to be conscious that particular group identities can resist a central national identity. It is clear that women have always had different kinds of split demands and pulls of loyalty, stemming in part from the original passing of ownership of the woman's body from fathers to husbands, loyalties split between outside and inside the family, between parents and partner (of whatever sex), between children and husband/father. These kinds of shifting demands ensure that a commitment to monolithic concepts like 'nationality' is problematic, especially when legal nationality is seen as stemming from the father, not the mother. If the national ideal is constructed around primarily male concerns or ideologies, then commitment to those wide general concepts is likely to be difficult, tinged by scepticism, ironic dismissal, or feelings of exclusion or incompleteness. 'Scottish' is tempered or altered by 'woman'. And if Scottish is the 'other' to English, with England used as the dominant reference point, and woman the 'other' to man, Scotswomen have felt a double otherness, a double marginality, or 'double democratic deficit' as the political scientists name it (Brown 2001: 204). We experience ourselves 'only fragmentarily, in the little-structured margins of a dominant ideology, as waste, or excess' (Irigaray 1985: 30). The dominant ideology for us has been both Anglocentric and male (the latter clearly having its own complicated inherent conflicts and contradictions).

But experiencing ourselves 'fragmentarily, in the ... margins of the dominant ideology' can be given a positive reading. Janice Galloway, one of the most thoughtful about her craft and radical in style of contemporary Scottish fiction writers, points out that the 'structures and *normal* practices of both politics and the law make it difficult for women to speak as women directly because there's little accommodation for a female way of seeing' (Leigh March 1999a: 85, original emphasis). But she sees women's 'traditional attraction to fiction' as having 'a go at reconstructing the structures':

Simply for a woman to write as a woman, to be as honest about it as possible, is a statement; not falling into the conventions of assuming guy stuff is 'real' stuff and we're a frill, a fuck or a boring bit that does housework or raises your kids round the edge. That stuff is not round

the edge! It's the fucking middle of everything. Deliberately pointing up that otherness, where what passes for normal has no bearing on you or ignores you – that fascinates me. (1999: 86)

Our experiences overlap, in the same way that Said describes literary experiences as 'overlapping with one another and interdependent ... despite national boundaries and coercively legislated national autonomies, history and geography are transfigured in new maps, in new and far less stable entities, in new types of connections' (1993: 384). Said's 'global, contrapuntal analysis' (1993: 386), rejecting 'conceptions of history that stress linear development' (384), is exactly the approach that can also be used *within* the nation to ensure inclusion of disparate and clashing elements, using 'all sorts of spatial or geographical and rhetorical practices – inflections, limits, constraints, intrusions, inclusions, prohibitions – all of them tending to elucidate a complex and uneven topography' (Said 1993: 386). His 'atonal ensemble' (386), like our 'debatable lands', is a metaphor for the shifting inclusiveness necessary to encompass the confusing demands on our loyalty of nation, region, gender, sexuality and class. The complexity and unevenness of the topography is fruitful. So there is a lure in fragmentation and the margins for some of us; there are possibilities for ambiguity and for the power of the marginal, the dispossessed, the peripheral, to assert our right to existence, to be heard, to be experienced positively. No one on the margins wants to acknowledge being central and those truly of the centre rarely acknowledge the power of the margins. Our dialogue is not with them but with each other.⁵

If Scotland's sense of nationhood has a civic rather than an ethnic base, with our surviving national institutions such as the law and education, and the mixed ethnic origins of Scots, then it is not surprising that women may feel excluded from a full sense of being part of *this* imagined nation. Only in the last twenty-five years or less have women been able to participate fully in the civic institutions that constitute our nationness. And there is a persistent maleness in Scottish civic life that is problematic. Even now, there are very few women in top education posts, despite a majority of women in the lower echelons; the first woman High Court judge and the first Solicitor General were not appointed until 1996 and 2001 respectively; there have been no female Lord Advocates nor women Moderators of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland or, even less likely, women priests in the Roman Catholic Church. Finally, to use the word 'emasculate' to refer to what central government did to local government after 1979 is not to use a gender-specific or biased word but to choose a fitting description, given the overwhelmingly male bias of central

government at Westminster (particularly under Margaret Thatcher, but continued under John Major and Tony Blair) and of senior local government officials, leaders and elected MPs. The higher proportion of women MSPs in the Scottish Parliament and high profile posts for women in the Scottish Executive since May 1999 may (it is to be hoped if not necessarily believed) indicate some kind of positive change in Scotland.

