School of Politics and International Studies

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

The Politics of the North:
Governance, territory and identity in Northern England

Edited by
Richard Hayton
Arianna Giovannini
Craig Berry

White Rose
university consortium
Universities of Leeds, Sheffield & York

Contents

Acknowledgements

For more information about the WRCN, please see www.wrcn.uk

About the authors

The Editors

Richard Hayton is Associate Professor of Politics at the University of Leeds, and founder of the WRCN network.

Craig Berry is Deputy Director of the Sheffield Political Economy Research Institute (SPERI), at the University of Sheffield.

Arianna Giovannini is a Researcher at the Sheffield Political Economy Research Institute (SPERI), University of Sheffield. She also teaches Politics at the University of Huddersfield.

The Contributors

Tony Collins is Professor of History at the International Centre for Sports History and Culture, De Montfort University.

Howard Elcock is Emeritus Professor of Government, at Northumbria University.

Matthew Flinders is Professor of Politics at the University of Sheffield, and Director of the Crick Centre for the Public Understanding of Politics.

Neil Foster is Policy and Campaigns Officer for the TUC in the Northern and Yorkshire & the Humber regions.

Matthew Jackson is Deputy Chief Executive of the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES).

Michael Kenny is Professor of Politics and Director of the Mile End Institute at Queen Mary, University of London.

Simon Lee is Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Hull.

Neil McInroy is Chief Executive of the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES).

Brenton Prosser is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Crick Centre for the Public Understanding of Politics, University of Sheffield.

Paul Salveson is a visiting professor at the University of Huddersfield and General Secretary of the Hannah Mitchell Foundation.

Mark Sandford is a Senior Research Analyst at the House of Commons Library.

Alex Schafran is a Lecturer in Geography at the University of Leeds.

Zac Taylor is a PhD researcher in Geography at the University of Leeds.

Introduction

Richard Hayton, Arianna Giovannini and Craig Berry

England is, in geographical terms, a relatively small country. At 130,373 square kilometres (50,337 square miles) it is less than a third the size of California, and barely a fifth the size of France. With 54 million people England has a population density of over 400 people per square kilometre, making it one of the most densely populated nations in Europe (ONS, 2013). Major population centres in the North of England, cities such as Hull, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield, are little over two hours by train from the capital, London. Yet at times 'the North' seems a world apart from the metropolis, seemingly inhabiting a radically different political, cultural and economic space. How can this be?

Debate about the North-South divide is a longstanding feature of life in England, and has become commonplace shorthand to explain the 'fractures' that cut across the country. Invariably these discussions rest on definitions of one against the other that are often caricatured and sometimes imagined, but easily recognised and understood by those involved. They run deep in our national psyche. It could even be argued that such tropes, highlighting Northern and Southern differences, are a distinctive trait of English identity. Frequently cited examples include party politics, where the South is portrayed as a Conservative stronghold and the North as Labour's heartland; class (Southern middle versus Northern working) and with it accent and dialect; but also culture and history, geography, landscape and weather.

In his seminal book *Looking North*, Dave Russell (2004) explains in an exemplary way the richness and complexity that surround the idea and the identity of the North of England, and its tight and problematic relationship with the South. The North is often referred to as 'a region'—and yet, it defies a univocal definition, it does not have clearly defined borders (especially towards the South), it does not appear on official government maps, and lacks its own political institutions. But, as is widely accepted, regions are by definition dynamic, shifting and fluid entities, that exist as much on the territory as in the mind of their inhabitants (Paasi, 2000), irrespective of whether or not they have explicit geographical boundaries. The North is no exception to this and, as Russell (2004) argues, it is as much a state of mind as a place. In this sense, the North is made of and constituted by a rich mixture of the discrete meanings associate with a 'real place' and a more abstract representation built on and rooted in social imagery (Shields, 1991). The very idea and meaning of the North, therefore, is not to be found on maps or in official documents, but is socially constructed, and engrained in the way in which people *perceive* and *perform* it as a cultural, social and political space, as part of their everyday practices.

From this perspective, the North can be seen as a 'vast region' – an imagined community made of and constituted by collective values, traditions, beliefs, history, a shared sense of belonging to a distinctive social space and, as Russell (2004) illustrates, even a specific character (proud, hardworking, down to earth, and tough). Such a view of the North as a broad region is rooted within the discourse of the North-South divide – and yet, there is more to it. As Russell (2004, p. 14), once again, aptly reminds us, 'the North has been imagined [and defined, we could add] in various ways according to time, context, subject matter and, crucially, *angle of vision*'. Following this remark, if we shift the focus from a North-South perspective to a view of the North from within, the idea of the North changes and plays the role of an overarching symbolic structure, embracing a number of regional and local identities. Thus, in the context of the North-South divide narrative the North stands as a coherent region, coalescing primarily in its difference from the South, especially in view of

the dominant role of the latter in the national imagination in political and economic terms. But once the 'external other' (i.e. the South, the centre, London) is taken out of the debate, Northerness manifests and defines itself against 'internal others' – showing a wealth of meanings and identities.

Within the North, historical counties like Yorkshire continue to maintain their own distinctive identity and a sense of belonging to what is often defined in popular culture as 'God's own country'. Yet, looking inside Yorkshire, local, city and town dimensions matter too, and are the source of a strong sense of pride and attachment for their inhabitants (Giovannini, 2016). The same is true for regions like the North East, which has historical and cultural roots and a specific sense of distinctiveness (Tomaney, 1999; Giovannini and Willett, 2014), whilst encompassing also idiosyncratic sub-regional identities. The North West is perhaps a more complicated case, in that it is more of a heterogeneous (or artificial, some would argue) region, including big metropolitan areas such as Manchester and Liverpool, with their own historical and cultural heritage, and a mix of counties (Cumbria, Lancashire, Cheshire, Merseyside, Greater Manchester) that were somehow forced into a marriage as a result of successive government's boundary reorganisations.

From within, therefore, the North shows a diversity and richness of meanings and identities, often underpinned by internal rivalries (sport is a clear example that epitomises this). Thus, the North is 'one and many' at the same time – however, this does not make it a less consistent social and cultural space, as internal differences are often based on 'good-natured competition' and 'mitigated by a considerable degree of mutual recognition and respects and a body of shared values' (Russell, 2004, p. 20).

On the base of this, Northerness emerges as a complex and layered identity, which can assume different connotations according to the vantage point from which it is viewed, perceived and experienced. Nor is this all, as the North and its identit*ies* should also be understood as part of a wider sense of English nationhood. Being 'Northern', in all its shades and forms, can be seen as a specific, and perhaps distinctive, way of being English. But one does not necessarily exclude the other. Indeed, as demonstrated in a recent study (Giovannini, 2016), local and regional senses of belonging in the North do play a strong role in defining people's identities, but these are also interlinked with and couched in an overarching sense of Englishness – which may be problematic, and at times perceived as biased towards the South, but is still relevant and meaningful. Although some critics have gone as far as defining the North as 'England's foreign country within' (Taylor, 1993), more recent analyses (e.g. Kenny, 2014) show that the distinctiveness of the North and its regions and localities cannot (and should not) be seen as separated from the national story of England. However, the challenge here remains that of finding a way of making these multi-layered territorial and identity dimensions coalesce in a positive way, going beyond the view that sees the North as subordinated to, and almost as a periphery of, the South.

The complexity inherent to the idea, meaning and identity of the North that has emerged from this short overview is becoming increasingly politically charged. Over the past decades, the North has been the focus of most of the attempts pursued by various parties in government to find a suitable devolution strategy for devolving powers across England. During the years of the last Labour government, the North and its regions were at the forefront of the English devolution agenda – first as part of the referendums on directly elected Regional Assemblies (which eventually failed in 2004), and of the Northern Way strategy for economic regeneration that followed. Although both of these projects eventually folded, the election of a new Conservative-LibDem coalition government in 2010 and of a Conservative government in 2015 have seen the persistence of the North as a 'logical recipient' of devolution. The recent Northern Powerhouse agenda and the signing of City devolution Deals in Manchester, Sheffield and Liverpool are clear signs of this. Within this

frame, it should be noted though that so far all the mainstream parties that have tried to take ownership of the devolution agenda in the North have conceived this from a largely economic and southern-centric perspective, whereby decentralisation of powers is seen as key to unlocking the potential of the North, and enabling it prosper and 'catch up' with the South. Beyond rhetoric, the politics of territorial identity of the North has not played any real role in past and present negotiations, and has been largely dismissed. And yet, perhaps in response to long-standing hyper-centralist governance stances as well as the momentum generated by the Scottish independence referendum, the historical, cultural and social richness that underpins the idea of the North is starting to surface, and for the first time, is being politically mobilised from the grassroots. This is reflected in the growth of civil society groups that call for a democratic, inclusive and sustainable system of real political devolution in the North (for example the Hannah Mitchell Foundation, The Northern Citizens' Convention, 38 Degrees Manchester, We Share the Same Skies Collective) and in the rise of regionalist parties in the North (namely Yorkshire First, the North East Party, and the Northern Party).

All this suggests that the North will continue to take centre stage in the political debate especially in the context of an increasingly devolved UK. Hence, as this collection of essays seeks to explain, the North is bound to face some distinctive and pressing challenges, which require new thinking to address. These encompass three key interrelated strands: political economy, governance and identity.

In relation to the first, what can be done to reverse the widening economic divide between the North and South? The concentration of wealth, better-paid jobs and career opportunities for graduates (particularly outside of the public sector) in and around the capital is bad for the North but fuels problems such as an affordability crisis and shortage of housing in Southern England also. The call by George Osborne (2014) for the creation of a Northern Powerhouse and the City Deals agenda acknowledge the importance of revitalising the economy of the North and creating an alternative to the dominance of London, but needs to be critically examined and developed to ensure it speaks to the needs of the North as a whole, rather than those of Westminster.

Secondly, governance. In the context of devolution to Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and, in the form of the Mayor's office, London, are new constitutional structures required for the effective government of Northern England, and if so what form should these take? Considering the complexity of the North in cultural, political and identity terms as illustrated above, what is the most suitable scale to ensure that devolution in the North flourishes and prompts economic as well as democratic renewal? And how might democratic engagement and accountability be best ensured? Also, how much power should be passed down from the centre, and to what type of bodies?

Related to these questions is the third key strand: identity. To what extent should any new governance structures aim to reflect local and regional identities? Is a strong sense of attachment required to give such bodies legitimacy? Can a pan-Northern identity be harnessed and developed to set aside local differences, and linked, as some have advocated, to a parliament for the North of England as a whole, covering some 20 million people? Or should the focus be placed on Regional Assemblies based on a more organic sense of identity? Or could 'artificial' City Regions work?

The idea of this e-book stems from the need to shine some light on such pressing questions, and the essays in this collection offer a range of perspectives on these. In the first piece, Howard Elcock offers a recap of the recent history of attempts to devolve power in England, with a particular focus on the North East, which became the focal point of efforts to created elected Regional Assemblies in England in 2004. The comprehensive referendum defeat of

that proposal appeared to kill the idea stone-dead, but Elcock argues that regionalism has 'remained the corpse that has refused to lie down'. As he persuasively argues, there is widespread acknowledgement of the need for some form of regional governance structures for the effective functioning of the modern state, even if there is little agreement about what form they should take.

In Chapter 2, Paul Salveson, General Secretary of the Hannah Mitchell Foundation which campaigns for democratic devolution to the North of England and member of the regionalist party Yorkshire First, is positive about the prospects for his cause and argues for an approach built on the creation of powerful elected Regional Assemblies working within the overarching framework of a 'pan-Northern Alliance'. In the following chapter, Simon Lee casts a critical eye over the Northern Powerhouse agenda being pursued by the current government. He argues that this is far from being a 'devolution revolution', but is a political strategy aimed at implicating northern councils in the politics of austerity and sharing the blame for unpopular cuts to public spending. He claims: 'Osborne's plan has meant the devolution of responsibility to current local civic and future mayoral leaders for shrinking the size of the state in Northern England'.

Drawing on a pilot project funded by the ESRC on 'Citizens' Assemblies on Devolution', in Chapter 4 Brenton Prosser and Matthew Flinders report on the findings of 'Assembly North', held in Sheffield in October/November 2015. They convincingly argue that current debates about devolution to the North need to take much more account of democratic, as well as economic concerns. They find that the promise of more democratic input can increase support for devolution, and suggest that in contrast to the City Region mayors model currently being pursued, a Regional Assembly for Yorkshire would carry more support.

In Chapter 5 Neil McInroy and Matthew Jackson of the Centre for Local Economic Strategies argue that inequality and economic centralism need to become the focus of our attention, and that the language of the North-South divide has obscured rather than illuminated the challenges facing the North of England economically. In the contribution that follows Neil Foster of the TUC highlights the role Trade Unions can play as stakeholders in developing new devolved institutions and meeting economic and social challenges in the North.

