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Łukasz Sorokowski – absolwent Instytutu Stosunków Międzynarodowych (2006) i Instytutu Anglistyki (2007) Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego. W swojej pracy badawczej podejmuje tematykę zawiłości współczesnych stosunków społeczno-politycznych w podewolucyjnym krajobrazie Zjednoczonego Królestwa, koncentrując się na procesie budowania polityki tożsamości (ang. identity politics) Szkocji w jej nieustających dążeniach do uniezależnienia się od dośrodkowych sił politycznych i administracyjnych wywodzących się z administracji centralnej w Londynie

Łukasz Sorokowski

A struggle in the peripheries: a few remarks on devolution in the UK

This brief study seeks to outline the mechanics of the recently growing demands for local and regional autonomy within the United Kingdom, their background and widespread repercussions caused by the eruption of the separatist forces developing in all of the UK's peripheral regions. These areas, comprising the so-called "Celtic fringe", have been reacting to what they unanimously regard as the central government's lack of political purpose and inability to respond to the local pronouncements of the territories located beyond the centripetal forces driven by the London-based administration. This study aims to offer a panoramic overview of these growing aspirations, which have taken a firm stand under the guiding principle of devolution, and focuses primarily on the question of their political roots, enhanced by an overtly nationalist agitation for home rule in Scotland dating to the latter part of the nineteenth century, although it was not until the 1970^{s} that the Scottish National Party (SNP) began to become a significant political force. Accentuating the growing discontent with existing political and economic conditions, the paper looks at the variety of interests voiced by the local and regional actors, of which Scotland has arguably been playing the first fiddle, locating them within a larger context of the British Political Tradition (BPT).

Over the last years, numerous attempts have been made to diagnose the changes that have taken place within the British state. Broadly speaking, it seems legitimate to assume that these have arisen from an evident crisis epitomised by an overloaded

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bureaucratic state apparatus sustained by the process of centralisation and vertical integration. The perception of a deepening crisis within the already messy nature of the United Kingdom’s constitutional arrangement as a treaty state has inspired both social scientists and political actors to locate a more agile and open pattern of organising the country’s internal affairs, one that would be more responsive to the growing needs of not only the local authorities, but, above all, to the tensions arising between the UK’s constituent parts, i.e. England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Given the copious analyses of the crisis in question, there have been different narratives of these local aspirations developed, mapping the underlying causes of the situation.

Of the numerous attempts made to critically interpret the dialectic of changes taking place within the United Kingdom since the 1950^{s}, two main narratives have come to the fore as plausible conceptualisations of the crisis: neoliberalism and institutionalism. Bevir (2003, p. 456) admits that neoliberalism has paved the ground for marketization and the new public management adopted by the New Right, whereas institutionalism opened up new networks and cemented the state governance endorsed by New Labour. Clear as it seems that the mapping of narratives onto a volatile area of public policy escapes the binary logic so frequently adopted by some theorists of social change, due credit still has to be given to the fact that in the case of the UK, the country has witnessed broad conjectures of these two narratives, making it a watermark of eclecticism in the sphere of public policy, shaped by a diffuse, intersecting group of mainstream scientists, policy advisors and politicians alike. This conspicuous approach to issues of state importance has been discernible especially in the aftermath of the eighteen years of Conservative rule which concluded in 1997, and the advent of New Labour – with Tony Blair taking the lead as prime minister and launching a number of unprecedented changes within the social, political and economic framework of the country, introduced under the novel and memorable label of the “Third Way”.

New Labour’s constitutional reform programme saw: the reform of the House of Lords in 1999; the introduction of both the Human Rights Act in 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act in 2000; the creation of a Supreme Court for the UK in 2005; and the introduction of devolution for Scotland and Wales in 1998. On 19 November 1998, indeed, the Scottish Devolution Bill received Royal Assent, which allowed for the establishing of a Scottish Parliament at Holyrood for the first time since the distant English-Scottish union of 1707. Devolution, alongside several changes instituted by the Labour government, finally ceased to be a pure concept vigorously debated throughout Britain since the early 1970^{s}, and was materialised into a significant moment in the history and development of the British political system. These changes described by Blair (1994) as: “the biggest programme of change to our democracy ever proposed”, saw the reform of numerous aspects of the institutions and processes lying at the core of British government. Of all these, Scottish devolution was undoubtedly the most radical and expeditious but took place without any significant attempt to de-radicalize the original proposal, as compared with other reforms, such as e.g. Freedom of Information, which was significantly de-radicalized, as well as the proposed Electoral Reform for Westminster, which did not take place (Marsh, Hall, 2007; Marsh, 2008).

