

**Maybe it's because I'm a Londoner? Place, Locality,
Nationality and Identity**

By Patrick O'Sullivan

In a society in which a majority of people are at least two generations removed from the habitual, if not always comfortable, relationships with soil, kin and community, many seek the security of some myth of commonality involving an association of geography and identity to quell emotional turmoil with safe simplicity. A few have sought to dig into the sources of anxiety to grasp its complexity in fictional and discursive works. My hometown, London, has provided the occasion for much of this searching. Ball (2004) has completed an excursion through *Imaginary London*, examining the viewpoints of Anglo Canadians, a Jewish Canadian, Caribbean Asians and Blacks and a variety of people from the Indian subcontinent, ending with the Anglo-Caribbean fused perspective of Zadie Smith (2000) in *White Teeth*. This ensemble is billed as “postcolonial” in time and “transnational” in geography. Unfortunately its publication missed Smith’s (2003) *Autograph Man* and Monica Ali’s (2003) *Brick Lane*. What was also missing was the impression of a major population element of Smith’s London, especially Willesden where most of her action takes place. She herself dismisses the Irish with crude stereotypes as toughs and drunks. Yet they have been the largest alien element in London’s make-up for a considerable time, and could be given some credit for the world being postcolonial. One of the first cracks in the empire’s structure was after all begun in Mitcham, south London, in 1909, when Michael Collins was inducted into the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and completed in London twelve years later when he signed the treaty that removed the Irish Free State from the United Kingdom. This gap in Ball’s coverage fails to net a wealth of experience of place, identity and nationality and its cultural and political fallout. Like most works in this vein Ball’s

does not come to conclusions. It fails to address trenchant, commonplace questions. Does place matter that much, or is home where the heart is? Are we as much children of where we have been as of the times in which we live? Which of the variety of geographic tags we might adopt is most powerful in shaping our attitudes and behavior? Is nostalgia a debilitating ailment, or merely a headcold? Can we step aside from our deep indoctrination into nationality and look at the world above and beyond its binding ties on the one hand, and from the viewpoint of a well-thumbed locality on the other? The spy novels of Greene, le Carre and Deighton have probably done more than any to address these in comprehensible terms.

As a London-Irish geographer who has lived as an alien in the USA for over thirty years, renewing my acquaintance with London annually, along with teaching courses on Britain and Ireland, and London, I can perhaps fill in some of the gap Ball has left from my experience, and offer comment, if not answers, to the questions I have just posed. In teaching as a geographer I try to convey the reality of the collection of people, activities, buildings, structures and linkages which over the last 2000 years has spread from where the Romans built a bridge over the Thames until it now reaches over much of southeast England, and to which the name "London" attaches. I trace the sequence of inscriptions and erasures spreading across the vellum, and then decompose the present text into the geographic dispositions of means of interaction, production, consumption, dwelling and ritual, and the variety of people so engaged. This provides a layered mental map with which to negotiate the partial perceptions of art and politics. My own partiality is abundantly clear, and numerically significant. I am part of the largest, self-identifying group of overseas origin in Great Britain, a group which provided the first large presence of culturally alien people in post-medieval London, distinguished by religion, speech and impoverished

rurality. Some part of this population has assimilated and imparted its qualities to the mainstream, but a significant portion has clung to their distinction. Clearly the relationship of place and identity has played a big part in these people's lives.

Place and Identity

There is a good case to be made that the matter of place and identity is **the** geographic issue. The first question God asked us, according to *Genesis 3:9*, was, "Where are you?" The rhetorical point was affirmed by Spike Milligan's proclamation that, "Everybody has to be somewhere!" Who we are is to some extent where we are and where we have been. Having spent 2.9 of our 3 million years as hunters and scavengers, we have a propensity to seek collective security, on top of the emotional attachments arising from the needs of reproduction and young rearing in late maturing creatures. As we have evolved economically through farming into more elaborate arrangements, our finite capacity for emotional attachment has come to be shared among an array of circumferences of sympathy in both interpersonal and geographic space. We can transfer the valance of our emotional energy between these radii, each of which has some geographic signature, whether it be territorial or disposed over a network-like field of interaction. The transfer of energy between circumferences occurs in response to love, hate, fear, propaganda, education, indoctrination, incitement and changing circumstances. In different times and places particular ambits have dominated the consciousness of large numbers of people engaged in collective enterprises. In these matters, change has sometimes been sudden and radical. For instance, Keegan (1993) credits the soldier farmers of the Greek city states with the revolutionary invention of total warfare to defend territorial sovereignty. Greek hoplites defied nature and the fear of full frontal, decisive battle with deadly weapons, by forming the phalanx.