Turning to the issue of party politics and identity, in Chapter 7 Michael Kenny considers what he aptly defines as 'Labour's English Questions'. He argues that Englishness is not, for most people, separate from, or a rival to, regional or local sense of belonging, and that a feeling of English nationhood is learned and shaped through the lived experience of different places, towns and cities. Thus, Labour should seek to engage with these 'identity questions' going beyond the straitjacket of the North-South divide, and find new ways of appropriating feelings of local solidarity and pride, while connecting them to a wider progressive and patriotic story. Hence, he concludes claiming that, in order to regain support and power, the left needs to champion a more diverse, locally rooted and regionally ranging set of impressions and ideas about England, and its peoples.

Developing on this theme, in Chapter 8 Mark Sandford considers the identity of the still relatively young county of Cumbria, which raises interesting questions about what really holds together a notions of territorial identity, beyond traditional county boundaries – perhaps holding out the prospect of a shared Northern identity sustaining pan-northern political institutions.

In Chapter 9, Tony Collins reflects on Northern culture and identity from the perspective of sport. Whilst illustrating how the sporting North has long been not only a geographical place but a state of mind, he also argues that in the contemporary context the sporting North is increasingly under pressure and in rapid decline. The book closed with a post-scriptum by

Alex Schafran and Zac Taylor, where the two authors offer a cynical and at times sarcastic yet compelling overview of the issues underpinning the emergence of the North of England as a distinctive political space, as seen from the perspective of two 'Yanks', living in, and studying the North.

References

Kenny, M. (2014). *The Politics of English Nationhood*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Giovannini, A. (2016, forthcoming). The Rise of Regionalist Parties in the North of England: the case of Yorkshire First. *Political Quarterly,* Special Issue.

Giovannini, A. and Willett, J. (2014). The uneven path of UK devolution: Top-Down vs. Bottom-Up Regionalism in England – Cornwall and the North-East Compared. *Political Studies*, 62(2), 343-360.

ONS (2013) Main Comparisons: Population and Migration.
Retrieved from http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/compendiums/compendium-of-uk-statistics/population-and-migration/index.html

Osborne, G. (2014). Chancellor: 'We need a Northern powerhouse'. Speech, 23 June, Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester. Retrieved from:
https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chancellor-we-need-a-northern-powerhouse

Paasi, A. (2000). Territorial Identities as Social Constructs. *Hagar: International Social Science Review*, 1(2), 91-113.

Russell, D. (2004). *Looking North: Northern England and the National Imagination*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Shields, R. (1991). *Places on the Margins: Alternative Geographies of Modernity*. London: Routlege.

Taylor, P.J. (1993). The Meaning of the North: England's 'Foreign Country Within'?. *Political Geography*, 12(2), 136-155.

Tomaney, J (1999). In Search of English Regionalism: the Case of the North East. *Scottish Affairs*, 8 (summer), 62-82.

1. Regional identity in the North East: death and re-birth

Howard Elcock

In November 2004 a referendum was held in the North East of England seeking approval for the creation of an elected Regional Assembly there, following the creation of powerful but not elected regional institutions by the Blair Labour Government in 1998. They were the work in particular of John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister, who was a long-standing advocate of regional government for England. These included Regional Chambers and Regional Development Agencies (RDAs). Previously, in 1994 John Major's Conservative government had created Government Offices for the Regions (GOR) whose role was to co-ordinate the work of government departments which had regional responsibilities. These GORs became advocates for their regions in the corridors of Whitehall. The cumulative effect of these reforms was to establish significant machinery for the government of the English regions, which might ultimately lead to the establishment of elected Assemblies in the English regions. Extensive discussions led up to the publication of the White Paper, *Your Region, Your Choice* in 2002, which set out the scheme that failed to win public support in the North East referendum.

The North East was widely identified as having the most distinctive regional identity of any English region (see Parks and Elcock, 2000), so it was assumed that if the idea of elected regional government failed to win popular support there it would fail elsewhere too. In the event, the elected Regional Assembly proposal was rejected by a four-to-one margin and as a result, referendums planned for Yorkshire and the North West were cancelled. After that, the idea of regional government went into eclipse. In 2009 the Regional Chambers set up by the Blair Government in 1998 were abolished as part of the Brown Government's Sub-National Review. The Regional Chambers had introduced a measure of indirect democratic representation to the English regions because between two-thirds and three quarters of their members were councillors delegated by their local authorities to serve on them. The remaining members were the Social, Economic and Environmental Partner (SEEP) members, who were nominated by a wide range of voluntary agencies, environmental pressure groups, universities and others. These SEEP members provided useful expertise and advice to the Chambers and sought to ensure that the many groups of activists that make up civil society could influence regional policy-making. These assemblies were given the task of preparing Regional Spatial Strategies, which was handed over to the 'business led' Regional Development Agencies after the Chambers' abolition, who completed this task without the benefit of advice from elected councillors or the SEEP members. As a result, an important democratic innovation was lost.

The Conservative Party had generally rejected all forms of regional government as a waste of money, although the Heath administration, which considered devolution to Scotland and Wales, was something of an exception to this. The Thatcher administration wasted little time in abolishing the Regional Economic Planning Councils that had been established by Harold Wilson's Labour Government in 1965 as part of its attempt to improve economic planning in Britain. Regional institutions have repeatedly fallen victim to Conservative beliefs in minimal, cheap government with very limited powers to intervene in the nation's economy. When the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government took office in May 2010 the Coalition Agreement promised the rapid abolition of the Regional Spatial Strategies. Although the Coalition Agreement provided for the retention of Regional Development Agencies 'in areas where they are popular' (Coalition Agreement, 2010, p. 9), RDAs were rapidly swept away by the Communities and Local Government Secretary, Eric Pickles, regardless of public and business opinion that was in favour, for example, of retaining the North East's RDA, One

North East. The Government Offices for the Regions followed soon after. The regional government machinery created in the 1990s was disbanded without any consideration either of public opinion or possible adverse consequences, as an act of ideological commitment. For instance, regional government institutions were needed to prepare regional strategies as bids for European Union Structural and Social Funds. The absence of regional institutions in the United Kingdom at the time of the EU's reform on its Structural Funds in 1989 led EU officials in the Commission's Regional Affairs Directorate to press for the creation of a regional body that could prepare a regional bid for these funds because no suitable body existed at the time (Elcock, 1997). After the abolition of the RDAs and GORs, regionalism looked dead in the water but the Coalition Government then created Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) whose role was, in part, to replace the RDAs in promoting and planning for regional economic development, although the resources allocated to them were small compared to those that had been available to the former RDAs.

At this stage the former North East GOR region was split into two. The North East LEP covers a huge area from the Scottish border down to the Southern boundary of County Durham and delimited by the Pennine chain to its west. It contains seven local authorities. Its board consists of nine business leaders, the seven local authority leaders and two representatives of higher and further education. A separate Tees Valley LEP covers Darlington, Middlesbrough, Stockton on Tees, Hartlepool and Redcar and Cleveland. Teesside relished being freed from the dominance of Newcastle as the 'capital of the North' and are unlikely to agree to the restoration of the former North East region. The LEPs have prepared economic strategies but the development of the North East LEP was held up by a dispute over whether its Chief Executive should be paid a £150,000 salary: the business representatives were in favour but the political leaders firmly resisted this remuneration, which they regarded as exorbitant.

Over the last couple of years a second set of regional government institutions has emerged in the form of Combined Authorities (CAs), under which the local authorities in the North East and Tees Valley LEP areas have come together to form joint authorities. This has been the North Eastern response to the Government's 'Northern Powerhouse' initiative, under which local authorities who form Combined Authorities are to be given extra powers and resources in the fields of transport, economic development, further education and planning. They are required by central government to create elected mayors to assume overall control over the CA's policy-making and other governmental responsibilities but this proposal has run into stiff resistance in the North East, with its memories of the autocratic if often beneficent leadership of T. Dan Smith as Leader of Newcastle City Council and then as Chairman of the Northern Economic Planning Council (see Foote-Wood, 2010). Also, these regional 'metro mayors' will not be accountable to an elected council, unlike the elected mayors created under the 2000 Local Government Act and subsequent legislation. Although the CAs are required by law to establish an Overview and Scrutiny Committee, whose task will be to hold the mayor to account. The North East CA was quickly established in 2014 and is led by the Leader of Durham County Council, Councillor Simon Henig, but the Teesside CA has been slower to develop.

The formation of the North East CA (NECA) was assisted by the fact that all but one of the seven councils involved are controlled by the Labour Party, which also governs the one authority where they did not quite achieve control (Northumberland County Council). They formed the LA7 Leadership Board in 2013, which grew into NECA. Since 2009 all the local authorities in the wider North East region have been unitary authorities responsible for administering all local government functions in their area, after Northumberland and County Durham achieved unitary status under the Brown government's 'invitation' to councils to apply for unitary status (See Elcock, Fenwick and McMillan, 2010). Their average population is 232,000. Nonetheless, a new and increasingly vibrant regional system of government and

governance is now developing, albeit that it is largely concerned with functional issues of economic development rather than with promoting and developing the region's culture and identity, which was an important strand in the campaign that led to the holding of the 2004 referendum. The North East Combined Authority initially showed little interest in environmental issues but has come under pressure from the Regional Group of the Campaign to Protect Rural England and other environmental lobby groups to do so.

Hence, despite the repeated determination of the Conservative Party to destroy regionalism in all its forms, this is the corpse that has refused to lie down. It appears that there is a need under modern conditions for a level of meso-government intermediate between national governments and local authorities that cannot be denied. One reason is the increasing importance of regional government in the European Union, where in other member states the 'Europe of the Regions' has developed in terms of regional influence on EU policy-making and resource allocation notwithstanding its hesitant, two steps forward one step back progress in England. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the other three nations that make up the United Kingdom, have all achieved their own forms of devolved government. A second reason why meso-government has become essential is that regions are useful areas for strategic planning, because they encompass a wide variety of communities and interests (see Elcock, 2003). Ultimately it seems that all political parties have to accept the necessity of regional government and governance as an essential part of the machinery of the modern state.

References

Elcock, H. (1997). The North of England and the Europe of the Regions: or When is a Region Not a Region? In M. Keating and J. Loughlin (Eds.), *The Political Economy of Regionalism* (pp.422-436). London: Frank Cass.

Elcock, H. (2003). Networks, Centres and Peripheries: Strategic Planning in a European State. *Regional & Federal Studies*, 13(3), 44-65.

Elcock, H., Fenwick, J. & McMillan, J. (2010). The Reorganisation Addiction in Local Government: Unitary Councils for England. *Public Money & Management*, 30(6), 331-338.

Foote-Wood, C. (2010). *T Dan Smith: 'Voice of the North': Downfall of a Visionary*. Bishop Auckland: Northern Writers.

Parks, J. and Elcock, H. (2000). Why Do Regions Demand Autonomy? *Regional and Federal Studies*, 10 (3), 87-106.

2. Will the North rise again?

Paul Salveson

> *I'm Joe Totale*
> *The yet unborn son*
> *The North will rise again*
> *The North will rise again*
> *Not in 10,000 years*
> *Too many people cower to criminals*
> *And government crap*
> *The estates stick up like stacks*
> *The North will rise again*
> *Look where you are*
> *Look where you are*
> *The future death of my father*

Fans of The Fall will recognise Mark E Smith's song from the early-1980s. Smith was a bitter man singing about bitter times: Thatcher, the miners' strike, Ireland. Smith was a sort of a precursor for a new, radicalised sense of Northern-ness which has taken a long time to find political expression. Perhaps it's beginning to, but it is far from clear how Northern regionalism will evolve. The Northern Powerhouse is a very clever piece of political positioning by George Osborne but it should not be dismissed as just cynical politicking. We need to capture some of the momentum behind the 'Powerhouse' idea and propel it in a more democratic direction. I would argue that needs distinct Northern regionalist parties who are not tied to the interests of London-centric political elites. But it also needs a flowering of non-aligned lobbies.

At the 2015 general election a number of regionalist parties stood parliamentary candidates. The North East Party and Yorkshire First averaged around 1 to 1.5 per cent of the vote, whilst The Northern Party, standing in some Lancashire seats, got a much smaller share. At a very local level, both the North East Party and Yorkshire First have scored parish council victories, and Yorkshire First has been getting between 7 and 10 per cent in the few district council by-elections it has contested. Despite small votes in what was seen as a closely-fought general election, regionalist parties are beginning to have an impact. Yet it is looking more like a Yorkshire or North East regionalism than a Northern one. It is surprising that a revived Lancashire identity hasn't found political expression but it may yet come.

So let's look at the politics of Northern regionalism. The Hannah Mitchell Foundation was formed just over five years ago, with a group of mostly Labour activists meeting in a Sowerby Bridge pub. We wanted to build a cross-party campaign for a Northern regional parliament, echoing the desires of Campaign for the North some 30 years earlier, ironically based in nearby Hebden Bridge but largely Liberal in its political inspiration, though having life-long Labour activists like Glyn Ford among its number. The North has a strong resonance and it is probably getting stronger. But we all know that people have multiple identities and what Northern regionalists haven't fully resolved is whether 'the region' is the North as a whole, with its 15 million people embracing the North East, Yorkshire and the Humber and the North West. My original vision, in the early days of the Hannah Mitchell Foundation, was to go beyond the campaigns for Yorkshire, North East and North West Assemblies of 2004 (remember the ill-fated referendum for a North East Assembly?) and fight for a pan-Northern approach.

