

IMAGINED CORNERS TO DEBATABLE LAND: PASSABLE BOUNDARIES

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This paper has become more impressionistic than originally intended. Rather than an academically and scholarly grounded 'objective' exploration of the ideas of gender and national identity as displayed in some twentieth century Scottish women's writing, it seems to have written itself as a circular exploration of the ideas with tangential contributions from some of that writing by women in Scotland. The reason for this is that the twin themes of Scottishness and femaleness have dominated my adult life. They have been my obsessions and my intertwining commitment. Consequently the paper comes out of an intensely personal and political space, in the best women's movement tradition.

The title of the paper is taken from two novels, **Imagined Corners** by Willa Muir, published in 1931, and Candia McWilliam's **Debatable Land**, published in 1994. The titles are emblematic of the kind of inevitably shifting, multi-dimensional perspectives that we find in these and other women's fictions and in any consideration of nation and gender. 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 being constructed by our circumstances and our societies' expectations. Said writes

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in **Culture and Imperialism** of the great many languages, histories and forms that circulate in the cultural discourses of decolonization (p.280). It is this same sense of plurality, circularity and interconnection that occurs in the conflicting discourses of nation, region, gender, sexuality and class. They also provide problematic 'contours' in our 'imagined or ideal community' (Said p.280). His notion of literature and culture 'as hybrid ... and encumbered, or entangled and overlapping with what used to be regarded as extraneous elements' (p.384) also applies to their conflicting demands on our loyalty, creating particular and conflicting demands on our commitment. The question for us here is whether there are particular conjunctions and disjunctions for women in marginal societies between the marginality of our femaleness and of our nation. And whether these multi-dimensional perspectives of nation, region, gender, class and sexuality are in a perpetual state of flux, with oppositions and alliances in constantly shifting relationships, within ourselves and with others.

CONFLICTING DEMANDS

If nationalism is a post-rationalist or enlightenment substitute for religion, with fake-historical roots to legitimise it, as Benedict Anderson argues (1991, p.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 of nationalist muses to the traditionally female poetic muse. Anderson's **Imagined Communities**, 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' (p.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. His five pages of bibliography cites only seven or eight articles or books by women. Is this because we are 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 the 'motherland' or Caithleen ni Houlihan or Britannia. 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, is much closer to an imagined possible saviour for women than Robert the

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Bruce or William Wallace. The historical figures with their acquired heroic and nationalist meanings are intended here, rather than their recent Hollywood manifestations, though the two may well interconnect as male symbols.

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 which constitute our nationness. And there is a persistent maleness in Scottish civic life which 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 was only recently appointed (July 1996), and there have been no female Solicitor Generals or Lord Advocates; there have been no women Moderators of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland or, still less, women priests in the Roman Catholic Church. Finally, to use the word 'emasculate' to refer to what central government has done to local government since 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 (particularly under Margaret Thatcher, and continuing so under John Major) and of senior local government officials, leaders and elected members.

Region, gender, nation, sexuality, class, work, family - all can produce particular and conflicting demands on our loyalties, creating a shifting sense of priorities and commitment. It is clear that women have always had these 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. The 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 then have a double otherness imposed on us, a double marginality. We experience ourselves 'only fragmentarily as waste or as

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excess in the little structured margins of a dominant ideology' (Irigaray 1980, p.104). The dominant ideology for us is both Anglocentric and male with its own complicating inherent conflicts and contradictions.

But experiencing ourselves 'fragmentarily as ... excess in the ... margins of the dominant ideology' can be read as positive. Our experiences overlap, in the same way that Said describes literary experiences overlapping, 'with one another and [are] interdependent, despite national boundaries and coercively legislated national autonomies, [thus] history and geography are transfigured in new maps, in new and far less stable entities, in new types of connections' (1994, p.384). Said's 'global, contrapuntal analysis' (1994, p.386), rejecting 'conceptions of history that stress linear development or Hegelian transcendence' (1994, p.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 1994, p.386). His 'atonal ensemble' (1994, p.386) provides 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 kind of 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 experience them positively. No one on the margins wants to acknowledge being central and those truly of the centre are incapable of recognising their centrality or acknowledging the power of the margins. Our dialogue is not with them but with each other.