Looked at from a theoretical perspective, devolution rests on “the transfer of powers from a superior to an inferior political authority” (Bogdanor, 2001, p. 2). More fully, it can be defined as the statutory granting of powers by the central government of the state to a government at national, regional or local level. Devolution can come in a variety of forms. It can be mainly financial, e.g. giving areas a budget which was formerly administered by a central government. However, the power to make legislation relevant to a given area may also be granted. Devolution also entails transferring power to a subordinate elected body, on a geographical basis, of those functions at present exercised by ministers and the Westminster Parliament (Bogdanor, 2001, p. 3). The Scotland Act of 1998 put in place a Scottish Executive, led by a First Minister. Scottish Devolution entailed three types of devolution: administrative devolution, allowing for the administration of public services in Scotland; legislative devolution, which granted the Scottish Parliament primary legislative power over a range of public policy areas; and financial devolution, which allowed Scotland to have a tax-varying power. Devolution differs from federalism in that the powers devolved may be temporary and ultimately reside in the central government, thus the state remains, *de jure*, unitary. Any legislation to establish devolved parliaments or assemblies can be repealed by the central government in the same way as an ordinary statute can be. Federal systems or federacies differ in that the autonomy of the sub-state is guaranteed by the constitution. At least in theory, devolution seems to be consistent with the BPT, as it aims to preserve the central feature of the British constitution and parliamentary sovereignty (Evans, 2003). As such, it is a continuation of centralisation and the executive dominance of Westminster, albeit in an amended form. Comparing the scope of powers given to the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Irish Assembly in 1998, a range of authors (Bogdanor, 2001; O’Neill, 2004; Jeffrey, 2006) point to the discernible asymmetry of the process.

In order to accurately pinpoint the multifaceted nature of the devolution discourse taking place in the UK over the recent few decades, however, with Scotland seen as, admittedly, its major promoter, one has to acknowledge the fact that in serious political matters, like the one hinging around the BPT, too much emphasis has so far been placed on the centralising notion of Britain and *Britishness*, thus giving insufficient importance to the underestimated sense of Scottish national identity. There is little or no discussion of the role that British nationalism and a sense of *Britishness* play or have played in the junction with *Scottishness*, just as the extent to which the BPT has been embedded within the political and cultural identity of Britain has clearly been underdeveloped in the majority of analyses (Preston, 2004). Beer's (1965) coy attempt to employ the notion of a political culture is left unnoticed, alongside Oakeshott's implausible suggestion that the BPT is rooted in the British national character (1962, p. 13). As such, the very idea of Britain having a uniform “grand tradition” acting as a key component of its political and cultural identity appears particularly hard to uphold, especially in light of the devolution discourse intensifying since the early 1970^{s} and taking up greater momentum in the mid-1990^{s}, following the euphoria of the victorious referendum in 1997.

Underlying the growing demand for recognition of Scotland's national interests and Scottish home rule there is the misperception that existed among several of the then members of the political elite that “the different parts of the UK have, to varying extents, different political traditions and identities” (Marsh, Hall, 2007, p. 225). The idea of a single BPT as an artificial way of imposing uniform political traditions, identities and discourses around all the other parts of the UK, which have diverged from those embedded at Westminster, contributed to speeding up claims for local and regional autonomy, based on the assumption that the notion that there might be different political tradition and identities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland has, to date, been ignored by those advocating the existence of a distinctive BPT. These sub-national identities, embedded in the social and political fibre of the UK, have been termed “little traditions forming part of the broader notion of political-cultural identity” (Preston, 2004). By acknowledging such local and regional differences within the UK, as well as highlighting their sense in opposition to the centralising notion of British exceptionalism and sense of superiority, the dynamic for change and continuity taking place in the form of devolution was opened up for public policy and scrutiny.