Recently, John Prescott argued for just such a body. He wrote in *The Independent on Sunday*:

> The North fails to punch its weight because it lacks one strong voice and an authority that puts the North first. Even now, devolution is being pushed on the North by government and it is not coherent. For instance, the new Transport for the north doesn't even cover all of the North. For growth to spread across the north, Councils need to work together not against each other, especially when it comes to strategic planning and improving transport. The North East, North West and Yorkshire and the Humber have 15 million people – three times as many as Scotland – with an economy worth more than £200billion a year. So let's have a body that sees all three areas working together as a super region – The North – on economic development, housing and transport. Just like they've been doing in London for nearly 15 years. (*Independent on Sunday*,14 November 2015).

There is much sense in what Prescott is saying though it is unclear if he is actually advocating a directly-elected Assembly for the North or a grouping of local authorities. The implication is the former, which would sit with his earlier ambitions for elected assemblies for the three Northern regions.

At this point, we need to consider political and cultural factors. In Yorkshire, but also in the North East, there is a strong sense of regional identity, which operates primarily on a cultural level. Many people see themselves as first and foremost Yorkshire (hence the party's name, 'Yorkshire First') and Northern, English or British after. The North East has a similarly vibrant sense of identity and one wonders what the outcome of a referendum for a North East Assembly now, 11 years on from the humiliating defeat of Prescott's modest (perhaps far too modest) proposals? Over a decade later we have seen the success of devolution in neighbouring Scotland and further hammer blows to the region's industrial base, the most recent being the closure of the steel plant at Redcar.

In Yorkshire, the vast majority of people have been excluded from the debate about the government's devolution proposals. However, a recent 'Citizens' Assembly' held in Sheffield (see chapter 4), came up with some interesting conclusions. Over two weekends of discussion and debate, the 31 participants – drawn as a broadly representative sample from Sheffield, Barnsley, Rotherham and Doncaster in response to an invitation by polling company YouGov – decided in favour of 'democratic devolution', supporting in their deliberation the creation of a directly elected Assembly for Yorkshire, and claiming for stronger powers for the area to include some tax-setting and stronger leverage over issues such as transport infrastructure, economic development and education. In many ways it was a remarkable result, given the lack of support for the idea among most local government leaders in Yorkshire, and political elites in London.

Admittedly the sample was small, even allowing for YouGov's best efforts to get a representative cross-section of people in South Yorkshire. Yet it chimes with my own gut feeling that given a choice, people in Yorkshire would opt for an elected Assembly covering their region, with a fairer voting system. The same goes for the North East. The North West is a more difficult region given that it is a forced marriage of Lancashire, Cumbria and Cheshire. Merseyside has its own very distinct identity. Despite being drastically reduced in size through local government re-organisation (notably the Wilson Government reforms following the Redcliffe-Maud Report of 1969), there remains a strong sense of Lancashire identity in what is now Greater Manchester and perhaps to a degree on Merseyside. Again it is a hunch, but if 'The Northern Party' had stood as 'The Lancashire Party' last May, their vote would have been considerably higher, even allowing for their very limited resources – a problem that all the regionalist parties in the North faced.

So does that mean regionalists should abandon a Northern vision and just plough their own Yorkshire, North East and North West furrows? I don't think so. In the area of transport there is already the emergence of a pan-Northern body, Transport for the North (TfN), supported by Rail North which will ultimately have responsibility for the Northern and TransPennine Express franchises. TfN's democratic oversight is pitifully weak, overseen by a consortium of 30 local authorities. With such a plethora of political interests, the only real decisions will be made by the senior officers with the token involvement of a handful of politicians from the major conurbations, indirectly-elected of course, with very little democratic mandate.

The alternatives are fairly obvious. It could be argued that a directly-elected Northern Parliament could provide direct oversight of Transport for the North, though I would say the political obstacles in its way are probably (for now) insurmountable. However, far better to have a consortium of three rather than thirty, with elected representatives of the three regions forming a transport committee which provides governance for 'Transport for the North'. The same could potentially apply to other areas, including health, higher education and strategic economic development. Just as there are many things which are best delivered at a local level, there are quite a lot of functions which are 'regional' and would be well served by Assemblies for Yorkshire, the North East and North West. But there is considerable scope for working together as part of an alliance which could really drive the Northern Powerhouse concept in a way it never will as currently conceived.

Yorkshire First, the North East party and The Northern Party are already working together and sharing ideas. Relationships are friendly and supportive. Yorkshire First's recent conference had the leader of the North East party, Hilton Dawson, as its guest speaker along with a representative of the European Free Alliance. Northern regionalism is deeply pro-European and offers an alternative to the narrow Anglo-centric prejudices of UKIP and much of the Conservative Party. The beginnings of a 'Northern Alliance' are there already but it needs to stretch out and involve members of the established parties too. That will involve some challenging discussions, but the argument for democratic devolution will only be won, particularly in the Labour Party, if challenged by independent regionalist parties taking votes off them.

The vision of a resilient democratic North will not just be won by political parties. The growth of non-party groups like Hannah Mitchell Foundation, the Campaign for Devo-Manc, Unlock Democracy and the emerging Same Skies Collective in Yorkshire offer what is arguably a more inclusive and non-sectarian Northern vision than formal political parties. I would say you need both.

We are in a rapidly changing political landscape. Scotland is moving closer and closer to independence and that will have implications for Wales. A British withdrawal from the EU could have huge implications for our politics which we have yet to grasp. But if Scotland does leave the UK and Britain exits the EU, that will create huge pressures within England itself particularly between the North and London/the South East. Could we start to see not just the break-up of the UK but the division of England itself in the next 20 years? It is not a scenario I would welcome, but it could be the consequence of this current government's policies. The progressive alternative is democratic federalism with 'devo-max' in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, working with devolved English regions in which the iron grip of the City of London is broken.

So how to move forward? The various organisations campaigning for democratic devolution in the North each have their own niche but we need to get some agreement on core messages. The idea of a Northern Citizen's Convention that is genuinely non-aligned and inclusive, coming up with some agreed basic principles, would be a very good start. The North will rise again and, as Mark E Smith hoped, in less than 10,000 years.

3. The 'devolution revolution'

Simon Lee

From the Venerable Bede in the eighth century to the pamphleteers of the English Civil Wars, through the Chartists, trades unionists, and Rochdale Pioneers of the nineteenth century, and the suffragettes of the early twentieth century, the people of the North of England have made a rich and often vital contribution to key developments in both England's national and local political and institutional identities. They have also played a major role in the development of the party political expression of liberalism, conservatism, and socialism in England.

This rich tradition of political thought, engagement, active citizenship and frequent non-conformity, has often been galvanised by exclusion from important questions of political representation. Given this history, it is notable that both the 'devolution revolution' unleashed by George Osborne's Northern Powerhouse, and the reaction to and implementation of it by political and business elites in the North of England, have manifested a shared process of popular democratic exclusion.

On the one hand, Osborne's 'devolution revolution' has maintained the neo-liberal 'developmental market' tradition initiated by Margaret Thatcher and Sir Keith Joseph, with its preference for devolving power to markets and corporations, and individuals as entrepreneurs and consumers, rather than to directly elected institutions, and individuals as citizens.

On the other hand, technocratic champions of Northern civic renaissance from Lord Michael Heseltine to Lord Jim O'Neill of Gatley, now Commercial Secretary to the Treasury (but formerly chair of the Cities Growth Commission) and prime mover of the Northern Powerhouse, have preferred to devolve power to expert bodies and executive mayors, rather than elected parliaments, assemblies or councils. Their technocratic pragmatism has conceived of English devolution as a series of elite-to-elite negotiations or 'deals', bypassing the English demos.

Where mass public participation (especially among the young) in the devolution referendum of the 11 September 1997 and the independence referendum of the 18 September 2014 was celebrated on all sides as an expression of a civic national Scottish identity, in the case of the 'devolution revolution' for the North of England, the opportunity to forge new politico-institutional identities has been deliberately avoided.

Less than a year after his 23 June 2014 personal political epiphany and discovery of the Northern Powerhouse, Osborne revisited Manchester on the 14 May 2015 to claim 'We've put the Power into Northern Powerhouse', and duly promised: 'a revolution in the way we govern England' (Osborne, 2015). Barely three years after nine out of ten referendums in English cities had rejected directly elected mayors, that 'revolution' would now take the form of a 'one-size-fits-all' elected, executive mayor model for English governance: 'a single point of accountability: someone they elect, who takes the decisions and carries the can' (Osborne, 2015).

Osborne's contradictory further statement: 'I will not impose this model on anyone. But nor will I settle for less' (Osborne, 2015) laid bare the 'deal or no deal' political realities of governance by Treasury diktat, and the ambition of the Viceroy of England. There would be no alternative to his centralised prescription.

The efficient, functional management of English territory, itself divided into administrative regional economic spaces, and in accordance with the technocratic principles of agglomeration and scale, has subordinated vital questions of local political identity and democratic voice, participation, accountability and legitimacy which have tended to surround questions of governance elsewhere. As I have argued elsewhere, it has amounted to 'sham devolution' (Lee, 2015).

Northerners are not indifferent to the potential advantages of devolution, but they have been kept in the dark by an elite-to-elite policy-making process. When the BBC commissioned a ComRes opinion poll on public awareness of the Northern Powerhouse, it found that no fewer than 44 per cent of those asked had never heard of the term, while a further 20 per cent had heard of, but knew nothing about it (ComRes, 2015). However, the same poll also disclosed that more than 82 per cent of those questioned agreed that local politicians in the North of England, rather than MPs at Westminster, should have control over services such as health and transport (ComRes, 2015).

This latter finding reflected the trend in surveys of English public opinion from the polls which accompanied John Prescott's aborted elected Regional Assemblies' initiative between May 2002 and November 2004, to the recent The Future of England Survey (Cox and Jeffrey, 2014). Such polls have consistently demonstrated strong public support throughout England not only for devolution to English local government, but also the principle of 'English Votes for English Laws' (EvfEl), as well as a reform of the archaic Barnett Formula for the territorial allocation of public expenditure (Lee, 2015).

In terms of its implications for governance, the Northern Powerhouse has done nothing to dismantle the 1293 statutory duties imposed on English local government, identified in June 2011 by Greg Clarke, the then Minister for Decentralisation. Nor have the 'deals' negotiated between the Treasury and local authorities in the North of England served to mitigate the fiscal constraints, political risks and policy challenges entailed in Osborne's 'devolution revolution', whose magnitude only became apparent with the publication of the Spending Review in November 2015. This has detailed a further 24 per cent real terms cut in central government funding for English local government by 2020-21, including a phasing out of the redistributive Revenue Support Grant. Resource Departmental Expenditure Limits for English local government will have been cut by 56 per cent during a decade of austerity.

In substantive policy terms, Osborne's 'devolution revolution' has meant the devolution of responsibility to current local civic and future mayoral leaders for shrinking the size of the state in Northern England. It constitutes nothing less than a revolution in the political economy of the public sphere in the North.

It is also important to reflect upon the nature of the 'deals' negotiated between the Treasury and local authority representatives in the North of England, when compared with 'deals' done by the Treasury with others elsewhere. On the 23 October 2015, the deal agreed between the Treasury and the North East Combined Authority Leadership Board included the commitment:

> The deal would enable the Combined Authority to create an Investment Fund focused on supporting the North East to compete in international markets, worth up to £1.5 billion, with an initial allocation of revenue funding for capital financing of at least £30 million a year for 30 years. The incoming Mayor would also have the option, with business support, to raise up to a further £30 million a year through a business rate supplement' (HMT/NECA, 2015: 2).

It should be remembered that annual identifiable public expenditure for public services in 2013-14 in real terms (outturn) for the North East of England administrative region was

£25,347 million (HMT, 2015, Table 9.3, 117). Consequently, the cost to the Treasury of agreeing this 'deal' was a measly 0.1 per cent of total annual identifiable spending on public services.

This could scarcely be described as a revolution in the devolution of political or fiscal responsibility, especially when compared with the terms and scale of the Treasury's 'deal' with Chinese and French largely state-owned corporations to build the Hinkley Point C nuclear power station. That 'deal' has provided £2 billion of guarantees to China General Nuclear Corporation and China General Nuclear Corporation. Furthermore, for a duration of 35 years, the Strike Price for energy generated by Hinkley Point C has been set at £89.50/MWh (or £92.50 if the final investment decision on Sizewell C is not taken), more than twice the existing wholesale electricity price, and fully indexed to the Consumer Price Index. Moreover, the Cameron government has confirmed 'it is not continuing the 'no public subsidy policy' of the previous administration' (DECC, 2015). Thus, while the Treasury has been prepared to grant only a highly limited degree of financial or political autonomy to local government in the North of England, it has been prepared to make a far larger and longer term financial and political investment in a project involving foreign, largely state-owned corporations.

Questions concerning the government of England, and in particular the government of the North of England, should not be reduced to technocratic questions of the efficient and functional management and administration of territory. Nor should the government of England be reduced to a series of 'deals', drawn up in secret between Treasury officials and local civic elites, without the active participation and democratic legitimation by referendum of the citizens of the North.

