

INTRODUCTION

Western social science underwent a series of 'turns' during the final decades of the twentieth century. Prominent amongst these were 'cultural' and 'linguistic' turns, accompanied by postmodern theories proclaiming (and sometimes celebrating) the 'end' of modernity. However, as the metaphor of 'turn' may imply, those shifts accompany a third 'spatial turn'. Re-emerging concerns with what appeared to be a new level of globalisation stimulated a rash of theories about the effects of this process on particular places. At first sight processes of globalisation and the spread of universal values seemed to be de-coupling space from place. People were becoming 'disembedded' from concrete places, space itself was 'emptying out' and the language of flows and processes replacing that of structures and certainty (see Lash and Urry, 1994, 13-15). In this process, territory, an apparently firm foundation of identity, was revealed as 'irreparably fluid, ambivalent and otherwise unreliable' (Bauman, 1992, 696). Instead of relying on such historical fixities, individuals were now actively choosing identities in a changing and confusing kaleidoscope of 'identity politics'.

However, on closer inspection it transpires that the 'spatial turn' involves more than deterritorialisation. The persisting importance of place is reinforced from two directions, one broadly empirical and the other conceptual. Empirically, it has proved impossible to ignore evidence for the continuing salience of place and territorial identities in conditions of 'post-

modernity'. Moreover, globalisation does not just replace place; it accompanies an increasing search for 'authentic' places, as illustrated by the explosion of interest in family genealogies and heritage sites.

Events in eastern Europe in the decade following the implosion of the Soviet Bloc furnished ample evidence for the continuing power of place based identities. But the resurgence of nationalisms in the East was only the most spectacular example of a 'new territorial politics' increasingly bisecting the political cultures of western nation-states (Agnew, 2001; Harvie, 1994; Keating, 1996). This 'new regionalism' was itself superimposed on 'a process that has been going on in Western Europe – Bretagne, Occitania, Lombardy, Cornwall, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Catalunya, the Basque Country, Corsica – for almost a decade' (Friedman, 1994, 238) and, as some would argue, a lot longer than that. Friedman sees this as a global process of 'ethnification'. Rooted identities proliferate, 'apparently impervious to conditions of mobility in the larger social arena' (Friedman, 1994, 239).

The second, conceptual, reinforcement of the importance of local places is linked to the way such places relate to larger social and geographical arenas. Geographers and historians now highlight the importance of particular places in the understanding of general processes. Thrift points out that the particular context of everyday life 'cannot be swept away under the carpet by grand social theories, for it remains where we actually live' (Thrift, 1994, 227). He is echoed by Gregory who calls for social theory to 'be worked with –patiently, carefully, rigorously – in each of its different ports of

call: not “tested” in some isolated laboratory, not “applied” from outside, but *worked with*’ (Gregory, 1994, 79). Such a re-working of the relationship between social theory and particular places resonates with the work of the historian, Barry Reay. For Reay it is ‘impossible to understand society and culture without examining local contexts’. His ‘strategically situated social history’ sets out ‘not just to explore the working out of wider social and cultural processes at a local level, but to use the local to challenge our view of the very nature of these processes’ (Reay, 1996, 262). Reay succeeds brilliantly in achieving this difficult task in his study of the Blean district of Kent in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

We might accept, therefore, that ideas have to be worked through in places, but what sort of places? In this respect it is possible to discern another sort of ‘turn’ over the later decades of the last century, a turn to the margins. Social and cultural geographers have been urged to study the geographies of ‘outsiders’, of the socially and geographically excluded, of those on the ‘periphery of cultural systems of place’ (Shields, 1991, 3). This fascination with the margins conjoins the attraction of the ‘Other’ that has sent social anthropologists as well as cultural geographers off in a search for the different, a search that is undertaken these days comparatively near to home. This ‘turn’, however, is composed of an essentially one-way traffic, of academics from the centre to cultures on the margins. The metropolitan perspective thus de-constructs and re-constructs peoples and societies of the peripheries, propounding and fixing its preferred interpretation (for

example Chapman, 1992). In such studies, places on the margins too often resemble laboratories for the centre. But places are also political resources. Places have always been 'spaces of resistance', 'where our "place" (in all its meanings) is considered fundamentally important to our perspective, our location in the world, and our right and ability to challenge dominant discourses of power' (Keith and Pile, 1993, 6).