THE PARTICULAR AND THE UNIVERSAL

A passage in Hogg's **Confessions of a Justified Sinner** represents the uneasy relationship of class and women's status within the class structure. Published in 1824, Hogg's astonishing novel is a kind of honorary twentieth-century text. The passage concerns the return of Mrs Colwan or Lady Dalcastle to her father's house after she has been raped by her husband, the Laird of Dalcastle, on their wedding night. Her father, displeased to have her back in the house, says:

I mean to be revenged on that villain Dalcastle ... for what he has done to my daughter. Come hither, Mrs Colwan, you shall pay for this ... I shall

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teach him to behave in such a manner to a child of mine, be she as she may: since I cannot get at himself, I shall lounder [beat] her that is nearest to him in life. Take you that, and that, Mrs Colwan, for your husband's impertinence.
(Hogg 1969, p.9)

So he punishes the Laird's wife, as the representative of her husband, for the treatment the Laird has meted out to his daughter, beating the wife/daughter, to the astonishment of the 'poor afflicted woman' (1969, p.10). Lady Dalcastle, passed like a parcel from the bourgeoisie to the petty aristocracy, here represents the slippery, movable class status of women, defined by the class position of the closest male relative. As women can display bilingual characteristics, broad at home, 'polite' at school or work, so we are assumed to have flexibility, and can be educated up, or marry up or down. Chris in Lewis Grassie Gibbon's **A Scots Quair** (1932-34) provides another, if rather mechanistic, example in Scottish literature of a woman moving through the class positions by marriage. While women's class positions may not now be legally as bound to male relatives as in Hogg's or Grassie Gibbon's times, there remains an ambiguity - defined in relation still to husbands and fathers, the male 'property' owners. Men define the class structure and women are fitted into it whether it fits us or not.

As long as maleness is central to the political and national structures, there is a kind of 'Tarzan: he universal' and 'Jane: she particular' mentality with the acceptance of maleness as 'universal-male', while the female is categorised as 'particular-female'. This brings a consequent limitation on the possibility of drawing wide national, if not universal, conclusions from women's fictional behaviour, and the accompanying acceptability of the drawing of national and, at times, universal conclusions from male fictional behaviour. Nan Shepherd reverses and undercuts this in her intensely complex novel, **The Weatherhouse** (1930), exposing the universal as less important, less truly honest, than the particular. In this novel, there is a triumph of the particular over the universal. She explores a version of the male-universal, female-particular dichotomy when the central male character, Garry, is shown pursuing 'splendid generalities' (1988, p.84) at the expense of the specific, in his pursuit of a woman claiming engagement to his dead friend. Enraged by what he feels is her exploitation, sullyng his friend's memory, he denies his motives are personal: 'It was not as a person he wanted Louie punished, but as the embodiment of a disgrace' (p.72). To him, his fight has a universality and he calls the woman who argues against his campaign against Louie 'petty' for imputing an 'ignoble motive to a *clean* fight against falsehood' (p.72). But

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when Louie is exposed as a liar, Garry bitterly regrets the social consequences of his action and the cruelty of its effect on Louie. Reality undermines his certainty. The particularity of the women's responses in the novel to his campaign interrogate Garry's certainty in 'splendid generalities', and provide a critical opposition to the acceptance of a male-universal interconnection.

There is a narrow-mindedness which sees James Kelman's fictions, intensely personal and particular explorations of individual working-class West of Scotland men, as having a universal, or at least national application. This attitude tends to reject Elspeth Barker's **O Caledonia** (1991) 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-boulted altar of womanhood' (1991, p.130) is too gendered for some: 'I don't recognise Scotland here', said Douglas Gifford of **O Caledonia**. But why should the intensely imagined girlhood in the North East of a heroine who is murdered in a castle age 16 be any less emblematic of nationhood than a man who wakes up blind in a prison cell in the West of Scotland (Kelman 1995, p.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 author, critics and readers. Politically working class, male, Glaswegian writers are constructed as more 'authentic' than middle class, female writers in exile - Elspeth Barker having been brought up and educated here, but living her adult life outwith Scotland - 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.