With the passing of the 800th anniversary of the signing of Magna Carta, in lieu of authentic devolved government, and a democratic and political identity for the North of England, the most that George Osborne 'devolution revolution' has been able to offer the North's local government elites is shared ownership of the responsibility for implementing the policy consequences of his fiscal Charter for Budget Responsibility, and the target of a £10.1 billion surplus on public sector net borrowing by the end of 2019-20.

References

ComRes (2015). *BBC 'Northern Powerhouse' Study: 21st-29th October 2015.* London: Comres.

Cox, E. and Jeffrey, C. (2014). *The Future of England: The Local Dimension.* London: IPPR.

DECC (2015). Hinkley Point C to Power Six Million Homes. London: Department of Energy and Climate Change News Release, 21 October.

HM Treasury (2015). *Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses, Cm.9122.* London: HMSO.

HMT/NECA (2015). *North East Devolution Agreement.* London: Her Majesty's Treasury and North East Combined Authority.

Lee, S. (2015). The Condition of England under The Coalition. In M. Beech and S. Lee (Eds.), *The Conservative-Liberal Coalition: Examining The Cameron-Clegg Government.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Osborne, G. (2015). On Building a Northern Powerhouse. Speech delivered at the Victoria Warehouse, Manchester, 14 May 2015.

4. The Northern Powerhouse project must bring democracy out of the shadows

Brenton Prosser and Matthew Flinders

In this chapter, we consider the northern economic powerhouse project and its associated devolution deals to argue that any model of governance that does not take the people with it is unlikely to take hold, which may in turn undermine any economic benefits. This argument is based on a comparison of key elements of a statement made by the Chancellor with outcomes drawn from a Citizens Assembly held in South Yorkshire in late 2015. In particular, we argue the outcomes of this Assembly show that when given appropriate support and opportunity, citizens are able to recognise rhetoric, contest taken for granted assumptions, and engage rigorously in contemporary governance issues. What they challenge is the cynical view that citizens are not interested, willing or able to engage in complex debate, as well as the mistaken assumption that economic benefits will always trump democratic benefits in the minds of the public. We conclude by arguing that public consultation is not an obstruction to governance reform, rather, bringing the democratic potential of devolution out of the shadows can contribute to economic initiatives taking root, blossoming and growing. In short, we argue that what the Citizen Assembly's members recognised, even if their leaders did not, was that the potential 'feet of clay' for the proposed Northern giant is a failure to embrace both democratic and economic foundations.

About Assembly North

The Democracy Matters project[1] held two pilot Citizen Assemblies in Sheffield and Southampton in 2015. The election of a majority Conservative government earlier that year had moved the political and policy focus to devolution deals with English regions. The two Assemblies sought to involve citizens in learning, deliberation, and decision-making around this focus. In particular, the announcement of a Sheffield City Region Deal meant that the Assembly North pilot became a timely opportunity to examine the Deal and feed responses into the proposed public consultation.

Assembly North drew citizens from the South Yorkshire local authority areas of Sheffield, Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham. The objective was to have 45 randomly-selected participants to fill various socio-demographic characteristics (including gender, age and ethnicity). Due to data protection laws and external recruitment provider policy, it was not possible for the project team to use conventional retention strategies. Although 45 people indicated an intention to attend prior to the event, 32 people presented on the first morning of the first event, of which 31 also attended the second event.

Assembly North applied three phases (learning, deliberation, and decision) over two weekends. It included sessions that were a mix of small group discussion, whole group plenaries and formal presentations. It also used a range of pedagogical strategies to engage members and support deliberative processes. The Assembly adopted a range of strategies that included interactive plenaries, group simulations, advocate Q&As and expert 'speed dating' with small groups. On the final weekend, the Assembly members took a number of votes. The outcome of these votes revealed that:

1. There was not support for the proposed Sheffield devolution deal in its original form;
2. There was support for negotiation to strike a devolution deal that was responsive to public consultation and better represented the interests of the Sheffield City Region;
3. There was a longer-term desire for local governance to be arranged around a Yorkshire and Humber Regional Assembly.

However, the lessons from Assembly North were not limited to the outcomes of these votes. The discussions leading up to these votes also offer important insights into the views of these citizens on devolution as part of a broader Northern Powerhouse strategy.

The Powerhouse: advocacy and assumptions

In his first post-election advocacy of a Northern Powerhouse, the Chancellor George Osborne drew on four foundational ideas: northern identity, city collaboration, elected mayors and devolved power (Osborne, 2015). Each of these elements were presented as important and co-dependent. While collaborations and elected mayors would strengthen cities economically, this would be facilitated by more flexibility through devolved powers, and, at the same time, allegiances of Northern identity would motivate future collaboration and strength. On the surface, this appears to be a compelling argument, but let us take a moment to examine some of the assumptions within.

A key element of the Chancellor's speech was that the 'devolution revolution' was an important solution. 'We've caught the imagination of a nation looking for new answers', he claimed. However, it is important to note that historical changes in the governance arrangements of the United Kingdom have been incremental, sometimes replicated, and rarely end solutions. Often they have been quick political fixes to constitutional challenges. Or to put this another way, what was evident amongst the Assembly members was a distrust of short-term solutions – they had been down that path before.

In fact, the outcomes of Assembly North revealed that members had developed a sound grasp of governance history and contemporary politics. In calling for better devolution arrangements now, they were sensitive to a pragmatic need to respond to current governance challenges. But by calling for a broader Regional Assembly with wider powers, they sought future enhancements to democracy and decision-making. Importantly, this also showed a willingness to go outside conventional views that the failure of Regional Assemblies in the north East removed them as an option, as well as a belief that the current agenda for devolution is not the solution, just another evolution.

Another element of Osborne's initial speech was his use of an architectural metaphor to advocate economic revitalisation. 'This building has a proud heritage...', he proclaimed, 'the story of this building, its evolution and its success, is echoed in towns and cities across the north of England'. Implicit within this statement was the notion that a powerful Northern identity would provide a driver for change. However, scholars working within identity theory note that identities are multiple, fluid and contextual, while the prioritisation of one identity over others says more about the interests of the labeller than the views of the labelled. This suggests that there may be limitations in the reification of any one identity (such as 'English', 'Northerner' or 'Yorkshire') as a unifying category to predict or shape human action.

Within the Assemblies, members shifted between a range of identity categories (including class, gender and ethnicity, as well as industry, business, local and parish member) according to the topic being discussed. Further, they shifted between what were contested and at times contradictory identities without an apparent sense of dissonance. Or to put it another way, identities are just as often shifting memes as they are definitive associations. This demonstrates that it should not be assumed that Northern identity can provide a stable and motivating concept that is strong enough to drive and sustain significant economic change.

Finally, in his speech the Chancellor also drew on notions of collaboration as a pathway to economic success. What is needed, in his words, was to 'bring those cities together – and the whole will be greater than the parts'. However, he also emphasised the importance of

city-wide elected mayors as a 'new, elected champion to represent it and promote it to the rest of the world.' Yet within these two claims there are notions of both co-operation and collaboration, which was also a contradiction noted in discussion by Assembly members.

The idea of an elected mayor was rejected by the Citizen Assembly, not only because of a view that it was being forced on combined authorities, but also because the city-level model was not deemed adequate. Importantly, the interest amongst members in a Yorkshire and Humber Regional Assembly was not based just on allegiance to a Yorkshire or Northern identity, it was made equally on economic grounds. Members did not believe that South Yorkshire alone had the size, infrastructure and access to ports to be able to attract international business and to rival the global economic centre that is London. In short, they echoed the Chancellor's argument that cities needed to be brought together and cooperate, but believed that a larger region was a more likely avenue of success than elected mayors who may lead to competitive (rather than collaborative) regionalism.

Concluding remarks

A recent study (Lyall, Wood and Bailey, 2015) counted the number of references by central government, local government, think-tanks, and civil society groups to different discourses in the devolution debate between 2011 and 2015. It found an overriding focus on economic growth, while debate on devolution placed less emphasis on the democratic transformations that could make devolution worthwhile. While the evidence for a focus on economic benefits remains at best inconclusive (Public Accounts Committee, 2015), what this suggests is that officials believe that the public will be most persuaded by promises of economic growth. Such views have been seen most recently in 'grab for cash' arguments put by civic leaders to justify the race to announce devolution deals with the Chancellor and the curtailing of public consultation processes so that additional funding can be invested quickly. It is not surprising, given this established link between devolution and economic arguments, that the northern economic powerhouse would come to be associated with devolution.

What this does not tell us, however, is if the public share these views. The outcomes of Assembly North would suggest that while citizens are aware of economic imperatives, they are not persuaded by economy before all else arguments. Instead, they demonstrated interest in the democratic potential of devolution. What this also shows is that the assumption by political elites that citizens are not interested, willing or able to engage in complex governance issues is not only inaccurate, but that even a relatively small Citizen Assembly can evaluate public statements to spot short-term fixes to long-term constitutional challenges, question the capacity of identity to drive economic renewal and identify contradictions in the debate about devolution.

It is the beyond the scope of this chapter to analyse each of these insights in depth, just as it is to assess whether what is on the table are 'new partnerships' rather than 'devolution deals' (for a more detailed account, see Flinders and Blunkett, 2016). However, what the Assembly North pilot does demonstrate is that greater public involvement is not an obstruction to reform, rather, a greater emphasis on democratic activity can uncover strong support for further devolution over the longer-term (when inclusive of public consultation and better addressing the interests of those it represents). Hence, the challenge ahead for civic leaders is working with their communities to put down the deep roots a new city region will need in order to flourish. In other words, devolution needs to be *a democratic region* in which the gap between the governors and the governed reflects the principles and aims of devolving power in the first place.

References

Flinders, M. and Blunkett, D. (2016, forthcoming). Devolution, Evolution, Revolution …Democracy? What's Really Happening to English Local Governance?. *Political Quarterly*, Special Issue

Lyall, S, Wood, M & Bailey, D. (2015). Democracy: the missing link in the devolution debate. London: New Economic Foundation.
Retrieved from: http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/entry/democracy-the-missing-link-in-the-devolution-debate

Osborne, G. (2015). Chancellor on building a northern powerhouse. Speech 14 May, Manchester Victoria Warehouse.
Retrieved from: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chancellor-on-building-a-northern-powerhouse

Public Accounts Committee (2015). City deals highlight need for clear accountability in devolution. Parliament.uk – reports, 11 November.
Retrieved from: http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/public-accounts-committee/news-parliament-2015/wave-one-city-deals-report-published-15-16/

Endnotes

[1] A collaboration between the University of Sheffield, University of Southampton, University College London, the University of Westminster and the Electoral Reform Society.

5. Inequality knows no compass points: questioning the North-South divide

Neil McInroy and Matthew Jackson

For decades, the North-South divide has driven England's approach to economic development policy and addressing economic inequality. We would argue that inequality goes far beyond narrow geographical debates and the economy. Inequality in England is maturing, it is a land of the local haves and have-nots, and the divides are deepening across economic, social and democratic themes. The problem is not North versus South – inequality knows no compass points.

There is nothing new about economic imbalances in the UK. Today, there remains a looming economic gap between London and the rest (London and the South East now account for 36 per cent of total GVA). However, London also has over 600,000 children are living in poverty – 12 per cent above the national average (NPI, 2015). Furthermore, the regional divide is widening as is the divide within regions and at a faster pace than elsewhere in Europe.

The North-South debate has a long history. Successive governments have struggled with solutions to this grossly un-balanced economy. From the Barlow Commission in 1940 (HLG27, 1940), through Beveridge (1942), the industrial policies of Labour's Wilson government, and the last 30 years of economic development policy and regeneration activity, there have been successes, but policy has broadly failed to end economic divides and the longstanding disparities of economic and social disadvantage.

The Northern Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and the Northern Way spent a decade (up to their abolition in 2010) trying to bridge the economic output gap between London, the South East and the rest of England. In attempting to bridge this gap, the RDAs documented a range of economic problems within their regions and in the North more specifically. However, the weight of evidence they amassed merely created a regional and Northern English frame for the problems. They were unsurprisingly focused on what the region and pan-Northern England interventions could do, but were fettered by what the UK centralised economic model would allow; they were Whitehall progeny.

Inequality has now deepened, and as such, we cannot go down a similar path again, which in seeking regional and local solutions, follows Whitehall prescriptions and leave central economic control intact. By making the case for a Northern economic 'special case' and honing in on economic inequality, as seems to be the case with contemporary policy, we could well be playing into the hands of the economic centralists and the powerful economic bureaucracy, who merely park the issue under 'Northern Powerhouse'. The present devolution context is shrouded in talk of places on the cusp of economic 'take off', power-housing their way onwards and upwards via a 'devolution revolution'. This blinds us to the new inequalities it is creating.

Opposed to a redistributive or economic reordering, which recognises the social issues and the bespoke local starting points, it focuses on forms of economic growth which accrue through the density of human activity. Ideas of 'agglomeration economics', place a singular focus on the benefits of proximity and concentrated networks of policymakers, companies, consumers and workers to stimulate economic growth. This merely follows a long line of economic policy which views growth and address economic inequality as of much higher importance than that of addressing social inequality and the distribution of that growth.