To defend the honor of their ancestral fields from the defiling tread of invaders, they faced the enemy shoulders to shoulders in a collective test of courage and might. Through history, wider experience and capacity to conceive the world, enabled the fabrication of wider identities and permitted endeavors which extended emotional dominance to wider limits, making the quantum leap from the personally experienced reality of family, locality and the genius loci, to the abstraction of religious transcendence, nationality, cultural domains, class or humanity. This brought people into relationships with places they would never visit and people they would never meet. In the not too distant past, the vast majority were firmly attached to family and locality. Apart from liturgical links and the exactions and impositions of government, they had little notion of a wider geographic affinity. Habitude created a longing for home. Unfamiliar sights, sounds, smells and voices were exciting but disturbing. Absence from home, especially if enforced, caused “nostalgia” for some. The name of this lower class malady was coined by a 17th century Dutch doctor for the debilitating home-sickness which struck down German serfs dragged off to fight someone else’s wars in someone else’s places. The conquerors, rulers, landlords, and priests, given their greater mobility, had displaced themselves from locality as the supreme tie. Nomadic horsepeople or itinerant preachers had learned to live in a non-place realm. They were, indeed, admonished to do so in their indoctrination. Being told that your neighbor was a despised Samaritan meant that anyone, anywhere was. Omar, the second caliph, instructed his officers that, when asked where they were from, they should give their lineage, rather than name a village like a peasant. You are *who* you came from! The Gaelic warrior aristocracy exchanged their children as hostages and shared an itinerant learned class to overcome locality. The British ruling caste still send their children off to boarding schools at an

early age to lose locality from their speech and acquire a widespread network of their social peers. West Point and the Ivy League create military and ruling cadres in similar fashion.

The tension between notions of origination is demonstrated in Europe's dual laws of identity: *ius sanguinis*, the law of blood, and *ius solis*, the law of place, soil. German identity is determined by blood. British identity used to be a matter of where you were born. For over a century there had been a generous British imperialist version of the Roman boast, "*Civis Romanus sum!*" applied across the empire. Increasing non-white immigration to Britain in the 1960s and 70s led to a revocation of this in the 1981 Nationality Act, narrowing the soil in question to that of the British Isles. Blood was allowed to leak into the picture in the form of a "patriality" loophole for Australians, South Africans and Canadians whose parents were from the UK.

Place and Being

Much of the mystery which shrouds the topic of place arises from the multiplicity of meanings which attach to the word, whose ambiguity lends itself to indulgence in verbal gymnastics. Such exegetic excursions usually commence with a scriptural text, appealing to a source of doctrinal authority, the word according to Husserl, Derrida or Foucault. But if you really want to get phenomenological you really have to have Heidegger. His 1959 essay *Zur Seinsfrage* (On Being) would seem to be as fundamental as you can get. The customary quote is, "'place' places man in such a way that it reveals the external bonds of his existence and at the same time the depth of his freedom and reality." The problem is that these words are not Heidegger's but rather come from a prologue written by his English translators, Klubach and Wilde (1958).

These two evidently had a thing about geography and they translated lots of Heidegger's German words with distinctly non-geographic meanings, with the English "place" (O'Sullivan 1992).

Those who really want a Nazi as their moral mentor ought, at least, to get the text right!

Heidegger did write some mystic stuff about absorbing Aryan morality through the soles of your hiking boots from the geology as you tramped happily through the Black Forest (Rorty 1988).

What his geographically obsessed translators wanted to say, however, did not amount to much more than the admonition to remember where you come from!

Nationalism

Through the 20th century the convulsion of place and ideology involved in nationalism was the most powerful political force abroad. What drew me to these matters was a cry of pain from an Englishman suffering the loss of his simple Marxist faith, along with the theft of his nationality by poncey, chinless class-enemies from England's banana belt, south of the Watford Gap. Pete Taylor (1991, 1993) was seeking a new ideological home with a critical search for the North of England. My affection for the English compelled me to leap to his rescue (O'Sullivan 1994). I assured him that coming from Doncaster was ok and that displacement was not too bad. It might even be good for you. Taylor was not alone in his disquiet over England. Over the last decade there has been a perceived erosion of English identity. Youths when surveyed tick off "British" rather than "English." This is not true for Scottish and Welsh youth. Folks in Brixton and Ladbroke Grove insist on "British Afro-Caribbean." The write-in category "Jedi Knight" competes with "Church of England" in the census. The royals are a laughing stock, especially since their mismanagement of Di's demise. The only visible displays of passionate Englishness are those of disconsolate soccer fans and the ecstatic flashing and copulating of *gamberros*