Within Scotland's boundaries there are regional communities demanding a loyalty and recognition as strong as a national commitment. There can be the same shifting perspective of commitment between nation and region as there is between gender and nation. Just as the individual fictional character can be taken to represent Scotland, so can the particular region:

Scottish novelists may construct their narratives as paradigms of a national consciousness, but they generally do so by locating their narrative within strictly demarcated regional boundaries.
(Craig, forthcoming)

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This provides a theoretical justification for the interpretation of the regional novel in Scottish literature as 'national'; it can also 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. 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 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. 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.

INFINITE POSSIBILITIES

Inevitably, one of the areas explored in Scottish women's fiction is the restriction of possibilities within social or political life. **Imagined Corners**, set in the twenties, examines the role of an unmarried sister, confined to housekeeping, with a precarious future when one brother dies and the other is committed to an insane asylum. It also looks at a spinster who runs a shop but has no political or religious outlet open to her talents. These women represent the realities of social position for women that underlie the poisonous gossiping wifey of anti-Kailyard novels. In Morrison's **The Gowk Storm**, exploring the growing up of three sisters in an isolated Perthshire manse, the daughters of the manse are at times imprisoned literally by the weather. One of them, the most rebellious, is locked in by the male villain, to prevent her running away to marry her lover. She breaks the window to escape. The lover is punished with exile for the breaking of his engagement to her friend and the friend's suicide, but her breaking of imprisonment is punished with death by exposure to the unforgiving storm. There is a cow in this novel whose byre is heightened to improve its winter living conditions, and an 'uneven' window is 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

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encrusted beams ... 'Ay, ay, ... he thoct it wouldna be so dull like for the
coo so she can get a keek oot in the winter.'
(1988, pp.41-42)

But despite the improvements and the view, the cow is still chained, still imprisoned. She is a paradigm for the position of women in Scottish society in the twenties and thirties. We could see out from our 'uneven' windows, but could not escape from our constricted worlds.

What is also mapped out in Scottish women's fiction are the infinite possibilities of the imagination: through reading in **O Caledonia**, through education in **The Quarry Wood**, above all through landscape. The possibilities for Willa Muir's central characters are represented in escape through death or through flight from Scotland. The title **Imagined Corners** itself, referring to Donne's

At the round earth's imagined corners, blow
Your trumpets, Angels; and arise, arise
From death, you numberless infinities
Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go
(**Holy Sonnets**, 2 vii),

is talking about Judgement Day. But it is also about the idea of corners that do not exist in reality; powerful corners which may exist in the unconscious, corners of possibility, magical spaces in which unimagined life can take place. At the end of **Imagined Corners**, the two central women, Elizabeth and Elise, leave together for the South of France. The movement south carries with it the suggestion of abandonment of the constrictions of heterosexuality and society in small town Scotland, and of movement for Elizabeth with her 'double' Elise into an open future with wider sexual and emotional possibilities. This is expressed in the image of winter hard-pruned vines:

She had never imagined vines looked like that ... She had imagined
something more lush ... not this dry, bright landscape with those gnarled
little trees, that looked as if they had been maimed and tortured ...
Crippled, like herself.
(1987, p.281)

But what Elizabeth has no idea of is the growth and the flowering in the southern sun that the pruning of the vines ensures; the constriction and

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'maiming' through pruning is essential for abundance. So her own possibilities can flower and expand once freed from the constrictions of her marriage and small town surroundings into the 'dry, bright landscape' of the southern, foreign world.