Hechter and Levy (1979, 262) once asked the question: 'Why should [there] be so much of a Welsh problem, yet so little of a Cornish one?' Nevertheless, despite posing 'little' problem for the British state, a sense of Cornish identity exists and demands for special treatment still emanate from this particular 'margin'. Indeed, recently, with the process of devolution on the brink of being applied to England's regions, the Cornish 'problem' has re-emerged. It appears that Cornwall is now more visible. In an article on the 'new British', Tony Blair argues that 'we can comfortably be Scottish and British or Cornish and British ... or Pakistani and British' (Blair, 2000, 22). Meanwhile Tom Nairn reminds us that:

Beyond the familiar Scotland-Ireland-Wales triad there now lies the question of Cornwall, and of the very small territories, the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey, which were simply ignored by traditional all-British political reflection – too insignificant to figure, as it were, in its dazzling image of greatness and global reach. No one ignores them now (Nairn, 2000, 14).

In the following pages we will explain why some in Cornwall persist in regarding it as a special case and also why the form of this special pleading

remains ambiguous and tentative. In doing so, we might also suggest that the question asked by Hechter and Levy was perhaps the wrong one, being over-reliant on a 'Celtic' comparison that has failed to engage comprehensively with the modern Cornish identity. We will conclude that, by restoring the importance of the reformulation of the Cornish identity in Cornwall's industrial period in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, we can better understand the modern Cornish identity.

The first two chapters begin by setting the context. Chapter 1 reviews a broad inter-disciplinary literature on identity and converges on the approaches of geographers and historians to sub-state territorial identities. The shortcomings of work that fails to problematize the dynamic social construction of regions are remedied by adopting a model of regionalization devised by the Finnish geographer, Anssi Paasi. This serves as a guide for some of the discussion in the following chapters. Chapter 2 then identifies academic approaches to the Cornish and their identity, before isolating the explicit Cornish Studies perspective that informs the present work.

The next two chapters focus on the symbols and representations of the territorial identity that had emerged in the early nineteenth century. Chapter 3 discloses some dominant images of Cornwall and its people in the early nineteenth century. The principal conclusion is that new symbols of distinctiveness cohered around an ideology of 'industrial civilisation'. This in turn rested on Cornwall's location as an industrial region. However, the new co-existed with the old, as other symbols of identity that looked back to

Cornwall's pre-industrial period were grafted onto a sense of regional pride bestowed by industrialisation. Chapter 4 turns from symbols and imagery to the consciousness of the people. Here, we discuss the self-representation of the Cornish at this period, noting that 'Cornishness' can be viewed as a 'nested identity' that co-existed with identities at other scales. Furthermore, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Cornish historians had constructed what might be read as an 'ethnic history', differentiating the Cornish from their neighbours.

The focus then shifts from representations to their context. Chapter 5 identifies the Cornish upper and middle classes and assesses their key role as agents of identity transformation. We argue that industrialisation had produced a distinctively 'Cornish' middle class – the mine agents – but that this group remained subordinate to a merchant bourgeoisie and landed class who maintained their strategic place in the reproduction of ideas of 'Cornwall'. Chapter 6 moves on to the economic context, comparing Cornwall's early industrialisation with the wider industrial 'revolution' in Britain. This review concludes that, while having some aspects in common with other industrial regions, Cornish industrialisation was also markedly different in other respects. Demography and the movement of people is the concern of chapter 7, which describes how intra-Cornish flows of people consolidated the territorial identity in the mid-nineteenth century and how mass emigration produced new differences.

The next two chapters assess other identities that co-existed with and shaped 'Cornishness'. Chapter 8 investigates the social relations of Cornwall in this period and argues that early industrialisation had produced a social compromise that crystallised a proto-industrial society. Relatively independent communities lived and worked in a network of 'dispersed paternalism', reflecting both Cornwall's settlement geography and the persistence of an 'economy of makeshifts' that cushioned communities from the full rigours of market relations. It was the strength of this proto-industrial social compromise that explains the resistance to newer class narratives in the early nineteenth century. Nevertheless, we also see in this chapter how 'traditional' forms were fragmenting from the 1840s and how Cornwall seemed to be converging with other industrial regions.

A central element in this proto-industrial society was a revivalist cottage religion based on Wesleyan Methodism. This is the subject of chapter 9, which asks why Methodism in Cornwall came to be seen as 'Cornish'. We suggest that the institutional structure and the message of Methodism neatly fitted the structures of late eighteenth-century Cornish society, and that revivalism coloured the development of nineteenth-century Methodism in Cornwall, helping to produce a 'folk-religion'. After the 1830s Methodism took its place as part of a more public nonconformist identity.

The concluding chapter reviews the elements of this public territorial identity in the later nineteenth century, showing how a distinctive Cornish identity had been produced in the course of industrialisation. But it also

suggests that the location of this territorial identity alongside discourses of Englishness and Britishness helps us explain why a cultural awareness of 'Cornishness' was not translated at this time into a politicised territorial identity. In this final chapter the study restores continuity between Cornwall's industrial and post-industrial periods, replacing over-simplistic categorisations with a subtler picture of shifting, complex and multi-tiered levels of territorial identity.