Along with the already mentioned laudations that the devolution arrangement has been a major development in the UK political system in the twentieth century, it has also been widely suggested that, as a consequence of devolution, Britain has found itself in a state of terminal decline (Marr, 1999). The BPT is no longer sufficient to hold the union together: its key tenets have been deprived of their former weight, and political actors no longer assent to it as they used to. As such, attempts to portray Scottish devolution as a catastrophic moment which “will create more tension and conflict rather than less” (Redwood, 1999, s. 141) seem rather like anticipated reactions to an event that was the culmination of a long run process of assertion and contestation of the constitutional position of Scotland.

Much as Scotland’s position within the constitutional framework of the UK has been explored over the recent decades, including explanations of the principles underpinning the Scottish Parliament, the mainstream Scottish narrative seems to have neglected a number of issues, including, among others, a failure to locate the debate about devolution and the options discussed within the broader institutional and ideational context of British politics, little or no consideration of how the dominant British political tradition effected reactions to the demands for constitutional change in Scotland, as well as insufficient focus on change and continuity in the attempts made at elucidating the process of devolution in Scotland and its outcomes.

Scotland’s position within the UK has always rested on negotiation and compromise, whose earliest elements can be traced back to the 1707 Act of Union. However, one has to take account of the fact that while negotiation and compromise were indeed features of the territorial relationship, the union “by its very nature was an asymmetrical relationship” (O’Neill, 2004, p. 3), in which England dominated under the banner of the artificially imposed notion of *Britishness*, which was gaining popularity. The establishing of the United Kingdom in 1707 was the product of power, control and negotiation, as from its inception, the Union was underpinned by a deliberate attempt by the political elite to create a sense of political unity from territorial and cultural diversity for essentially their own purposes (O’Neill, 2004). Due to the English-driven centrifugal forces, some Scottish institutions and components of identity could not endure; however, others were allowed to continue only on condition that they would not pose a threat to the project of creating a functioning territorial union governed from Westminster. Therefore, the development of a sense of British political unity and distinctiveness must be recognised as an integral part of any discussion of Scotland’s constitutional position (Hall, 2009).

Although surrendering political statehood, Scotland did not become fully incorporated by its southern neighbour, retaining, as part of a unique geopolitical consensus, a considerable measure of civil and cultural autonomy. In particular, it could preserve its system of local government, and it held on to its “holy trinity” of legal, religious and educational institutions, including its four universities. Over the years, all these factors have significantly contributed to fashioning the country’s conceptual and symbolic shape, as well as its institutional texture. Essentially, despite being set within the constitutional parameters of the British Crown and governmental apparatus, the Union safeguarded Scotland’s position as a “territorial unit” with a “sufficiently diversified civil society and institutional practice to render its identity much more complex than in those countries where state and society are one” (McCrone, 2001, p. 21).

Thus, the 1707 treaty did not abolish the nation of Scotland, but left all the pivotal components underlying the territorial and conceptual shape of a region: with the name, boundary and spatial structure virtually intact. In short, the legacy of the Union could be succinctly expressed as a step towards rendering Scotland a hybrid society, in which people’s lives and actions began to be shaped by a multitude of what Paasi (2003, p. 476) refers to as “narratives of space.”

Although the Celtic background of the Scottish people was recognized, and certain unique regional elements, including separate educational and legal systems, were taken for granted, the so-called mainstream view was that the Scots were rather “picturesque cousins of the English” (Lazer, 1977, p. 50), blending their family differences comfortably within the idea of a unified nationality and culture artfully embedded into the notion of *Britishness*. Protesting against the assumptions of this idea, some of the Scottish dissenters in the latter half of the nineteenth century intensified their demands for a separate branch of administration; and in response to it, a Scottish Office, headed by a minister, was established in 1885. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the National Covenant, asking for parliamentary devolution, was enhanced by almost two million supporters. Only a certain number of people, however, who shared the separatist sentiments were committed enough to the Scottish cause to break with the UK’s political consensus and vote for a nationalist party. Thus, until 1970, the SNP was almost completely unrepresented in Parliament, with their popular vote usually relegated under “others” in the party election statistics (Lazer, 1977).