*Inglese*s in San Antonio and Aya Napa. This does not bode well for the desired metamorphosis from “Rule” to “Kool” Britannia. This decline and fall is an attention catcher inasmuch as Americans read it as a dress rehearsal for the hyperpower’s endgame, having noticed the size of China and India at last. The major participants in the analysis of this phenomenon are historians and journalists, with the likes of Colley (1994), Davies (1999), Paxman (1999) and Ferguson (2003) achieving best seller status. What makes the English problem especially fascinating is the resurgence of non-English nationalities in Great Britain: Welsh, Scots, Cornish, and even Northumbrians riding an anti-Saxon wave of enthusiasm, peaking when Lisa Simpson cried “Kernow bys vykkan” and waved St. Piran’s black flag with a white cross. Along with these are the growing regional assertions by Geordies and Scousers seeking assemblies like those enjoyed by the Scots, Welsh, Londoners, and, potentially, the Northern Irish. The vast literature on the British question is summarized by Ward (2004).

These emotional tugs and pushes are taking place in the political arena and involve imaginary relations to people and places. There are indications that the sentimental monopoly of the nation state is being drained inwards as well as outwards. There are a few ardent Europeans in the UK, but for many the EU is distinctly parochial (and catholic to boot), compared to the echoes of the empire upon which the sun never sets and the special relationships with the USA. The euroskeptic UK Independence Party got 18% of the vote in the Euro elections of 2004. The Brits did globalization between 1760 and 1960, and its memory lingers on. There are antiglobalizationists now, but they have a very global organization and agenda. Besides there are enthusiasts for *unam catholicam ecclesiam*, who are the largest denomination in Britain’s dwindling churchgoing population, and, as well, those who long for *umma*, operating out of the

Finsbury Park mosque. Internet activity suggests that there is also an inward drainage into personally experienced senses of locality and placedness. This latter is aided and abetted by the strong streak of place consciousness in the popular literary tradition of England reaching from Dickens through A.J. Cronin, J.B. Priestly and Catherine Cookson to the crime writers like P.D. James and the American Deborah Crombie.

It has to be kept in mind that the nationalities which dominated place identity over the last century are of recent genesis as popular sentiments. England was the first nation state, but “English” was for long the disparaging name the Norman French conquerors of 1066 called the conquered. For three centuries they remained aloof and French. By 1400 they had adopted the English language, but were still part of the European ecumene. The severance came in 1583 when Henry Tudor founded the sovereign English nation, denying any higher authority in matters secular and sacred. Thomas Cromwell, his Vicar General, waged a campaign of propaganda, bribery, laws and terror which brought this sovereignty, and its monopoly of deadly force, home to every parish in the land. This was the ultimate geographical authority, demanding and enforcing total allegiance within its boundary. Seventy years later it was necessary to invent a new identity encompassing England, Wales and Scotland, when James IV of Scotland became James I of England also. “British” was the Anglo-Saxon conquerors terms for those they pushed aside in the 6th century. Dr. John Lee, a Welsh astrologer, alchemist and court sycophant to Elizabeth Tudor, had come up with the conceit of “Great Britain” for the big island. This was applied to the joint kingdom in 1604. The emergent British identity coincided with the Calvinist revival of the Hebrew concept of “the chosen people,” and conspired by the 1640s to create among the Puritan lords, gentry, merchants and artisans who revolted against the Stuart

monarchy, an image of the British as “the best people in the world. And in this people you have what is still more precious a people who are to God as the apple of his eye ... God hath done wonderful things amongst us – terrible in righteousness” to quote the Lord Protector of the English republic, Oliver Cromwell (from Kohn 1961, 176-177). These same people were to lay the foundation of American identity, with similar sentiments, in New England. In the course of the 18th century and the second round of the English Civil War, fought out in Scotland and Ireland, this British identity, with Englishness as its kernel, triumphed along with the parliamentary Whig oligarchy. The deep and wide adoption of British/Englishness came only at the end of the 18th century (Colley 1994). It was cultivated and propagated by the Hanoverian establishment in the throes of war with republican and Napoleonic France, amidst the flux of industrialization. It represented a conservative defense against republican and democratic ideas. Its idols were Crown, Church and Constitution, and its scripture the Whig chronicle of the inevitable path to the protestant Jerusalem.

What this development eclipsed was Wales. Ironically a Welsh family, the Tudors, started the rot. The name is derogatory. “Walas” is Anglo-Saxon for “foreigners.” They are Cymru, and have the most consistent collective story in the islands. Romano-British society survived Germanic invasion in the broad, western peninsula until the Norman conquest in the 1280s. The Welsh gentry were coopted and anglicized, while the peasantry retained their language and avoided assimilation into English culture until the 19th century. Industrialization made much of Wales a coal and metal producing annex of England. In the course of the 20th century the number of Welsh speakers halved. This erosion was evident enough by 1920 to generate an academic-led political response, forming Plaid Cymru. This was a linguistic, cultural nationalist

party with little following in the industrialized areas. From mid-century, the government in Westminster conceded to Welsh agitation and aspirations with a national capital, a Welsh office, Welsh language provisions and an assembly in Cardiff.