Landscape in Scotland incorporates light and infinity. In Nan Shepherd's **The Weatherhouse**, prefiguring Muir's title from Donne, we read that

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.
(p.10)

Lindsay, one of the central characters, runs from the Weatherhouse to escape:

The night astonished her, so huge it was. She had the sense of escaping from the lit room into light itself. Light was everywhere; it gleamed from the whole surface of the earth, the moon poured it to the farthest quarters of heaven, round a third of the horizon the sea shimmered ... She ... reaching the crest, saw without interruption to the rims of the world. The matted snow and grass were solid enough beneath her feet, but when she looked beyond she felt she must topple over into that reverberation of light. Her identity vanished. She was lost in light and space.
(p.29)

The imagery of light and infinity permeates the novel, 'the blue sea trembled on the boundaries of space' (p.112), infecting those characters, female and male, who experienced 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. Similarly, in **O Caledonia**, a more recent novel, also set mainly 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 1991, p.33)

It is as though for these young women, the constrictions of earthly life are released by the light and landscape of the North East into the edge of time

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and endless uncharted possibilities, possibilities that were more fractured or constrained in life. Shepherd is most explicit about this conjunction of landscape, light, and Scotland in **The Quarry Wood**. Martha, as a child, 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 rising 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's 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.

(pp. 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'. It is Dussie, who grows up into the pragmatically intelligent wife of Mattie's first love, who wonders what bounds Scotland to the north when the magical lights of the Aurora Borealis have gone. Mattie, 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.

Galloway's **The Trick is to Keep Breathing** (1989) charts different boundaries; 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 truth. I read **The Prophet**, Gide, Kafka, Ivor Cutler. **Gone With the Wind**, **Fat is a Feminist Issue**, Norman

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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. (p.196)

These are the clamouring and clashing discourses found in the cultural artefacts of late twentieth century Scottish women's lives. The '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, p.33) 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 dialects no longer distributed between different characters in the narrative but interiorised in an inner dialectic. (Craig, forthcoming)

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.

POSSIBILITIES FOR CHANGE

Recent Scottish women writers may still react and write out of the inequalities of women's positions, but they can also write much more freely from an assumption of rights and possibilities for change. They write after MacDiarmid's death in 1978, after the 1979 referendum, after the latest resurgence of the women's movement. The MacDiarmid idea or monolith seems a dead end for women and for men too. As Kathleen Jamie has said (1996) in relation to 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.

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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.

The female equivalent to the MacDiarmid monolith has seemed to be Muriel Spark, prolific, isolated, providing a slippery, elliptical and philosophically cunning counterpart to MacDiarmid, both admired or revered, but neither apparently the beginning of a vibrant new tradition. But though Spark has largely been treated as a unique writer, subsumed into the 'English' canon by non-Scottish readers, her themes and preoccupations place her firmly within the Scottish tradition and her inheritors may just now be appearing in the nineties, both Elspeth Barker and Candia McWilliam carrying elements of Spark within their themes and style.

The women writers of the twenties and thirties had little access to an accepted place in the culture. Willa Muir could note the irony of Edwin's quiet attic study while she worked on the ground floor with household traffic all around her (Muir 1968, pp.162-63). She wrote against constricted gender roles in her novels but accepted her own adjunctive position to Edwin the poet. She wrote a second novel, **Mrs Ritchie**, in 1933, then stopped because they did not make money. Nan Shepherd wrote three novels, 1930-33, ending with **A Pass in the Grampians**, then stopped, the novels going out of print. Both they and Nancy Brysson Morrison were implicitly excluded from the Scottish Renaissance, yet they wrote modernist, challenging fiction and were part of the intellectual current of their time. They fell off the edge of the cultural map drawn by men (particularly MacDiarmid) and their works literally disappeared. The reclaiming of these works as part of the body of missing work by women was part of an international search for the sidelined, disappeared, woman writer. **The Quarry Wood** and **Imagined Corners** were republished in 1987 by Canongate Classics, the others later. At the same time, for many years in the department of English Literature at the University of Edinburgh there was only one first year course in Scottish Literature, to the bitter disappointment of students such as Duncan McLean, now a novelist himself. The first woman writer to be included in the course, Muriel Spark, was not introduced until about 1987. The extension of Scottish Literature into a second year course, including a five week module specifically on women's writing, began as recently as 1990, and only in 1993 did the first student graduate with a joint honours degree in English and Scottish Literature. This illustrates clearly how Scottish literature within the literature department of one Scottish University has been as difficult to introduce and incorporate into the curriculum and degree structure as women's writing has been.