As long as this maleness is central to the political/national structures, the acceptance of maleness as 'universal-male', with female categorised as 'particular-female', continues. Nan Shepherd (the modernist north-east Scottish novelist) reverses and undercuts the universal/particular, male/female conflict in her intensely complex novel, *The Weatherhouse* (1996b [1930]), exposing the universal as less important, less truly honest, than the particular. She explores a version of the male-universal/female-particular dichotomy when the central male character, Garry, is shown pursuing 'splendid generalities' (84) at the expense of the specific. In his persecution of a particular woman, he denies his motives are personal: 'It was not as a person that he wanted Louie punished, but as the embodiment of a disgrace' (72). But Garry's certainty in 'splendid generalities' is interrogated by the women in the novel, providing a critical opposition to any assumption by the reader of a male-universal connection. Shepherd's fiction has been long neglected by virtue of her specificity in north-east, rural, female subject matter. In contrast to this neglect, there is a view that sees fiction about working-class men as having a national (with an implicit universal) application. Cairns Craig extends this to Scottish writers (and, when he was writing in the 1980s, these were implicitly male⁶) in his introduction to the twentieth-century volume of *The History of Scottish Literature* with the assertion:

To the extent that much of Scottish middle-class society models itself on English values, distinctively Scottish culture has more affinity with the working classes than English culture, is more imbued with a continuing sense of a living 'folk' culture ... Scottish writers are both more working class and more philosophical than in England. (1987: 3)

Drew Milne sees Craig's introduction as drawing attention to 'the defining locus of contemporary Scottish writing' as being in 'the dialectical relation between urban vernacular and the politics of the city' (1994: 400). In an essay interrogating the concept of the 'hard man' ('terminal form of masculinity') as representative of Scottishness or Scottish maleness, Christopher Whyte perceives a 'hegemonic shift' where 'urban fiction in Scotland has increasingly and explicitly assumed the burden of

national representation ... Once urban fiction was assigned a central position, its class and gender placements took on national implications' (1998: 278):

The task of embodying and transmitting Scottishness is, as it were, devolved to the unemployed, the socially underprivileged, in both actual and representational contexts. Even a writer like James Kelman, despite his libertarian and egalitarian views, can be seen as participating in a 'representational pact' of this kind with consumers of his fiction. (275)

This 'representational pact' allows James Kelman's intensely personal and particular explorations of individual working-class West of Scotland men to be seen as both representing Scottishness and containing a 'commitment to celebrating the realities of contemporary and essentially urban Scotland' (Gifford 1992: 9).⁷ But this same pact means that Elspeth Barker's *O Caledonia* (1992 [1991]) has been explicitly rejected as having any national application – because the heroine is middle class and diametrically opposed in her femaleness to anything that Kelman's heroes might represent. A heroine shown growing into 'the dim, blood-boultered altar of womanhood' (1992: 130) is too gendered for some. 'I don't recognise Scotland here', said Douglas Gifford of *O Caledonia*, 'the family may be chill Calvinists, but their attitude – upper class and estate-remote – isn't at all representative of Glasgow, Edinburgh, or Scottish culture of the time', and he criticises it for 'hardly being part of a diagnosis of what's wrong with Caledonia' (1992: 11). But why should the intensely imagined girlhood in the North East of a heroine who is murdered in a castle age sixteen be any less emblematic of nationhood than a man who wakes up blind in a prison cell in the West of Scotland (Kelman 1995: 9)? His essential 'maleness' is not any more intrinsically a comment on the 'Scottish' condition than her femaleness. It has been interpreted into that by the assumptions of his critics/readers. Politically working-class, male, Glaswegian writers are constructed as more 'authentic' than middle-class, female writers in exile – cut off from the authenticity of 'folk' roots by their class, their gender and their exile. But for those of us brought up as women in Scotland, *O Caledonia* contains an authenticity of response to the condition of Scottish womanness that Kelman cannot offer.⁸