In light of the unprecedented rise in the SNP’s popularity, followed in the 1970s by the government’s response with its devolutionary proposal, it is clear to see its radically new dimension of internal policy venturing into territory, admittedly, relatively strange and uncharted not only by British experience, but by that of other countries as well. As outlined in one of the pertinent White Papers,

> [t]he constitutional changes proposed [were] the most fundamental of their kind in Great Britain for centuries, and [raised] complex and far-reaching problems. There [were] few parallels anywhere for dividing between two levels of government, the powers and functions long exercised centrally in a unitary state (Parliamentary Command Paper, 1975, p. 1).

Discourse on devolution intensified with the 1969 founding of the Royal Commission on the Constitution, commonly referred to as the Kilbrandon Commission, which issued its major report in October 1973. Its recommendations were developed into prospective legislation in two successive White Papers: Democracy and Devolution: Proposals for Scotland and Wales, issued in September 1974, and Our Changing Democracy: Devolution to Scotland and Wales, issued in November 1975. One of the pivotal structural changes within the UK’s constitutional framework was that the prospective Scottish Assembly would be democratically elected and would have the power to legislate on a number of devolved matters that pertained exclusively to Scotland. Among these subjects, the Kilbrandon Commission had recommended local government, roads, education (apart from universities), arts and culture, agriculture, social work, health, sports, tourism, the police, and justice. Since this Scottish legislative power covered such a wide range of subjects, “control of the great bulk of public services which affect the people of Scotland [was] in the hands of the new Scottish institutions” (Parliament Command Paper, 1975, p. 35). However, despite being endowed with its own legislature, Scotland was still to be represented in the national Parliament at Westminster. There were two significant constitutional limitations to the Assembly’s powers. First, the British Government could check any of its actions, reserving for itself the right to refuse to submit to the Royal Assent measures considered ultra vires or those not in line with the Government’s policy. Second, a limitation was set upon the actual use of power insofar as the Assembly was denied any taxation powers unless it wanted to impose further taxes upon its constituents over and above the regular tax which all citizens would pay to the British national government. Its revenue, therefore, would come, as usual, through block grants form Parliament in Westminster. The new Scottish governmental structure, in turn, would not be limited to a legislature. It would have an executive and a prime minister similar to that of a typical parliamentary regime. Nevertheless, the institution of Secretary of State for Scotland would remain within the British Cabinet, and the civil service would be national rather than epitomise local and/or regional Scottish features (Lazer, 1977, p. 53).

The major reason for the shift of the tone of urgency in the devolution debate throughout the 1970^{s} was a growing Scottish discontent with existing political and economic conditions and trends in the overall functioning of the United Kingdom. In political terms, this dissatisfaction reflected a number of considerations, one of them being that the political machinery which had evolved over the years to handle Scottish affairs within Parliament had become outmoded and in need of reform.

Amidst a multitude of contentions was the feeling that England failed to recognise Scotland’s specificity, which led to shaping a conspicuous perception of the English as indifferent at best, and hostile at worst, towards their Caledonian neighbours. As Scots saw things, they lacked an effective voice within the government, with Parliament dominated by English interests, the cabinet notoriously failing to adopt a local and/or regional perspective, and even Scottish Westminster MPs being elected with the support of particular economic interests, rather than those in line with Scottish national interests (Rose, 1975, p. 8–9).

The Conservative victory in 1979, followed by the election of Margaret Thatcher to serve as prime minister for three consecutive terms of office, is often depicted as a turning point in British politics in both ideational and policy terms (Hay, 1996). However, in terms of territorial relations within the UK, it seems more accurate to imply that it was rather an extreme manifestation of a long established approach. Like most of the Conservative Party, Thatcher wholeheartedly believed in the sanctity of the UK’s existing territorial relationships and was “deeply suspicious of what that [devolution] might mean to the future of the union” (Thatcher, 1993, p. 36). Unlike some of her predecessors, such as Heath or Douglas-Hume, she saw little value in making gestures with regard to devolution, even if, the situation in the 1970^s and 1980^s required such sensitivities (Gilmour, 1992). Historically, the Conservative Party had built its electoral appeal on

> projecting itself as the party of the Union, the Empire, and the Constitution, and identifying the party with the established institutions and symbols of national legitimacy (Gamble, 1983, p. 111).