In the economics of devolution, specific and bespoke place needs (including poverty and social and democratic inequality) are of lesser importance, compared to place as the *site* for this generic economic agglomeration policy. That is why there has been so much focus on the larger cities and already successful areas where the potential for even greater economic growth can be readily realised. The narrowness of this place-blind policy is unlikely to disrupt the long time, settled unequal English economic geography.

Poorer places, or those more distanced from economic growth are seen as benefiting either through trickle down in wealth through jobs or a 'trickle outwards' of wealth toward any outlying (and poorer) areas of cities and neighbouring towns. The focus is not on deep-rooted spatial inequalities. Quite the reverse, it rather cruelly sees place 'losers' as the inevitable price to pay for the higher order importance of winning on opportunities, economic growth and global competitiveness. The retention, or even acceleration, of economic inequality across the country is inevitable. Indeed it is the nature of agglomeration economics.

There is of course the hope and promise of further devolution and we must keep the pressure on for more (McInroy, 2015). However, with no national economic plan or an industrial strategy of any real weight, there is little hope of any meaningful economic rebalancing. At best we will see some selected successes, but generally, existing devolution may deepen not lessen divides around economy, social issues and democracy. We must become more bullish in asking questions about the systemic causes which create the divides in the first place, and the new social and democratic inequalities which devolution is creating. We need to be arguing for a deeper fundamental shift and challenge to the prevailing inequality and divisions. Serious rebalancing of the economy needs an active plan and central economic change to how investment flows and who it flows to.

Before the financial crash, monetary policy which supported the City of London with financial return to shareholders and investors in financial markets were king. Eight years on from the crash, they remain king. Despite the Chancellor talking up manufacturing and the 'march of the makers' (Osborne, 2011), return from activity in the financial markets still take precedence over good old profit earned through investment in manufacturing and industry. In 1948, UK national income contributed by industrial production was nearly 42 per cent. Today it is just 15 per cent. In 1950, 65 per cent of bank lending was to industry, it is now around 15 per cent.

The investment sector – when it does look to the real economy – prefers those businesses in the north or south with collateral, which can be pledged against the investment. This means property and developers. It does not mean small manufacturers, or businesses whose pledge is the knowledge and ideas within their own heads. With no national industrial strategy, no national strategic plan, no dedicated regional investment vehicle, there are few levers for genuine power-housing, for the genuine rebuilding of manufacturing and SMEs in the North or the South and for the addressing of inequality.

The City also has a stronghold on the UK's economic mind-set and, from this, policies, public resources and investment flow. Public investment remains skewed, and an economic culture of thinking is dominated around the narrow confines of the square mile. As a result, many areas remain investment ready, but are underinvested in. The progressive future for UK economic steerage must acknowledge that part of the issue here is the dominant role that the City plays upon UK economic life.

A report by the Centre for Research in Socio-cultural Change (CRESC), written in 2009, describes the financial sector as the 'great un-leveller' in the UK economy because it: 'Promotes a distribution of income which has increased social inequality from top to bottom,

and a distribution of jobs which has increased regional inequality. Vertically and horizontally, socially and spatially, the finance sector concentrates prosperity within the UK' (Buchanan *et al.*, 2009, p. 14).

The report goes on to describe this trend as being associated with a group of 'working rich' centred on finance, where bonuses tap a huge financial sector turnover base. To date, this inequality story has been ignored by North-South divide narratives. Indeed, even in the high peak of regionalism, the RDAs never sought to actively diffuse prosperity around the country, as was done with regional policy in respect of manufacturing in the 1970s. As CRESC state: 'finance is actively concentrating prosperity spatially in a way which undermines most kinds of regional policy and the problem is barely registered in political discourse' (Buchanan *et al.*, 2009, p. 15).

Furthermore, North-South debates have failed to acknowledge the fundamental difference in the nature of jobs in the financial sector compared to manufacturing jobs. Manufacturing jobs have a much greater multiplier effect than the financial sector, as jobs are created through the supply chain.

This has to be disrupted. Key to this, are sets of policies which develop investment models and structures focused on the real national economy opposed to buying and selling in financial markets. In Germany there is a regional dimension to the banking system. In Scotland, the economic strategy has laid out plans for a Scottish Business Bank. In Wales there are similar considerations. If we are serious about rebalancing the economy, we must advance financial institutions which cater more for investment in industry, SME activity and the real economy across England – developing entrepreneurship, and accelerating local businesses, supply chains and clusters.

The failure to recognise the interconnected and integrated nature of the economic system has created an unbalanced economy and led to a number of structural weakness such a lack of skills, low wages, and zero hour contracts. If we are to begin to address these systematic weaknesses within our economy we must begin to reform our national and local economic structures and political attitudes to reflect a more holistic place based approach.

Successive governments have allowed a skewed economic geography to flourish and many of us have been complicit in framing the North as a problem, leadings us to then advocate parochial solutions. The North is not the problem. Economic centralism is. There is more than one way to skin the devolution cat, and we must ensure that devolution is framed within a context of national fairness. A fairness which seeks to reduce inequality, not just create new forms of it.

References

Beveridge, W. (1942). *Social Insurance and Allied Services.* London: HMSO.

Buchanan, J. *et al.* (2009). *Undisclosed and Unsustainable: Problems of the UK National Business Model*. CRESC Working Paper No. 75. Milton Keynes: Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change.

New Policy Institute (2015). *London's Poverty Profile 2015.* London: NPI. Retrieved from: http://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/LPP-2015-findings.pdf

HLG 27 (1940). Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population (Barlow Commission). Retrieved from: http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C8722

McInroy, N. (2015, August 24). Keeping the Pressure on for More Devolution. *New Start.* Retrieved from: http://newstartmag.co.uk/your-blogs/keeping-the-pressure-on-for-more-devolution/

Osborne, G. (2011). Announcement: 2011 Budget: Britain open for business. London: FCO. Retrieved from: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/2011-budget-britain-open-for-business

6. Devolution dilemmas: the role of unions

Neil Foster

Northern identity and decision-making has increased in significance in the last two years. We have a Minister for the Northern Powerhouse and many councils are looking to strike devolution Deals with the government for varying additional powers. It is difficult for many trade union members in the North to divorce the Conservative government's decentralisation proposals from other policies and ideological intent which impact on our regions.

Northern councils have experienced deeper cuts from government than more affluent areas typically (though by no means exclusively) located in the South of England. The Treasury's austerity policies are taking many public services to the brink. Jobs in the steel industry risk falling like dominoes across Northern towns while the government wrongly claims it is in incapable of intervening as other governments have. In stark contrast the same government will go to court to protect the City of London from a Financial Transaction Tax that is winning government support elsewhere within the European Union. The Trade Union Bill seeks to weaken workers' industrial and political voice. Constituency boundary changes coupled with a distorted electoral register will weaken the parliamentary representation of millions. This all adds up. Trust and motive matters.

In the last parliament Conservative ministers tried to push through regional pay for public services that would have further reduced the wages and spending power of those outside of London and the South East. They abolished successfully evaluated Regional Development Agencies without prior consultation with the regions. Ministers who demanded mayoral referenda of English cities in 2012 (rejected by most) are now insisting on sub-regional mayors within devolution deals without the requirement of any public vote. There are now fears that the further localisation of business rates will widen geographical and social inequalities, not narrow them. These are all good reasons why many trade unions are not approaching the government's decentralisation measures with enthusiasm or confidence. The Northern Powerhouse is a damaged brand now more likely to provoke derision than inspiration. It didn't have to be this way.

Trade unions have historically played a supportive role in the devolution processes in England and are important social partners to the Scottish and Welsh governments. Unions are instinctively interested in processes that will empower people and communities to enable more inclusive decision-making. We value scrutiny and better decision-making because it is our members who live or work with the consequences. Across the three Northern English regions there are two million trade union members. Not only are we the most prominent voice of working people we are a key part of wider civil society.

The captivating Scottish referendum campaign had an impact on many trade union members in the North of England who feel politically and culturally close to Scotland on many issues. Scotland raised expectations in England. I recall one session with trade union members in early 2015 in Wakefield. It was pointed out that Yorkshire has the same population as Scotland but with a tiny fraction of its powers and much was made of this. However, what became clear was that for many taking part in this workshop the devolution agenda was only a means to an end. Creating better employment opportunities, fairer workplaces, an inclusive approach to the economy, a just society and more sustainable future were some of the main goals. There were discussions about public procurement and how to prevent 'blacklisting' companies from being rewarded by the public purse and how we could ensure those working on public contracts are paid the living wage. There was much concern about

youth unemployment and we talked about the jobs of the next generation and the need for better quality apprenticeships that led to real jobs.

Following the general election I hosted a workshop with another union in Newcastle. The mood was somewhat different and quite sombre as the implications of continued austerity policies were digested. Despite this, there was some hope that devolution might be able to provide more fruit than Westminster Conservative government. We discussed valuing public services, the North East's support for greater equality, improving health and tackling poverty and our desire to create the conditions so that people did not feel they needed to leave their region in order to find a decent job or career.

These are not just issues for trade unionists – they are issues for all communities. For all the recent regional newspaper coverage of the trials and tribulations of different 'Devo Deals' we have not heard anywhere near enough about what is devolution for? The government appears to be doing its best to limit the involvement of civil society and have chosen a path that disempowers rather than bring new voices to the table. Our vision is almost inevitably going to be broader, more radical and challenging to the Conservative government at Westminster than the version handed down from Ministers. We should be having the discussions about our aims and objectives for our communities and regions in spite of the government and not because of it. This will involve creativity, determination, imagination, teamwork and patience. Real devolution cannot be confined to academics, politicians or think tanks but must be a process that aims to empower and involve people from all backgrounds.

There are plenty of some good examples of progressive policies that have emerged locally that could be learned from and campaigned for. Thanks to the explicit representation that Ken Livingstone gave trade unions, Frances O'Grady and unions were able to push for, develop and secure London 2012 as the first living wage Olympics. In Northumberland the County Council was able to help ensure the buy-out of a costly PFI deal that will help Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust save £67 million per year. In Wales the ProAct policy helped retain and train workers with a package of financial support from the European Union rather than see them made redundant following the financial crash of 2008. This policy emerged as a result of a Welsh Economic Summit involving the Welsh Government, Wales TUC and CBI Wales. Unions played a key role in campaigning to bring train manufacturing to Newton Aycliffe working alongside Durham County Council, the North East Chamber of Commerce, local MP Phil Wilson and the Northern Echo newspaper.

We are fiercely proud of the North. There is no shortage of challenges facing the North of England, but there is no limit to the potential solutions or willing participants either. The key question is whether we can unlock the ideas, priorities and values of the people who live and work in our communities and give space to them being developed and supported? The TUC is keen to see a clear commitment to a social partnership approach involving trade unions in future within devolved arrangements in England. 'Public service workforce partnership councils' could bring together employers, unions and elected political representatives to ensure effective workforce planning and skills development and the improvement of employment standards and job quality. 'Civil society partnerships' could unite voluntary and community organisations, trade unions, businesses, academia and other stakeholders to work with local politicians for future goals and aspirations. An ethical commissioning and procurement framework could ensure social, environmental and economic values and aims permitted under UK and EU procurement law are present in local decision-making of how services are run and good bought and sold. This is some of the architecture that could see new solutions emerge from and with trade unions in the North of England.

Trade union members are approaching the issue of decentralisation in England with their eyes wide open. We are under no illusions of the damage the Conservative government is doing to the social and economic fabric of our country and will oppose it and present alternative approaches. Given a choice between Northern Powerhouse rhetoric and Thatcherite laissez-faire economics then we know which Ministers will choose. Local government is being gutted with councils in the North being hit particularly hard. This government's record of listening and consulting regions in the issues that affect communities is woeful. The new insistence on installing mayors having been rejected comprehensively in 2012 owes more to blackmail than devolution. The stranglehold of HM Treasury will certainly initially inhibit what can be done. It is precisely because we want to change things that unions want to use every single opportunity to make life better in our regions for our members, their families and communities. Just don't expect everyone to be satisfied with the current arrangements.

Our regions hold the potential for broad alliances and networks to be assembled to tackle the issues of today and tomorrow. Where we have powers we should use them to best effect. Where we lack the powers we should lobby, campaign, pressure and for more – generating as much momentum as we can muster and using what democratic leverage we have. Our ambitions will exceed those of the government and many of us in the North will subscribe to a different approach. There will be many others who have an interest in working co-operatively for the good of the north. Collectively our members possess a great deal of practical insight and expertise ready to be allied with others seeking to improve our regions for the better. Trade unions won't have all the answers but we are confident we have some.

7. Understanding Labour's English questions

Michael Kenny

The government's plans for a significant devolution of powers to Greater Manchester continue to generate considerable debate. Critics have focused on their implications for policy in key areas such as health provision, on the model of executive leadership that Osborne favours in the form of the directly elected mayor (Talbot, 2015) and on the question of whether this represents a top-down, enclosed form of governance, or one that might permit a revival of the wider civic culture. Equally, the merits and limitations of the Northern Powerhouse have also generated division, not least about whether it will make a difference to the economic prospects of some of the most disadvantaged communities in the UK (Cox and Raikes, 2015).