Within Scotland's boundaries there are regional communities demanding a loyalty and recognition as strong as a nationalist commitment with the same shifting perspective of commitment between nation and region as there is between gender and nation. As Cairns Craig writes: 'Scottish novels may construct their narratives as paradigms of a

national consciousness, but they generally do so by locating their narrative within strictly demarcated regional boundaries' (1998: 221). This justification for the interpretation of the regional novel in Scottish literature as 'national' can be extrapolated onto the construction of individual fictional characters as 'paradigms of a national consciousness'. But where this extrapolation becomes problematic is when one region, class, or gender (for example, Glasgow, working-class, male) is used for the representation of the 'whole' nation to the exclusion of others. This hegemonic hold of the idea of the lowland Scottish working-class male (Whyte's 'hegemonic shift') on perceptions of 'Scottishness' contrasts with the lack of power that this grouping has in 'real' life. The urge to universalise from the gendered particular is problematic, leaving, as it does, half of the nation unrepresented in the imagined world being put forward as 'Scottish'.

Scottish women's twentieth-century fiction, whether centred fully on women or equally on women and men, ensures at least that, in reading it, we start from a position of imagined identity with women. It starts from the position that women are central rather than peripheral or marginal, even when social constrictions are being examined and the limitations of gender roles explored. Galloway links women's writing with Scottish writing in this:

And to reprioritise, to speak as though your norms are the ones that matter, is what's happened to Scottish writing as well recently. Scottish writers have started writing as though their language and national priorities signify, whereas for years we took on the fiction they didn't. The Let's Imagine We Matter thing is important. *What if I don't accept that I'm marginal, add-on territory* – it's the same root for me. (Leigh March 1999a: 86, original emphasis)

Just as previously the male was always seen and used as of central importance in constructions of 'Scotland', now the female can be interpreted in the same extrapolated way to define Scottishness, though this kind of identification often carries uneasiness and ambiguities, 'as elliptical and ambiguous as the world outside' (1999a: 86).⁹

If we examine a range of writing from late twentieth-century women we find concern with gender identification and representation. However, if we return to women writers of the 1920s and 1930s, we find them exploring a greater restriction of possibilities for women within social or political life.¹⁰ Nancy Brysson Morrison's *The Gowk Storm* (1988 [1933]) explores the growing up of three sisters in an isolated Perthshire manse, imprisoned culturally and, at times, literally by the weather. The

most rebellious daughter dies after exposure to an unforgiving storm. She is like the cow whose byre is heightened to improve its winter living conditions, an 'uneven' window knocked in the wall:

A white cow glimmered through the darkness that smelt of milk and hay. Its chain clanked as it turned its heavy head to look at us. Through a tiny uneven window, light struggled faintly and lit up a spider's web spanning encrusted beams ... 'Ay, ay ... he thocht it wouldna be so dull-like for the coo so she could get a keek oot in the winter'. (1988 [1933]: 41-2)

But the cow is still chained, still imprisoned, a paradigm for the position of women in Scottish society in the 1920s and 1930s who could see out from 'uneven' windows, but could not escape from cultural and social limitations.

But what this earlier twentieth-century Scottish women's fiction also mapped out was the infinite possibilities of the imagination: through education, through reading, through landscape. Landscape in Scotland incorporates light and infinity. In Shepherd's *The Weatherhouse* (like Willa Muir's title, *Imagined Corners*, echoing Donne's 'At the round earth's imagined corners'), it 'was a country that liberated. More than half the world was sky. The coastline vanished at one of the four corners of the earth, Ellen lost herself in its immensity' (1996b [1930]: 9-10). The imagery of light and infinity permeates the novel, 'the blue sea trembled on the boundaries of space' (112), infecting those characters (female and male) who experience it with the sense of invisible edges to the world, of possibilities reaching out into infinity, in contrast to the constrictions of their daily life.