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The universalised male centre such as MacDiarmid (or Burns) beloved of traditional Scottish culture, is limiting. The Alasdair Gray model, on the other hand, leaping into multi-life in 1980 with **Lanark**, proved much more fruitful. His ironic and humourous questioning of maleness, West of Scotlandness, his fragmented creations, proved inspirational. As he was stirring up writing, the women's movement was stirring up Scottish society. Post 1979, the work of issue-based women's groups such as Rape Crisis Centres (particularly Edinburgh RCC), Scottish Women's Aid, and 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; irritatingly Anglocentric for Scottish feminists, and US-centric for Canadian feminists. The eighties may have been a time of political constriction after the Tory victory under Thatcher in 1979, but for feminism in Scotland 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 acceptance of the Zero Tolerance campaign of the nineties in Scotland, based on a Canadian model, was built on the work of eighties' feminists.

It is from this background of specific social change, accomplished by women (despite the restrictions of Thatcherism and Majorism), and cultural energy, represented by Gray and Kelman and Liz Lochhead (despite the disappointment of the failure of the 1979 referendum and loss of devolved power from Westminster), that the younger writers like Galloway and Kennedy emerge. The map has been redrawn so that they can 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 drew attention to her feminism and her femaleness when she won the 1994 McVittie Prize. A.L.Kennedy, less overtly political, perhaps, more a writerly writer, writes that she has 'a problem. I am a woman, I am heterosexual, I am more Scottish

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than anything else and I write. But I don't know how these things interrelate' (1995, p.100). To the shifting perspectives of gender, nation and sexuality is added that of the writer, the interrelationships remaining problematic. But in Anderson's phrase, their 'fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality' (1991, p.36). Their writing is essential for the part it plays in contributing to an imagined wholeness in the nation, ensuring that the 'narrative of "identity"' (Anderson, 1991, p.205) of Scotland includes women, allowing for a thinking across boundaries, making them passable boundaries. Their presence allows shifting allegiances in counterpoint to the limiting containment of the earlier static male cultural mode that was the stultifying norm.

There is a constant leap of imagination required of women to read literature by men, with male-centred concerns. In this exploration of issues of nationality and gender in relation to twentieth century Scottish women's fiction, the same kind of imaginative travel is necessary to where gender interacts with nation so that nation cannot be defined as exclusively male or, indeed, either exclusively male or female. Any exploration entitled 'Imagined Corners to Debatable Land' has to be circular, tentative, non-linear; there is no certainty in imagined corners. They are both contained and imaginary; therein lies their power to allow controlled flight into imaginary worlds. Debatable land carries the certainty of border crossings, dispute, debate, contiguity and interaction. These are the lands of thought that are interrogated and fought over. This is Said's 'complex and uneven topography' (1994, p.386), as much about women's space within the nation as about the boundaries of Scotland. These titles and all the novels referred to carry resonances of what is available for women through the shifts of time and place within the nation. Candia McWilliam's hero in **Debatable Land**, because he wished 'not to set an edge to life', has to leave, only to find Scotland 'at the back end of the Pacific' (1994, pp.88 and 215). So also A.L.Kennedy's Margaret in **Looking for the Possible Dance** leaves Scotland. At the end of the novel, having decided to return, she 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, p.250).

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This ending, as all the best endings, shimmers with the possibilities of openness. It is in this shimmering openness that Scottish women's fiction presents to us its relation to gender and nation.

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