Marsh and Hall (2007, p. 225) suggest that “the Conservative party’s reverence for the dominant tradition was historically linked to their reverence for tradition and their dislike of change”, along with their faith in and support for elitism. For the Conservatives, “there were some things worth dying in the last ditch for” (Gamble, 1983, p. 119), as epitomized by the union of the United Kingdom. Thatcher’s views were undoubtedly a continuation and affirmation of this trend, no matter how untenable these claims appear thirty years later. Her vehement unionism and British nationalism, both central tenets of the BPT, were at the forefront of her vitriolic opposition to the idea of devolution.

One of the major aspects of Thatcherism which impacted the mainstream attitudes to devolution in the 1980^s hinged on the view that Thatcher herself “saw Scotland as an outpost of the dependency culture she was determined to extirpate” (Bogdanor, 2001,

p. 195). Most of her then policies, particularly those entailing privatization and opting out of local government control in areas such as education, found little or no resonance in Scotland. The truly Thatcherite belief in the supremacy of neo-liberal individualism ran contrary to both the more traditional values of community and the belief in the virtues of social democratic institutions, such as the welfare state, and a commitment to what has been traditionally identified by commentators as "the post war consensus". Indeed, socio-economic factors were, arguably, central to Scottish dis-satisfaction in the 1980^{s} (Finlay, 2008). Thatcher herself seemed to be, and was certainly, perceived by many Scots as anti-Scottish. She did little to alleviate such concerns through her actions or through her comments throughout the 1980^{s}, declaring in her memoirs that

> [t]he union [was] inevitably dominated by England by reason of its greater population. The Scots, being a historic nation with a proud past, will inevitably resent some expressions of it from time to time" (Thatcher, 1993, p. 624).

Such sentiments were commonplace in the 1980^{s}, and were further enhanced by Thatcher, who saw English dominance of the Union as both natural and desirable. Furthermore, her view of how that dominance had been secured was overly simplistic and insensitive to the history of these isles or how people in Scotland might feel about it. As such, Gamble's suggestion that the years of Thatcherism "marked the final end and exhaustion of the Conservative's old unionist formula" (1994, p. 166) appears misguided, in light of the extent to which unionism has always been an inherent part of the Conservative Party doctrine. However, as acknowledged by Hall (2009), these years were undoubtedly a final, reactionary attempt to aggressively reassert this notion in its most powerful and virulently nationalistic form.

The increasing dissatisfaction of Scots with Scotland's position within the UK, and thus the dominant political tradition, was also reflected in the further rise of the Scottish National Party, a party whose *raison d'être* has been to challenge the central tenets of the BPT. In 1987, the SNP won 14% of the votes and 3 seats in the General Election. In local elections in Scotland, the SNP did even better, achieving 21.3 % of the vote and 113 seats in 1988. However, the SNP were not the only beneficiaries of the Thatcher approach to territorial politics. All the major opposition parties aimed to capitalise as the belief grew that the old territorial consensus and whatever lay behind it was being undermined by the Tories (Mitchell, 2002). This belief became increasingly resonant throughout the 1980^{s}, and parties such as the SNP, Labour and the Liberal/Alliance all came to reflect these sentiments.

However, the defining moment and, admittedly, the turning point in the Scottish-English relations came with one of the most controversial policies of the 1980s by the name of the Community Charge, also known as the Poll Tax. O’Neill’s description of it as “a defining moment in the already deteriorating relations between the government and Scotland” (2004, p. 74) has been almost unanimously acclaimed the major factor that promoted contestation of the Union and the impulse for change. Evans (2003, p. 235) identifies it as a political disaster which “revitalized the devolution issue as a focus for an anti-Thatcher Scottish identity”. The significance of the Poll Tax for any narration of the process of Scottish Devolution can be seen in a number of ways. Broadly speaking, it was above all a bureaucratic calamity, given the extent of non-payment, as well as an issue that galvanised many of those who had been undecided over devolution in 1979 (Evans, 2003). The tax is depicted as an event that triggered contestation of the key facets of the traditional constitutional position of Scotland, alongside the BPT, which underpinned it. It was back then, and still is remembered now as such, one of the pivotal events that promoted opposition parties and sections of the public, particularly in Scotland to contest the legitimacy of the Thatcher Government and consider alternative constitutional arrangements for Scotland.