Amidst this swirl of comment and debate, much less attention has been paid to the question of what these projects mean for one of the most powerful and destabilising trends in British politics – political tensions around national identity and territory. The government's much trumpeted ambition to bring greater self-government, increased investment and sustainable growth to the Northern economy brings a multi-faceted set of challenges for Labour. And these include – but also spill beyond – questions such as whether the party tries to mould a more radical, decentralising alternative (Raikes, 2015), or sticks to a familiar line about Tory plans to pass responsibility for cuts to beleaguered Labour authorities.

A broader issue at stake here is whether the party can supply a coherent answer to the political question which inform these reforms. Does it accept the case made by the Conservatives for English devolution, or not? Where political authority should lie within England, and how the largest territory within the UK should be governed, are undoubtedly uncomfortable questions for Labour to deal with. Yet they are now also unavoidable.

Whichever way the party turns, tensions over territory lie ahead. Rather than dismissing its Scottish cataclysm as a one-off, progressives should see it as a warning about what can happen to parties that are on the wrong side of the powerful currents of national sentiment and cultural attachment. Yet the Labour leadership's lack of feel for these issues is notable. Amidst all the politicking over Jeremy Corbyn's reshuffle of his Shadow Cabinet in January 2016, his team were strikingly inattentive to the territorial implications of their decisions, as two representatives of Northern seats and one from the Midlands were removed, and more London MPs promoted (Dathan, 2016).

The attachments that have become most important to people across the UK range from the very local, up to the town or city, to counties, and, for a minority, the region. But the single, most notable, identity trend of the last two decades is the rising salience and strength of an attachment to English, rather than British, nationhood (Kenny, 2014). And while this does not mean that most people reject an affiliation to the multi-national UK, there is evidence to suggest that for a growing number, this spills over into a desire for a much greater institutional recognition of England and its perceived interests (Wyn Jones *et al*, 2012).

These feelings have come to the fore, in part, as a consequence of the devolution settlement introduced by the first Labour government. Intended as a bulwark against the rise of nationalist sentiment in Scotland especially, the on-going award of greater powers for Scotland and Wales has boosted the development of more distinct and nationally self-conscious political cultures and debates in the non-English parts of the UK. And it has, over time, rendered the question of the constitutional position of the English a more politically resonant one.

More recently, following the dramatic rise to prominence of the SNP in Scotland, and the strengthened position of a Conservative Party that is almost entirely English in its parliamentary representation, a powerful, territorially rooted dynamic has come to the fore in British politics. This runs between a mainly Southern, English Conservative Party, on the one hand, and an unchallenged SNP. And unless the UK's progressives make themselves relevant to, and offer potential solutions to, this conflict, they face the risk of being pushed to the margins of political life.

Labour's current woes therefore have a clear territorial, as well as ideological, dimension. Scotland is lost for the foreseeable future. There are new challenges in Wales in the form of the Conservative Party which polled strongly in the General Election (BBC News, 2015). And the party is a long way from being in a position to challenge in swathes of Eastern, South-Eastern and Southern England (Diamond and Radice, 2015).

One tempting response to these challenges is to assume that it should seek refuge in its remaining heartlands – the North of England and London. The idea of a renewal premised upon Northern identity and its accompanying traditions is both powerful and appealing. It speaks to those who still hold a candle for the ambition that has, in recent years, fallen into disrepute in Labour circles – the idea of developing a system of regional government. This idea was pursued in highly technocratic form by the Blair governments, and was mainly driven by concerns about imbalances in regional economic fortunes and performance (Diamond and Radice, 2015). Some hoped for the development of more democratic systems at the regional level, but this ambition never came close to realisation. The regionalist project was shattered by the No vote registered in the North East Referendum of 2004. Prominent figures from Northern Labour, such as John Prescott, were architects of this vision, and it was nurtured thereafter by various Brownites, most notably Ed Balls. Similar assumptions and ambitions inform current assertions of Northern regionalism.

Yet there have always been Northern Labour figures – for instance David Blunkett (2005) and Frank Field – who have instead argued for England as the natural companion to the pride that many feel in cities like Sheffield and Liverpool.

More generally, the notion of a Labour revival based upon the politics of any single region – be it London or regions in the North – suffers from a number of limitations. In political terms, it is unlikely that Osborne would have pursued the Powerhouse strategy had he not become convinced of the potential for his own party to win more voters in parts of the North. This judgment reflects an appreciation that Labour's position, though strong, has been weakening markedly over the last few decades, as signalled by the loss of local government in cities like Newcastle (2004) and Sheffield (2008) to the Lib Dems. Labour is also badly affected by the rise in non-voting among working-class citizens in the North. Indeed, across the country, while the turnout gap before the mid 2000s by social class was fairly small, at the last election the difference in the proportion of people in manual jobs who did not vote compared to people in professional and managerial jobs was nearly 20 per cent (Tilley, 2016). The rise of UKIP, now the most working-class party in British politics, represents a particularly acute challenge for Labour; there are few signs that Corbyn's brand of metropolitan leftism will stem the flow of working-class voters from Labour.

A further reason for caution about the idea of a Labour revival founded upon regional identity is that such an idea serves to lock Labour into a particular cultural idiom and a sub-national focus at a point when, like its competitors, it needs to contemplate building alliances and making connections across differences of class, geography and ethnicity. But seeking to stick to a UK-wide patriotism looks increasingly like flogging a dead horse, as the depth of attachment associated with Britishness has declined so markedly. A state-wide national

focus and a strongly regionalist 'offer', which many in the party favour, represents a pitch that is both too broad and too narrow. It is perhaps no coincidence that in Wales, the only territory where Labour is the leading force, the party takes the lead in telling a progressive national story, and is entirely comfortable within a progressively patriotic frame of reference (Deans, 2015).

This does not mean neglecting the task of developing an alternative model of devolution to that on offer from the current government. Labour needs to explain its belief that devolution requires greater voice and recognition for the English within the political system, and also signal that it supports the dispersal of the powers hoarded within the central state.

It also needs to face up to the complex cross-currents of public attitudes on issues of identity and governance. While there is undoubtedly a growing feel for the idea of self-government and empowerment in different parts of the UK, support for a radical programme of local devolution remains fairly shallow (Gash, Randall and Sims, 2014). This may well alter once devolved models are established and if their benefits become clear, but any project for local or regional devolution has to live within these parameters. The Englishness that is re-emerging is not, for most people, separate from, or a rival to, attachments to their own area or town. It is through the lived experience of different places, towns and cities that a feeling of nationhood is learned and shaped. Territorial identities work in more complicated, joined up ways than progressive thinking tends to allow. A recent series of annual surveys on this score show that a sense of Englishness had grown at a roughly similar rate in all regions of England – from Durham to Devon, and Cheltenham to Clacton (Wyn Jones *et al*, 2012). The only significant outlier to this trend is Greater London and the South East, where a much larger proportion of people continue to identity as British.

Appropriating feelings of local solidarity and pride, while connecting to a wider progressive and patriotic story, looks increasingly like the right kind of response to these challenges. And, as various commentators have noted, Labour now has a successful template to ponder in the form of Jim McMahon's impressive campaign in the Oldham by-election of November 2015. This illustrates well how such a focus can create the opening for politicians of the left to offer a more rooted and compelling alternative to the shrill discourse of populist nationalism.

Clearly people do not live or express their sense of Englishness in the same way in this extraordinarily diverse land. But is it misleading to assume that these differences are mainly structured along a North-South divide. Multiple differences, not the 'two nations' of Victorian England, should be the watchword of progressives seeking to engage with the contemporary politics of identity.

In key respects, English national identity is still defined by an indefinability which has fascinated and disappointed commentators for centuries (Kumar, 2003). This gives it an imaginative range, an adaptability, and a lived, rather than stipulated, quality (a 'behavioural grammar' as Kate Fox (2004) puts it). And it also means that there is plenty of room for different visions, ideas and experiences of Englishness to be promoted and celebrated in the public culture.

It is certainly true that the playing field is far from being level when it comes to how different parts of the country figure within the national story. George Orwell was one of a swathe of Southern English writers who journeyed north in the last century, and reported on an England that seemed to exist outside the ambit of familiar ideas of Englishness. This was the England of the industrial revolution soiled by the sweat' land which many writers assumed to be located somewhere between the Cotswolds and the South Downs.

The North has undoubtedly been hugely disadvantaged by patterns of cultural representation, as well as by its systemic economic marginalisation. But there is a risk that current assertions of the uniqueness, and progressive potential, of Northern identity tacitly accept the dominant notion that its identities, manners and cultures place it outside the English nation.

Englishness is best understood as a layered set of representations, selected memories and cultural performances. Some of the standard references through which these are evoked – the twee village, the thatched roof, the sanitised songs of the folk tradition invented by Cecil Sharp, and the genteel landscapes of Southern England (as opposed to the wild and dark moors of the North) – have long conveyed the imprint of England as the 'Southern Country'. But these influential and instantly recognisable versions of the homeland have always been shadowed, and occasionally challenged, by other Englands. These have been drawn from its industrial heritage, the rich history of its local civic cultures, the spirit of economic innovation and commerce associated with cities like Leeds and Manchester, and the cultural 'cool' attached to various iconic artists (Harris, 2010).

In this undoubtedly imbalanced context, a turn away the 'identity space' (to borrow Charles Taylor's phrase) that is coalescing, in messy and disparate ways, around a more strongly felt Englishness, would be self-defeating. The left needs to champion a more diverse, locally rooted and regionally ranging set of impressions and ideas about England, and its peoples. If it does not start telling a progressive story of nationhood to those audiences still prepared to give it a hearing, there is every chance that Tory Englishness will become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Acknowledgements

References

BBC News (2015, May 8). Election 2015: Best Welsh Tory Election for 30 Years. Retrieved from: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2015-wales-32610447

Blunkett, D. (2015). *A New England. An English Identity within Britain*. London: IPPR. Retrieved from:
http://www.ippr.org/files/images/media/files/publication/2011/05/a%20new%20england_1336.pdf?noredirect=1

Colls, R. (2013). *George Orwell: English Rebel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cox, E. and Raikes, L. (2015). *The State of the North 2015. Four Tests for the Northern Powerhouse*, IPPR North Report.
Retrieved From: http://www.ippr.org/files/publications/pdf/state-of-the-north-2015_Oct2015.pdf?noredirect=1

Dathan, M. (2016, January 6). Jeremy Corbyn Reshuffle: Labour Leader Accused of Opening up North-South Divide in the Party. *The Independent*. Retrieved from: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/jeremy-corbyn-reshuffle-labour-leader-accused-of-opening-up-north-south-divide-in-the-party-a6799636.html

Deans, D. (2015, October 21). Welsh Labour is Enjoying a 'Corbyn Bounce' Ahead of Next May's Assembly Election, Pollsters Say. *Wales Online.*
Retrieved from: http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/politics/welsh-labour-enjoying-corbyn-bounce-10146796

Diamond, P. and Radice, G. (2015). *Can Labour Win? The Hard Road to Power*. London: Policy Network and Rowman & Littlefield International.

Fox, K. (2004). *Watching the English. The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Gash, T., Randall, J., and Sims, S. (2014) *Achieving Political Decentralisation. Lessons from 30years of Attempting to Devolve Political Power in the UK*. Institute for Government.
Retrieved from:
http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/DecentralisationPaper%20-%20FINAL_0.pdf

Harris, J. (2010). *The Last Party: Britpop, Blair and the Demise of English Rock*. London: Harper Perennial.

Kenny, M. (2014). *The Politics of English Nationhood*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kumar, K. (2003). *The Making of English National Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Raikes, L. (2015, February 25). Devo Manc? It's the Best Thing Since Sliced Bread. *New Statesman.* Retrieved from: http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2015/02/devo-manc-its-best-thing-sliced-bread

Talbot, C. (2015, February 27). A Mayor for All Seasons?, *Manchester University Policy Blog*, retrieved from: http://blog.policy.manchester.ac.uk/featured/2015/02/a-mayor-for-all-seasons/

Tilley, J. (2016, January 6). How Can Labour Assemble a Winning Coalition of Voters?. *Policy Network Observatory*, retrieved from:
http://www.policynetwork.net/pno_detail.aspx?ID=5038&title=How+can+Labour+assemble+a+winning+coalition+of+voters%3f

Wyn Jones, R., Lodge, G., Wincott, D. and Henderson, A. (2012). *The Dog That Finally Barked. England as an Emerging Political Community*. London: IPPR, available at: http://www.ippr.org/files/images/media/files/publication/2012/02/dog-that-finally-barked_englishness_Jan2012_8542.pdf?noredirect=1

8. Cumbria, the North, and what makes a 'territory'

Mark Sandford

England, with a few exceptions (Bryant, 2003), is alleged to lack territorial identities of any significance at either local or regional levels, a 'fact' marking it as out of step with its European neighbours. Scholarly attempts to examine what role, if any, territorial identity should play in sub-national governance – and how it should feed into decisions on regional administration structures – have thus rarely known where to begin. Policy has swung sharply on many occasions: in recent years, the Labour government was wedded to the North East, North West and Yorkshire & Humber; the Conservative government has privileged counties and urban areas; and campaign bodies such as the Hannah Mitchell Foundation talk generically of 'the North'. What ideas, feelings and beliefs lie behind these contradictory approaches to the drawing of regional boundaries?