It is as though for these women, the constrictions of earthly life are released by the light and landscape into the edge of time and endless uncharted possibilities, possibilities that were more fractured or constrained in life, providing another version of Irigaray's internalised '(Re)-discovering herself, for a woman ... *never being simply one*' with a 'sort of expanding universe to which no limits could be fixed and which would not be incoherence nonetheless' (1985: 30-1, original emphasis). Shepherd is most explicit about this conjunction of landscape, light, and Scotland in her first novel, *The Quarry Wood* (1996a [1928]). The protagonist Martha, from a north-east crofting family, passionately pursues knowledge as a child, goes to Aberdeen University and then returns to her home area in the hills of Aberdeenshire to become a teacher. As a child, she is told a half-remembered 'bit screed' by her father:

'On the sooth o' Scotland there's England, on the north the Arory-bory

– Burnett’s lassie, the reid-heided ane – Alice; on the east – fat’s east o’t? ... I some think it was the sun – the risin’ sun. Ay, fairly. That’s fat it was. Noo, the wast. Fat’s wast o’ Scotland, Matty’ ... Geordie could get no further with the boundaries of Scotland ... They stood on Scotland and there was nothing north of them but light. It was Dussie who wondered what bounded Scotland when the Aurora was not there ... ‘Yon’s the wordie, Mattie – fat the meenister was readin’ about. Eternity. That’s fat’s wast o’ Scotland. I mind it noo’ ... Eternity did not seem to be on any of her maps: but neither was the Aurora. She accepted that negligence of the map-makers as she accepted so much else in life. She had enough to occupy her meanwhile in discovering what life held, without concerning herself with what it lacked. (1996a [1928]: 19–20)

Shepherd shows here the disjunctions between the maps available for women, ‘the negligence of map-makers’, and the pragmatic capacity of women to get on with the exploration of the reality of ‘discovering what life held’. Martha, setting out on her voyage of the intellect, education and love, accepts the oddity of the boundaries of Scotland which are shown as mysteriously and infinitely expansive through light and eternity. Only to the south is travel in the imagination limited by the real border with England.¹¹ Similarly, in *O Caledonia*, a more recent novel, also set partly in the north-east of Scotland and imbued with the characteristics of both the literature and the landscape of that area, we find that ‘for Janet it was the view ahead which held all the enchantment she had ever yearned for; in the distance the hills lapped against each other to the far limits of the visible world’ (Barker 1992 [1991]: 33–4). Barker’s novel in its yearning for intellectual freedom and its exploration of the limitations of 1940s’ femininity seems positioned much more with the earlier Scottish women writers than her contemporaries.

One of those contemporaries, Janice Galloway, charts different boundaries from Shepherd and Barker in her first novel, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1991 [1989]). In its first-person portrayal of a breakdown there are internal, conflicting senses of existence and non-existence and absence. Joy, the narrator, scours the written word in a search for self:

It’s important to write things down. The written word is important. The forms of the letters: significances between the loops and dashes. You scour them looking for the truth. I read *The Prophet*, Gide, Kafka, Ivor Cutler. *Gone with the Wind*, *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, Norman MacCaig and Byron, *Lanark*, Muriel Spark, *How to cope with your Nerves/Loneliness/Anxiety*, Antonia White and Adrian Mole. *The Frances Gay Friendship Book* and James Kelman. ee cummings. *Unexplained Mysteries*

and *Life after Dark*. I read magazines, newspapers, billboards, government health warnings, advertising leaflets, saucebottles, cans of beans, Scottish Folk Tales and The Bible. They reveal glimpses of things just beyond the reach of understanding but never the whole truth. I fall into a recurring loop every morning after. (195–6)

This passage provides emblematic juxtapositions which show the extent our selves, written and lived, are constructed from heterogeneous cultural influences, clamouring and clashing discourses found in the cultural artefacts of late twentieth-century Scottish women's lives. Galloway's 'glimpses of things just beyond the reach of understanding' are the internal landscape's confused equivalent to the 'far limits of the visible world' (Barker 1992: 34) in the external landscapes of Scotland. Galloway's internal dialogues make Joy's head 'the site of a multiplicity of competing voices, a dialogue of dialect no longer distributed between different characters in the narrative but interiorised in an inner dialectic' (Craig 1998: 238). The 'inner dialectic' is unresolved; the loops of the words, the forms of the letters, provide a trap instead of a map with Galloway showing the instability and inaccessibility of meaning in the written word. Joy's uncertainty and ambiguity comes not from madness but from a reasoned response to a conflicting and conflicted world.¹²

Contemporary Scottish women writers may now write from an assumption of rights and possibilities for change but they also still write out of the inequalities of women's positions, 'writing to *make visible*' (Leigh March 1999: 92, original emphasis), writing themselves into a culture that has been dominated by male cultural icons. As Kathleen Jamie has said in relation to Robert Burns:

I don't think we need a national bard. I think folk call him that out of laziness, because they can't be bothered to read what's been written since. It's a monolithic attitude, where every era seems to have enshrined one male. A vibrant culture, as we have, is in the hands of many, many people. (quoted in Dunkerley, 1996)¹³

Hugh MacDiarmid, the writer who bestrode the Scottish literary renaissance (in many ways defining it), had an iconographic function similar to Burns in Scottish intellectual and literary life after the Second World War. The female equivalent to the MacDiarmid monolith seemed to be Muriel Spark: prolific, isolated, providing a slippery, elliptical and philosophically cunning counterpart, both of them admired or revered, but neither apparently directly the beginning of a vibrant new tradition. Spark has previously been treated by and large as a unique writer, subsumed into the 'English' canon by non-Scottish readers. Her themes and preoccupations

pations, however, place her firmly within the Scottish tradition and her inheritors have appeared in the 1990s; Elspeth Barker, Shena Mackay, Candia McWilliam, A. L. Kennedy and Janice Galloway all carry elements of Spark within their themes and style. Spark's writing has a cold, observant eye – a 'people-watcher, a behaviourist', as she describes herself (1992: 25) – detached from the life around her, amused and unengaged, containing both the coldness of the excluded and a cool observation of the masculinised world of Scottish life and culture. It is symptomatic that the woman writer who has had most obvious influence on contemporary women writers has chosen exile and that her work should be so open to critical interpretations which ignore or are ignorant of the obvious Scottish dimensions of her work.

The universalised male centre such as MacDiarmid (or Burns) beloved of traditional (male) Scottish culture, is limiting. The Alasdair Gray model, on the other hand, leaping into multi-life in 1981 with *Lanark*, proved much more fruitful. His ironic and humorous questioning of maleness, West of Scotlandness, his fragmented creations, all proved inspirational for younger Scottish writers even though his second work, 1982 *Janine* (1984), was more problematic for women readers in its conscious use of pornography to make political points about the disempowered Scottish male. The protagonist Jock is feminised and weakened (the two being seen as equivalent) by his role as the oppressed Scottish male. He carries for his author and some critics (for example, Craig 1999: 183–92) the assumption that the male out of power is equivalent to the woman oppressed in the sex industry (Janine is a fantasy pornographic plaything of Jock's), absolving the male of complicity in the violence of pornography.¹⁴

As Gray was stirring up writing, the women's movement was stirring up Scottish society. Post-1979 and the failure of the campaign for a devolved Scottish Assembly, the work of issue-based women's groups such as Rape Crisis Centres, Scottish Women's Aid and the Scottish Abortion Campaign ensured that campaigning for change in women's legal and social positions was grounded in the difference of Scots Law and developed separately from groups in England. Though starting from an identical analysis of male abuse of power, our awareness of English ignorance of our different campaigning needs meant that some of us developed a specifically Scottish perspective to feminism. International feminism often means a homogenising in the direction of the imperial centres; for example, Anglocentric for Scottish feminists, and US-centric for Canadian feminists. The 1980s were a time of political constriction after the Tory victory under Thatcher in 1979, but for feminism in Scot-

land they were also a time of consolidation and advance; rape in marriage was established as a crime (before England), incestuous rape was exposed as something not happening on the periphery, be it peripheral Edinburgh council estates or the Western Isles, but something being done violently to children (mainly, though not exclusively, girls) in the best and worst of families. Domestic violence was acknowledged as not a 'domestic' problem, but a problem of male violence against women, of abuse of power. The campaign of Zero Tolerance of violence against women of the 1990s in Scotland, based on a Canadian model, was built on the work of 1980s' feminists.¹⁵