The 1997 New Labour’s landslide victory seemed to be the first stage in achieving these goals. Following eighteen years in opposition, Labour took over at Westminster with 44% of the vote and an unprecedented 179 seat majority in the House of Commons. In Scotland, the Conservatives lost all their Parliamentary seats, which was coupled with the fact that at that moment, they did not control a single Scottish local authority. Labour offered Britain an unprecedented programme of constitutional modernization, couched in a language of democratic opportunity, as highlighted by Tony Blair, who declared that

> the government’s progressive programme of constitutional reform [was] moving [the country] from a centralised Britain, where power flowed top-down, to a devolved and plural state. A new Britain [was] emerging with a revitalised conception of citizenship (2000, p. 1).

The outcome of the referenda held in Scotland and Wales in September 1997 opened up the certainty of a far-reaching change in the government of the United Kingdom. In Scotland, turnout stood at around 60%. Almost three-quarters of those voting (74.3%) backed the establishment of a Scottish Parliament, as proposed by the government, and as many as 63.5% advocated endowing it with having tax-raising powers. The proportion of the total Scottish electorate voting “yes” exceeded the 40% hurdle which had applied in 1979, and had nullified the majority (33% of the electorate) in favour of the scheme which had then been before it. Moreover, in 1997 all 32 local authority areas in Scotland voted strongly for the Parliament, and only two areas (at opposite ends of the country: Orkney, and Dumfries and Galloway) voted against the tax-varying powers. In the capital, Edinburgh, 72% favoured the parliament which would be located there.

This resulted in the Scotland Act 1999 and the establishing of a Scottish Parliament in May 1999, as conceived by the McIntosh Commission. The devolution of limited political powers to Scotland in 1999 re-kindled debates over the meaning and relevance of Scotland as a national container for social, economic and political processes. The devolution settlement “reserved” certain powers at Westminster, including foreign affairs, defence, monetary policy and social security; the remainder, including local government, health, education, criminal justice and transport, would be “devolved” entirely to Edinburgh. The UK government remained responsible for national policy on all matters that had not been devolved, including foreign affairs, defence, social security, macro-economic management and trade. It was also responsible for government policy in England on all the matters that had been devolved to Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. The UK Parliament was still able to pass legislation for any part of the UK, though in practice it only dealt with devolved matters with the agreement of the devolved governments. Within the UK government, the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were responsible for the Scotland Office, the Wales Office and the Northern Ireland Office. They were to ensure that devolution works smoothly, and help to resolve any disputes. They represented their parts of the country in the UK government, and represented, in turn, the UK government in those parts of the country. Most contact between the UK government and the devolved administrations was to take place between the individual government departments that dealt with particular matters.

To sum up, of the entire UK territory, devolution has been most advanced in Scotland, where the Scottish Parliament, and its executive arm of the Scottish Executive, subsequently named the Scottish Government, came into being in June 1999, shouldering responsibility for a wide range of functions transferred from Westminster. Policy decisions are now taken by 129 elected Members of the Scottish Parliament, which also has the power to raise up to three pence in the pound income tax and to change non-domestic local taxation or business rates. Whilst Scotland had, historically, retained a distinct set of legal, educational and other state institutional forms within the United Kingdom, the reestablishment of a Scottish Parliament brought a new set of agendas into prospect. As the Scottish Labour Party made clear, one of its first priorities was “a Scotland Bill giving Scotland the right to run its own affairs while still playing a full part in Britain” (Scottish Labour Party, 1999, p. 1).