Essentially, regional boundaries throughout Europe are based upon some combination of economic assessment, administrative convenience, and historical identity, with the balance between these differing according to the local pertinence of each. The conventional wisdom regarding England is that sub-national identity is either extremely weak, inheres in the daily practice of individuals, or defaults to traditional county boundaries. Clear exposition of such ideas, how they interconnect and influence one another, has been almost entirely lacking, reflecting both their perceived irrelevance and the difficulty of defining clear phenomena to investigate.

Why look at Cumbria in this context? Much has been said about other territories in the North. Yorkshire and Lancashire have a distinct, if ill-defined, sub-national identity dating back centuries. Some scholars (such as Robert Colls, John Tomaney, and David Byrne) have published historical, geographical or economic studies of the distinctiveness of the North East of England. Cumbria, however, has largely been missing from these debates.

The lack of attention paid to Cumbria in debates over devolution and English identity, compared to its more urban and populous neighbouring areas in the North of England, is striking. Study of Cumbria as a defined geographical area has largely been restricted to the area's Celtic history from the 8th to the 12th centuries, when it formed part of various kingdoms, some of which are referred to as 'Cumbria' in historical sources. But in modern debates it has frequently been treated as an invisible annexe to the North East or North West administrative regions. The narratives of Northern economic resurgence that underlie much of the current devolution debate appear to quietly exclude it, perhaps due to its small population, its partly rural and partly heavy industrial character, and its distance from larger population centres. This is unfortunate, as the creation and persistence of Cumbria as an administrative unit may throw some light on how identities interact with economic and administrative considerations within the governance of England.

The arrival of Cumbria

Long-term narratives of Northern economic resurgence, based on a combination of economies of scale in administration, locally-led economic growth and infrastructure investment, make it all the more surprising that the modern county of Cumbria even exists. The county council was created in the local government reforms of 1972-74, replacing the county areas of Cumberland and Westmorland. This was despite the fact that the Redcliffe-Maud (1968) and Kilbrandon (1973) reports recommended a radically different geography: one territory for 'northern Cumbria' and one for the Morecambe Bay area (Lancaster, Barrow and much of Westmorland). Whilst most county council boundaries eventually remained

unchanged by the 1972 reforms, this was not the case in Cumbria. The decision to create Cumbria at all was in practice to privilege a particular geographical perspective over arguments for county identity (visible from the inclusion in Cumbria of Furness, formerly an exclave of Lancashire, and Sedbergh, a small district of Yorkshire on the west of the Pennines). Equally, the economic diversity of the area militates against a clear economic rationale for the territory in the manner of other authorities created at the time, such as the metropolitan counties. Cumbria's economy includes the heavy industrial traditions of Barrow and West Cumbria, including the Sellafield nuclear power station; agriculture in the east and south of the county; and tourism (and associated second-home ownership) in the central Lake District. The mountainous centre impedes travel from one part of the county to another. It is bounded by the sea to the west, Scotland to the north, and the Pennines to the east; but there is no such natural frontier to the south.

If county boundaries were the sole, weak source of territorial identity within England, one might have expected Cumbria to go the way of the other 'new' county councils created in the 1972-74 reforms. Other counties established then, such as Humberside, Cleveland and Avon, attracted public opprobrium on the grounds that they disregarded traditional identities, and each has now been disaggregated into unitary authorities. Cumbria, on the other hand, has proved resilient. Periodic campaigns advocate the replacement of its two tier structure with a unitary county, but they rarely challenge the geography of the county area.[1] As is often the case in English territorial management, path dependency has seen other county-level public bodies follow its administrative boundaries, further establishing its modern geographical extent.

Cumbria has, on the other hand, fitted uneasily into recent narratives of economic regionalism and city-based devolution of power. Administratively, it has oscillated between the North West region and the North East / Northern region, frequently somewhat randomly, for many decades. Its population is some 500,000; narratives of economic regionalism have normally sought populations of a few million people to use as territorial units. Lacking a major urban centre, it also does not fit clearly into the concept of 'city regions'. It might be expected that actors in Cumbria would gravitate towards a fixed wider geography, identifying solid reasons why the territory should be included with Lancashire or the North East. But this has not happened. Not only has Cumbria failed to find a settled home within regional structures, it has also maintained its own territorial integrity. Given the dependence of many administrative decisions on narratives of shared economic interests and county identity, this requires explanation.

A fruitful means of explaining the survival of Cumbria may lie within the shared geography and history of the territory and its contribution to identity. Sparsity of population and distance from major cities affects the whole area. There is a Celtic heritage, reflected in many place-names of Celtic origin, and the historical record of the area having been a region of the kingdom of Strathclyde from approximately the 8th to the 11th centuries. It was only ceded to England in 1092, and most of the modern county was not covered by the Domesday Book. Traditional dialects show similarities to modern Scandinavian languages; equally, many instances of Celtic counting systems (the 'Yan Tan Tethera') have been identified within the area. In other words, its history carries markers of distinctiveness from its neighbours.

Implications for England

What does Cumbria's anomalous history tell us about local/regional identity within England? I suggest that, whilst often inchoate, there are a number of resources of identity that have been used in recent decades to justify territorial restructuring. These include similarity of economic interests; travel-to-work and leisure travel patterns; administrative familiarity; historical familiarity; and geographical factors. Concepts of territory, whether held by

administrators, local economic actors, or local people, derive from the interaction between such factors. For instance, in Greater Manchester economic interests and travel to work patterns have been perceived to outweigh the claims of historical boundaries of Lancashire and Cheshire.[2] Conversely, shared economic interest could not gainsay historical identity and geographical factors in Humberside, leading to the county's abolition after 24 years of existence.

The example of Cumbria, and others, suggests that the balance between the resources of identity is not uniform across England. Nor are resources of identity so weak as to mean that popular conceptions of territory take no account of them. Rather, the balance between economics, geography, history and administrative familiarity differs between areas. Conventional wisdom suggests that, in England, traditional county boundaries are the single predominant resource of identity. The recent history of the territory of Cumbria points to this picture being far more nuanced.

How these resources of identity interact to drive ideas, discussion, and individual views of geographies, has rarely been investigated, not least because clear evidence of resources of identity that underpin the endurance of Cumbria as a territorial unit would be hard to adduce. Reflecting this, descriptions attempting to encapsulate this phenomenon often fall back upon a glib, nebulous language. Writers and researchers have used phrases such as the 'character of the land' (Nicholson, 1963); perceived 'geographical unity' (Edmonds, 2014); 'trends of social and economic life' (Redcliffe-Maud and Wood, 1974, p. 49). The current debate on devolution, though, would be enhanced by greater consideration of these matters.

References

Aughey, A. (2007). *The politics of Englishness.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Bryant, C. (2003). These Englands, or where does devolution leave the English? *Nations and Nationalism*, 9 (3), 393-412.

Edmonds, F. (2014). The Emergence and Transformation of Medieval Cumbria. *Scottish Historical Review*, 93 (2014), 195-216.

Nicholson, N. (1963). *Portrait of the Lakes.* Robert Hale: London.

Redcliffe-Maud, J. and Wood, B. (1974). *English Local Government Reformed.* Oxford: OUP.

Endnotes

[1] Versions of a 'Morecambe Bay' authority, stretching from Lancaster through Westmorland to Barrow, appeared in the Banham review of local government (1992-5) and in the review associated with the abortive Regional Assemblies agenda (2002-4). Formulation of 'travel-to-work areas' by researchers often comes up with a similar boundary. But these have gained little traction on the ground.

[2] The picture is never unanimous: a speaker from Bolton at a recent public session of the Communities and Local Government Committee used the phrase 'Devo Manc? No thanks – we're Lancs.'

9. Sport and the idea of the North

Tony Collins

When I was growing up in Hull in the late 1960s and early 1970s, sport was the exemplar of my family's sense of Northernness. Our primary sport was rugby league, a self-defined Northern game. When we watched soccer on TV we would always want the team from the North of England to beat its Southern opponent. Cricket was thought by my father and grandfather to be organised as a conspiracy against the first-class counties in the North.

We were not alone in these attitudes.

Indeed, alongside accent and an industrial economy, sport has historically been perhaps the activity most associated with the North in the national consciousness. And with good reason too, as the North-South sporting dichotomy can be seen in many, if not all, sports.

There are sports that are largely divided across geography, such as rugby, which divided in 1895 between the London-based, strictly amateur Rugby Football Union (RFU) and the Northern-based, semi-professional Northern Union, which would become known as rugby league.

There are sports in which the North-South divide played a key role in defining their cultural identity, such as cricket. Others were divided on organisational lines, athletics in the North being for many years administered by the Northern Counties Amateur Athletics Association (NCAA).

Even soccer had a North-South divide running through it, with the impetus for professionalism and the formation of the Football League coming from the North-West of England, in opposition to the southern-based Football Association. Between 1921 and 1958, the Football League's third division was split into north and south sections.

Nor was this a strictly male phenomenon. In the inter-war years similar disputes broke out in women's sport, provoked in large part by the intransigence of a middle-class leadership based in the south of England. In the 1920s the Northern Women's Amateur Athletics Association was formed, and the following decade women's cricket split between the southern-based Women's Cricket Association and the northern Women's Cricket Federation.

Northern values

All these sports have more than geography in common. Money played a central role in their organisation and culture, in marked contrast to the dominant amateur philosophy of British sport.

Professionalism was the hallmark of Northern sport, but by the late nineteenth century amateurism had been established as the default principle of English sport, so these Northern sports were seen as something of an aberration in contrast to the more socially-accepted amateur sports. Even the North's idea of amateurism differed from the mainstream; the NCAA was viewed as dangerously lax on the issue by the dominant Amateur Athletics Association.

As can be surmised from the importance of money, Northern sport was also deeply competitive. Winning was the aim of the contest, in contrast to the dominant model of English sport in this period, which was based on the amateur principle of 'the game for the

game itself', summed up in the phrase 'it's not whether you win or lose but how you play the game'. The idea that one did not play to win was anathema to the competitors in these Northern sports, an attitude summed up in the comment 'we don't play it for fun', allegedly made by Wilfred Rhodes, the great Yorkshire cricketer of the early twentieth century.

Competitiveness was itself a key aspect of the third major feature of Northern sport: masculinity. Before the 1920s, all these sports were overwhelmingly male pursuits, both in composition and as a way of demonstrating those qualities felt to be essentially male, strength, stamina and determination. In short, 'hardness'. This reflected the harshness of male working-class life, in which the ability to withstand and overcome physical pain was a highly valued attribute. All of three of these qualities – professionalism, competitiveness and hardness – came to be closely associated with sport and its playing in the North.

Of course, there was nothing intrinsically Northern about these qualities. To a large extent, they reflected the impact of industrialisation on the culture and communities of the North of England. And, in fact, the impetus for commercialised, mass spectator sport also came from the industrialised English midlands as well as the North.

This can be seen most strikingly in the clubs that formed the professional Football League in 1888. All came from either the North West (Accrington, Blackburn Rovers, Bolton Wanderers, Burnley, Everton and Preston North End) or the Midlands (Aston Villa, Derby County, Notts County, Stoke, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton Wanderers).

In cricket, Derbyshire and especially Nottinghamshire were historically part of the North. Indeed, Nottingham was in many ways the birthplace of professional cricket, William Clarke, the man who established the Trent Bridge ground in the city, was also the initiator in 1846 of the All England XI professional touring side. And it was the Birmingham and District Cricket League that pioneered semi-professional local league cricket in 1888, predating the more famous leagues in the north; the Lancashire League being founded in 1892 and the Bradford League in 1903.

Nevertheless, the sheer size of the industrial North, both in terms of population and economic strength, meant that Northern clubs dominated the early decades of mass spectator sport. With the exception of Aston Villa, no team outside of the North won the Football League Championship before the outbreak of World War One in 1914. In rugby there was no national league or cup contests for clubs, but the country championship, established in 1888, was won six times by Yorkshire and once by Lancashire in the years before the 1895 split. And in cricket, Yorkshire were champions more than any other county, and in the interwar years the competition was entirely dominated by northern sides.

Whose Northernness?

Of course, the other problem with identifying a specifically 'Northern' character to sport is how to define the North. The Lancashire-Yorkshire North is a different sporting world from the 'North East', defined, although not unproblematically, as the area from the Tees to the Scottish Border.

The North East historically has had different sporting traditions to those of the Lancashire-Yorkshire North. In the mid-nineteenth century rowing on the Tyne had become uniquely popular, with rowers such as James Renforth, Robert Chambers and Harry Clasper attracting tens of thousands of spectators when they rowed. Such was the popularity of the rowing that when Renforth died in 1871 an estimated 100,000 people turned out to watch his funeral procession. Conversely, cricket and rugby historically have been much less significant.