It is against this background of specific social change accomplished by women, and of cultural energy, represented by Gray's and Kelman's fiction, and by the writing of Tom Leonard (for example, *Intimate Voices*, 1984) and the work of poet and dramatist Liz Lochhead, that the newer writers in the 1990s (such as Galloway, A. L. Kennedy, Jackie Kay or Laura Hird) emerge and move in fresh directions. The map has been redrawn so that they write from a confident assumption that being female and being Scottish are culturally positive; writing out of the same kind of natural assumption of place in the culture previously available to male writers. Galloway, with her intensely individualised, West of Scotland women's stories, explicitly draws attention to her feminism and her femaleness. A. L. Kennedy, less overtly political, perhaps, writes that she has 'a problem. I am a woman, I am heterosexual, I am more Scottish than anything else and I write. But I don't know how these things interrelate' (1995: 100) and insists that 'the great thing about books' is that they are 'not nation-specific, not race-specific, not religion-specific' but 'about humanity' (Leigh March 1999b: 108). Jackie Kay's works, from the poetic drama of *The Adoption Papers* (1991) to the novel *Trumpet* (1998), centre on complicated questions of gender, sexuality and race in a way new to Scottish writing. Laura Hird represents younger voices, her stance equivalent to those male writers she appeared with in *Children of Albion Rovers* (Williamson 1996) and the writers interviewed in *Repetitive Beat Generation* (Redhead 2000), drawing the harshness of young Edinburgh lives, writing of the complicity of women in our position, and looking on middle age as a foreign country.¹⁶ In Benedict Anderson's phrase, their 'fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality' (1991: 36). Their writing is essential for the part it plays in contributing to an imagined wholeness in the nation, ensuring that Scotland's 'narrative of "identity"' (Anderson 1991: 205) includes women. Their work ensures exploration of shifting allegiances and passable boundaries in counterpoint to the

limiting containment of that earlier static male cultural mode which was the stultifying norm.

It used to be said that nineteenth-century fiction looked for closure, and twentieth-century literature resisted it (although when we looked again, post-postmodernism, it was clear that much nineteenth-century fiction carried its own anxieties in the metaphors and subtexts embedded in its apparent order). But the resistance to, the *impossibility* of, closure is carried into the twenty-first century. So Margaret, at the end of A. L. Kennedy's *Looking for the Possible Dance*, walks out into an urban landscape through a door which is as suggestive of light and infinity as the edges of the north-east world:

from a distance its doorways seem white, more like curtains of white than ways through walls and into light. Margaret walks to one door and sinks into brilliant air, becoming first a moving shadow, then a curve, a dancing line. (1993: 250)

This ending – now criticised by Kennedy as ‘the illusion of arriving at the end of a story but actually you just arrive at the end of a railway line’ (Leigh March 1999b: 100) – shimmers with possibilities. It is in this openness that Scottish women’s writing presents its multiple and heterogeneous relation to gender and nation.

There is a constant leap of imagination required of women reading literature by men, with male-centred concerns. As Boland writes: ‘teenage dreams of action and heroism are filled with exciting and impossible transpositions of sexuality ... If I wanted to feel the power of nation as well as its defeat, then I would take on the properties of hero’ (1996: 65). In twentieth-century writing the same kind of imaginative travel is necessary to where gender interacts with nation so that nation cannot be narrated as exclusively male or, indeed, exclusively female. Any exploration must be tentative, flexible, non-linear as the only certainty carried by ‘debatable lands’ is that of uncertainty, of border crossings, dispute, debate, contiguity and interaction, equivalent, perhaps, to Bhabha’s ‘inscription and articulation of culture’s *hybridity*. To that end we should remember that it is the “inter” – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space – that carries the burden of meaning of culture’ (1994: 38, original emphases). Lands of thought that are interrogated and fought over, these debatable lands are Said’s ‘complex and uneven topography’ (1993: 386), as much about women’s space within the nation as about the boundaries of Scotland.