Admittedly, devolution to Scotland has awoken the latent potential of Scottish people to change everything that has been understood and imagined or thought of and speculated about their country. The devolved parliament has shifted the governance of the country, resetting financial provisions and socio-economic management, thus recreating Scottish politics and Scottish society. It has undoubtedly also affected how Scotland is represented and imagined beyond its own geographical and cultural boundaries. The unprecedented speed at which the devolution discourse is accelerating its embedment within the UK social and political discourse should also stir Scottish-wide debates over both its vast opportunities and rigid paradigms and structures. Serious questions ought to be pondered of the impact of political devolution on the rhetoric of *Scottishness*, when set against the hybrid model of the nation shaped by devolution, resetting identity within Scottish culture as much less predictable and much more inclusive than has previously been understood.

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Summary:

The paper looks at the major issues underlying devolution in the United Kingdom, i.e. a process whereby the historically diverse areas and regions constituting the seemingly uniform state have been slowly striving for independence, along with the formation of local, regional and even national identities. Hinging on the idea of 'multicultural citizenship', the paper seeks to analyse the ongoing public discourse centered on the gradual transfer of centralized London-based power to local and regional bodies across the UK. This discourse forms the pivotal background of devolution, overtly pointing to the idea of the so-called 'new opening' of the entire British political scene, clearly promoting the notion of strengthening the position of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and English regions as increasingly autonomous geographical and cultural areas as part of a weakening monolith by the name of the United Kingdom. Resting almost entirely on historic tensions between British identity and Scottish identity, it is made clear that the Scottish public debate has basically neglected the issues of the assimilation of its cultural minorities with the 'post-devolution' reality. The devolution discourse stems from the rancorous debates and polemics which have taken place throughout the three hundred years of the Scottish and English Union, covering several social and political contexts, including the growing demands voiced by the SNP. Indeed, it has a major impact on the formation of Scots' national distinctiveness alongside Scotland's gradual emergence as a separate part of the British Isles.

Keywords:

devolution, power, politics, the United Kingdom, struggle, identity, cohesion

Streszczenie:

Artykuł omawia główne zagadnienia leżące u podstaw procesu dewolucyjnego w Zjednoczonym Królestwie, tj. stopniowego uniezależniania się historycznych krain – regionów współtworzących to pozornie jednolite państwo, oraz tworzenie się w tym procesie tożsamości lokalnych, regionalnych, a nawet narodowych. Bazując na pojęciu „obywatelstwa wielokulturowego”, dokonano analizy podjętego w tym państwie ożywionego dyskursu publicznego w kwestiach związanych ze stopniowym przekazywaniem władzy skupionej centralnie – w Londynie – instytucjom lokalnym i regionalnym. Dyskurs ten stanowi istotne zaplecze procesu dewolucji, wyraźnie wskazując na ideę tzw. „nowego otwarcia” całej brytyjskiej sceny politycznej, jednoznacznie promując umacnianie pozycji Szkocji, Walii i Irlandii Północnej oraz angielskich regionów jako niezależnych obszarów geograficzno-kulturowych w ramach słabnącego monolitu państwowego Zjednoczonego Królestwa. Dyskurs dewolucyjny ma swe źródła w burzliwych debatach i polemikach toczących się w ciągu trzystu lat istnienia unii angielsko-szkockiej. Obejmuje wiele środowisk społecznych i politycznych, w tym rosnącą w siłę Szkocką Partię Narodową (SNP) i ma istotny wpływ na kształtowanie się poczucia narodowej odrębności Szkotów oraz stopniowego umacniania pozycji tego „regionu – obszaru – kraju” na Wyspach Brytyjskich. Artykuł przybliża istotę dążeń odśrodkowych na przykładzie Szkocji, której coraz bardziej wyraziste dążenia niepodległościowe – ich apogeum jest zaplanowane na wrzesień referendum niepodległościowe – oznaczać będą istotne zmiany konstytucyjne, stanowiąc poważne wyzwanie dla spójności całego Zjednoczonego Królestwa. W ten sposób uwidacznia się istotny z punktu widzenia spójności kulturowej problem przyszłości tego państwa w obliczu możliwych dalszych zmian terytorialnych.

Słowa kluczowe:

dewolucja, władza, polityka, Zjednoczone Królestwo, walka, tożsamość, spójność