Nor can we assume that Lancashire and Yorkshire share an identical sporting culture. Their rivalry in cricket suggests little sense of unity. And when we look at the detail of significant 'Northern' events there is little to suggest a unified North. For example, at the crucial 1893 meeting of the Rugby Football Union (RFU) when the proposal to pay players 'broken-time' compensation for taking time of work to play rugby was defeated, numerous Lancashire clubs voted against it. It was only when the RFU began to suspend Lancashire clubs for professionalism in 1894 that a united front was formed between the two counties.

But county boundaries were not the only thing that divided the North. Class divisions can be seen strongly in Northern sport. The convention that only an amateur could captain the county team was upheld by Yorkshire until 1960 when Vic Wilson became the first professional to lead the side. In the years before 1914, when the 'professional' image of Yorkshire cricket was established – perhaps best exemplified by the phrase 'we don't play it for fun' – the county was dominated by its president Lord Hawke, who also captained the side from 1883 to 1911, the very embodiment of the patrician aristocrat who dominated cricket in the south.

Rugby in the North after the 1895 split also divided on class lines, as middle-class players and supporters stayed loyal to the RFU and rugby league became dominated by the industrial working-classes. Rugby union in the north consciously sought to become the winter sport of the northern middle classes and made strenuous efforts to establish itself as the leading sport of private and grammar schools. It strength lay in the market towns and suburbs of Northern cities, such as Headingley, Otley, Sale and Gosforth.

Middle-class rugby players and cricketers saw themselves as no less 'Northern' than their working-class counterparts. But their idea of the North was predominantly a rural, non-industrial pastoral vision. In this it echoed the views of H.V. Morton in his 1928 book *In Search of England* in which he viewed the industrial North as a temporary aberration which would eventually revert to its rural origins. It was not coincidence that the *Yorkshire Post* rugby union correspondent J. M. Kilburn entitled his 1938 book *In Search of Rugby Football*. This North was clearly counterposed to the dominant view of it as synonymous with the industrial working class and its values.

Indeed, it can be argued that in most narratives the 'North' acts as a synonym for 'working class'. 'Northern' is an adjective which stands for the supposedly working-class values such as professionalism, competitiveness and hardness. It is rare to find a middle-class sportsman referred to in 'Northern' terms – despite England rugby union players regularly coming from the North, they are rarely referred to as such. For example, it is rare to hear former England captains Bill Beaumont or Rob Andrew referred to as Northerners because they do not fit the class stereotype associated with the North.

The sporting North today

In the twenty-first century it appears that the North and Northerness as a distinct sporting identity is in decline. In soccer, the prominence of Manchester City, Manchester United and Liverpool around the world is not linked to their geography. Indeed, given the fact that British soccer clubs can be bought and sold in a franchise-like way raises the question of the extent to which regional location now has any cultural importance.

Despite the ultimate commercial failure of the venture, the attempt by Newcastle businessman Sir John Hall to create a multi-sport club to represent Newcastle's 'Geordie Nation' seems to suggest that it is the city rather than the region that is the most important expression of geographic identity after nation. And similar trends can be seen in cricket.

In cricket, the consolidation of county clubs in one stadium in one city – in contrast to the older custom of playing at various venues across a county – reinforces this view. Lancashire County Cricket Club play in Manchester and Yorkshire in Leeds, and are to all intents and purposes city-based clubs. Only the crushing weight of tradition has stopped county cricket clubs becoming city clubs – and in 2014 Warwickshire took the plunge and adopted the name Birmingham Bears for the national Twenty20 league.

Even rugby league, the sport most identified with the north of England, has sought to shed its Northern image over the past decade. Its top division has hosted sides from London and France, while clubs from outside the north such as Oxford, Gloucester and Coventry have been fast-tracked into the semi-professional third tier competition. In all sports, the North has become a much diminished point of reference.

For a century and a half commercial sport in the North of England was reliant on local communities to support and sustain it. Today, elite-level sport is being transformed into a global entertainment spectacle by an unprecedented influx of money from television networks such as Rupert Murdoch's Sky TV. Its market place is no longer regional but worldwide – and as its appeal expands, the relevance of regional identity is consequently shrinking.

If it were true to say in the past that the sporting North was not a geographical place but a state of mind, we seem to be rapidly approaching the day when the sporting North is no longer even a state of mind, but a distant memory.

References

Kilburn, J. M. (1938). *In Search of Rugby Football*. London: Arthur Barker Ltd.

Morton, H. V. (1938 [2000]). *In Search of England*. London: Methuen.

Post-Scriptum:
Slouching towards Barnsley

Alex Schafran and Zac Taylor

> The center was not holding…
> It was not a country in open revolution. It was not a country under enemy siege. It was the United States of America in the cold late spring of 1967, and the market was steady and the G.N.P. high and a great many articulate people seemed to have a sense of high social purpose…
>
> Joan Didion, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (1981, p.94).

We arrived separately, at different points in time, but at the same point in history. We arrived differently, in age and shape and geography and taste, but effectively the same as far as Yorkshire was concerned. Americans. Yanks perhaps, even if we detest that term, loaded and whatnot with baggage from the Civil War, which if you haven't heard is still being fought. Gringos would be better. We are from Florida and California and speak Spanish and don't wear braided belts or play lacrosse or like the Red Sox or the Yankees but all that is lost when you are a foreigner.

One would think that in a land so defined by the micro-geographies of identity – the famed (alleged) ability to determine what street/neighbourhood/village one is from just by the slightest change in accent – that this would create a culture of micro-geography aficionados, but that is not how identity works. Having a strong identity doesn't make you inherently interested in other people's versions of the same.

At first, this amazing panoply of accents and football allegiances and river basins and moors seemed to be only bunting on what was otherwise English or Northern or perhaps Yorkshire. There seemed few differences in cuisine or music or written language, no fondue meets bouillabaisse on the edge of Provence or Basque or Gaelic or Welsh speakers over yonder across the way. This was not the race-, class- and sexual-identity politics we grew up with and learned to play professionally at university in the grand American tradition. This was something different. Whatever you think you know about identity as an American falls apart in between the moors.

What began as foreigners' fascination became something else when happenstance and persistence and a few thousand quid turned our interest professional. Here was the North/Yorkshire/West Yorkshire/Leeds City Region/Leeds at the centre of another round of devolution politics, debating and discussing (but rarely demanding) the possibility of some form of semi-self rule where London would decide to force them to agree to having a mayor, and where London would decide to set up a new Transport Authority to look like London's, and where London would decide to build a somewhat very fast train from London to a few cities in the North, but god forbid not between them.

When we started it was called Northern Futures, and was run by a posh man from the South (Buckinghamshire, which just *sounds* fancy to us) who was educated at Cambridge and in the United States and married the daughter of a Spanish senator and somehow ended up representing both the East Midlands and Sheffield in various parliaments, even though we have been told that the East Midlands and Sheffield are very different places and that while Derby County or Nottingham Forest versus one of the Sheffield teams isn't officially a derby it can get heated. It then became the Northern Powerhouse, and was run by a posh man from the South (Paddington, which just *is* fancy) who was educated at Oxford and in the United States and married the daughter of an English Lord and somehow ended up

representing East Cheshire, which is an exceptionally posh bit of North halfway between the less posh Manchester (extra North) and the even less posh Stoke (not North).

No matter, for even when the gold-and-blue lapel was discarded for a bolder blue, the set pieces remained largely unchanged. Devolution events come in many shapes and sizes, but all of them involve the ancient English art of political tea-leaf reading. Peppered in between a handful of impassioned speeches about should and could is the inevitable act of interpretation of the latest plans for the/a North by some people who are more powerful than the people in the room.

And so we followed and follow devolution back and forth, as cabinet members and mid-level Whitehall staffers and think tank people zigzag between Kings Cross and Leeds and Euston and Manchester or St Pancras and Sheffield, and the cues and hues of London are rolled out in the grand halls of old Victorian banks and hotels in those 'core' Northern cities. For the bigger and better funded events rented stage lights project Millennium purple and blue over lintels and dentils once and again, and zero hours-hands carefully cut crusts from finger sandwiches and layer them on trays, primed to stuff the long pauses and clipped conversations between PechaKucha pep rallies and glossed panel discussions. The microphone is passed between pinstripes from Whitehall or Goldman Sachs, from this Commission or that Council, from her Local Enterprise Partnership or his Combined Authority. English invocations of Brookingspeak are punctuated by the charisma of a chosen local entrepreneur or brightened by a pair of star students. As hands are politely shaken and toes dance around invisible red and blue lines and even yellow on the stage, as heads nod in agreement or remain poker-faced in disagreement, the premises and promises of devolution solutions are churned so as to almost become tangible but never real. Perhaps a 'deal' is partially brokered or just nibbled at in the backrooms rooms or sideshows between well-dressed Londoners and well-dressed Northerners or some sort of permutation, but we would not know as we aren't allowed in those spaces and might not understand if we were. Then, the mad dash to the southbound 16:28.

A few decades ago, talking about the US, Joan Didion wrote 'it is very easy to sit at a bar in, say La Scala Beverly Hills, and to share in the pervasive delusion that California is only five hours from New York by air. California is somewhere else' (Didion, 1981, p. 173). We'd like to believe that if she ever did come to write about devolution in the North, she'd rewrite the above, with London playing the role of New York. The shoe fits if you are talking about the Big Apple and the Big Smoke, what with Boris a native New Yawker and the main smoke coming out of either city being the fires of financialization and gentrification. But the metaphor works even better, and has held truer in Yorkshire than it has in California. Leeds is only two hours and fifteen minutes by newly reprivatized train from London, but Yorkshire – and the North – is somewhere else.

While Didion's California was a land where Anglo immigrants from other states still saw California in relation to elsewhere, our California and our Florida (a similarly strange land of orange groves and irrigation and real estate dreams created in the anti-image of other Americas) were by the time of our raising fully their own places where the distance from New York was irrelevant. Not so in Yorkshire, no matter how many thousands of years it has been there, no matter the suspicion that one day in the aptly named White Scar cave someone will find evidence of an indigenous Yorkshireman older than Lucy. London is always present, always performed, a shadow of power and allure and trends and antipathy, a place loved and envied and hated simultaneously.

The irony of the anti-London component of Northern identity is that is the one pathway to true acceptance for those of us from elsewhere. We can never truly be from our neighborhoods, never truly from Leeds or Manchester, never a Yorkshireman nor a

Lancastrian nor a Geordie, even if we lived there for 50 years and took speech lessons as part of an inversion of the tragically traditional stripping of Northern accents by a particularly English snobbery which maps class onto geography. But we can be Northerners, defined as not being from the South. A few good anti-Southern jokes over a pint, and at least for the night, you are welcome to define yourself as being from above a certain imaginary line on a mid-sized island off the coast of Europe.

The challenge with an identity that is really an anti-identity is that it isn't much to hang a political movement on. And the problem with building a political movement on an identity in the North of England is that there are so darned many of them and, alas, none of them truly map onto any of the actual things one needs governed. Manchester is a suburb of Leeds and vice versa, and so too are each of the proud cities in between. Yorkshire is now a brand, not just an identity or a cricket team, following a bike race which is the only thing that everyone around can seem to agree was a success. York and Harrogate and Sunderland and Middlesbrough are all very different places. Alas, this has little to do with the cost of housing or the best way to train workers or teach students or vote or do politics.

Alas, the identity issue isn't one confined to the North or the non-London. Every inch of the island is infused with identity politics of some sort, to the point where even naming it is problematic. One of us now simply refers to 'the island', which tends to shock people.

> 'You know, I never think about the fact that we are an island.'
> 'You are also a monarchy with a state church in which the queen is the pope.'
> 'Yes, but nobody really believes in all that.'

A wise person at one of the many devolution events we go to once referred to the years and years of debates about changing the geography of power as 'a House of Lords type problem'. Almost everyone agrees that a modern 'democracy' like that found on the island should probably not have an unelected parliamentary body which still contains Lords and Viscounts and Earls who earned their titles the old-fashioned way - by inheriting them. The problem is that nobody can agree on a replacement, so inertia wins.

Perhaps devolution, and the tricky problem of how to govern all the various things which need governing in a place which is both hyper-sensitive about its micro-identities and one of the most complex and highly urbanized spaces on earth, isn't just 'a House of Lords type problem'. Perhaps the pathway forward involves actually solving the actual House of Lords problem first.

The idea of an elected senate – ideally more democratic than the United States' version of the same – is exciting because it could be located in Manchester and because it is actually semi-possible. This would be the radical choice, not because it would actually solve the problem of how to make the transport system better, or how to feed people, or educate them, or deal with that most vexing of local political issues – bin collection. It would be radical in its symbolic rationality, it would be radically modern, radically northern, radically affordable, and it would require that the multiple identities of the non-London agree on this one big plunge that would raise one of them seemingly above all the others. It would be a moment of cooperation that could perhaps pave the way for a federalized political space, for a decentralized economy, for a new spatial politics for a new economic order, for the making of Barnsley less poor without making it any less Barnsley. That, after all, is what this is all about, no?

References

Didion, J (1981). *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.

**School of Politics and
International Studies**

University of Leeds
Leeds, United Kingdom, LS2 9JT
E: r.hayton@leeds.ac.uk
W: www.wrcn.uk