Notes

- 1 This chapter is based in part on an earlier essay, 'Imagined Corners to Debatable Land: Passable Boundaries' (Christianson 1996).
- 2 In 1850, Dinah Mulock Craik applied it to that other liminal geographical space in Scotland, the northern side of the rift valley that delimits highlands from lowlands, describing an 'old Scotswoman – who, coming from the debatable ground between Highlands and Lowlands, had united to the rigid piety of the latter much wild Gaelic superstition' (27). See also Anderson 1992: 34–5.
- 3 The nation is '*imagined*' because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (Anderson 1991: 6, original emphasis).
- 4 The historical figures with their acquired heroic and nationalist meanings are intended, rather than their Hollywood manifestations in *Braveheart* (1995), though the two may well interconnect as male symbols, as in the adoption of the face painted with the Saltire by fans of football (that centralising trope not of nationhood but of maleness).
- 5 For example, there are many connections between Scotland and Ireland to do with religion and emigration in different centuries, Catholics into Scotland and Protestants into Ireland.
- 6 For an influential analysis of 'the male monopoly on Scottish culture' see Anderson and Norquay 1984. See also the subsequent correspondence in *Cencrastus*, 16: 46, and 17: 43–4 (Spring and Summer, 1984).
- 7 Janice Galloway, sometimes coupled with Kelman as a fellow West of Scotland, working-class writer (for example Gifford 1992: 9), takes a complicated view of Kelman as 'writing not so much about as *through* Glasgow. His landscapes are very often alien hostile places, more states of mind (albeit states of mind influenced by physical landscape) than anything else. They needn't be Glasgow, and less and less are they becoming Glasgow. He's moved much more into the territory of abstract writing. I never really think of Jim as Scottish at all, which strikes outsiders as funny ... Most of those who choose to get bogged down with the language are making a political choice – *I won't read through this filter, I choose to make it illegitimate*. I think Jim's writing through an existential tradition, using traditionally illegitimised language perhaps, but it's the existential stuff that shapes his meaning. That's the most profound thing about Jim's work, not the Scottishness' (Leigh March 1999a: 87, original emphases). She refers in particular to the fuss in the English press when Kelman won the 1994 Booker prize for *How Late It Was How Late*. For a description of this, see Taylor (one of the judges and a Scottish journalist) 1994. Critical (as opposed to journalistic) approaches to Kelman have not been simplistic, most critics seeing him both as an existential and a class- rather than nation-identified writer; for example, see Milne (1994) and Nicoll (2000).
- 8 Janet's experiences do not just resonate for middle-class women; Dorothy McMillan finds 'sufficient intersections' with her own memories of a council house upbringing (1995: 94). See also Christianson (2000).
- 9 For a consideration of the difficulties of interpreting nation and gender in Galloway's work in particular, see Norquay (2000).
- 10 I include in my consideration of gender and nation those women writers of the first half of the twentieth century whose works disappeared from our literary

maps, giving those maps a misleading and incomplete slant. I also include them because on their re-publication in the 1980s they became 'new' writers, slotting into a historical place in modernist Scottish writing but also representing new and exciting work in the freshness of readers' responses. But they also provide a warning. The disappearance and reappearance of women in history and in writing – the surges of activity in the last two hundred years, the reinvention of commitment and analysis of women's position, is echoed in the writing of women, each generation forgetting and losing the work of the generation before last. Might this cycle recur in Scotland and elsewhere (in Australia, Canada, Ireland or the US, for example)?

- 11 See also Carter 2000: 52–3.
- 12 What Joy is *not* is symbolic of 'Scotland'. Joy's 'I looked. I was still there. A black hole among the green stars. Empty space. I had nothing inside me ... Nothing at all' (1991 [1989]: 146), is interpreted by Craig as 'the image not only of a woman negated by a patriarchal society but of a society aware of itself only as an absence, a society living, in the 1980s, in the aftermath of its failure to be reborn' (1999: 199). That is, Joy = Scotland, woman exemplifying nation; Craig thus invokes and continues that problematic dynamic of nation symbolised as female, incorporating Galloway and other contemporary women writers into his grand masculine narrative, one which acknowledges the region in nation, but blurs or even ignores the complexities of gender's place in the nation's narratives.
- 13 For some of the problems presented by MacDiarmid for women, see Anderson and Norquay (1984) and Christianson (1993).
- 14 A. L. Kennedy says of Kelman and Gray: 'I've probably got more sympathy with Alasdair because he does weird stuff' (Leigh March 1999b: 101). For critical readings of Gray, see Lumsden (1993) and Whyte (1998).
- 15 A major source for detailed information about Scottish rape crisis campaigns is the Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre's reports, first (1981), second (tenth anniversary, 1988) and third (fifteenth anniversary, 1993) (all Edinburgh: Edinburgh Rape Crisis Collective), and subsequent annual ones. See also Christianson and Greenan (2001). Short histories of many other women's groups in Scotland in the eighties are in Henderson and Mackay (1990).
- 16 The woman of 'the elderly couple' in Hird's 'Tillicoultry/Anywhere' is in her fifties (1997: 143). For further consideration of contemporary Scottish women writers, see individual chapters in Christianson and Lumsden (2000).