Scottish identity has an odd bipartite genesis. Named for Irish invaders of the 4th century, the present Scots image emerged from the 19th century fusion of two incompatible geographic and cultural components, Highlands and Lowlands. The kingdom of Scotland is a century older than that of England. The heroes who resisted its absorption into Norman England, such as William Wallace and Robert Bruce, were Norman French gentlemen, not hairy-arsed Highlanders. In 1320 the Scottish parliament appealed past the English crown to the top of the medieval moral and legal hierarchy for recognition, “while there exist one hundred of us we will never submit to England. We fight not for glory, wealth and honor, but for that liberty without which no virtuous man will survive.” (quoted in Davies 1999, 378) They achieved recognition and their independence under the Norman, Stuart family. When the Tudors expired without issue in 1603, James Stuart moved south. A century and two civil wars later the catholic Stuarts were excluded and the Whig establishment put a protestant German princeling on the throne of the United Kingdom. The Stuart efforts to regain the throne in 1716 and 1745 exploited their Highland supporters. Their failure excused the scattering of the Highlanders and the extirpation of their culture in the 1750s. After 1820, when they were no longer a threat, the Highlanders were subject to the same treatment meted out to the indigenous population in the USA. A romanticized, prettified Highland culture was reinvented complete with skirts, tartans and bagpipes, and embraced by Lowlanders and the royal family. This odd fusion is still with us as one of the strongest and most widely recognized iconic signatures in the world. But political

nationalism, as professed by the Scottish Nationalist Party, has nothing to do with this flummery. It is not Gaelic revivalism. Its cultural heritage is the Romano-Scottish Enlightenment of the 18th century. It is the revival of a nearly defunct 1930s movement by economists, who in the late 1960s thought that North Sea oil might provide for economic independence.

“Irish” is also an imposed label, arising 1000 years ago from an Anglo Saxon attempt at the locals’ name for their island, Eri. The native ruling caste saw themselves as Gaels, cognate of Gauls, Galls and Galatians. This is a cultural rather than a geographical designation which some carried with them in the 4th century into western Scotland. For these folks the dominant affective radius was the *fine*, i.e. family extended to five generations. After this elite were dispossessed and dispersed, the peasantry they left to the tender mercies of a protestant landlord ascendancy eventually sought political remedy for their afflictions. This took the form of a demand for home rule, the reinstatement of the Irish parliament in Dublin, which had been abolished by the Act of Union of 1800. If they had their way it would represent majority interests, rather than those of the landlord class which ruled prior to 1800. After the devastation of the 1840s, more were drawn to republican nationalism. Ironically the founders of this movement were the mainly protestant United Irishmen who had grafted French revolutionary zeal onto their Hebraic sense of nationhood and opened membership to the catholic population. The French revolutionaries had profoundly changed the notion of nation from that of the territory containing people, to a fusion of people, territory and polity into a corporate mass personality and consciousness.

By the end of the 19th century in Ireland, with the extension of the franchise, protestants had second thoughts about home rule as “Rome rule,” while English foot dragging had encouraged

the republican tendency among catholics, prompted by the expatriate population in the USA. It was at this time that the emergent Irish myth acquired its Celtic patina, inspired by the big house, Anglo-Irish led, Iron Age revival, along with more popular means of creating cultural distinction from the English, such as the Gaelic Athletic Association. The eventual victory of republican nationalism in the 1920s did leave the Ulster plantation protestants partitioned in Northern Ireland, still in the UK, but enjoying the home rule they had so vigorously opposed for the whole of Ireland, gifted to them in the form of their own parliament and government in Stormont, along with a largely dissident, disadvantaged catholic minority. The innate tension in this arrangement erupted in 1969 into a thirty year civil war, ending in a cease fire in 1998, and a continuing political search for an acceptable constitution. In the Republic, as it was declared in 1949, the simplicities of the national myth purveyed as history in schools are being questioned, but the economic success of the Emerald Tiger and a world-wide enthusiasm for things Irish has intensified emotional attachment to Irishness.

In these matters we are not dealing with time-honored, deeply ingrained, cultural communities, but with ever-changing uses of invented tags. These geographical identities are powerful political forces which have held sway with large numbers over the last two centuries in these islands. Where their countervailing forces played out most directly was in the UK's capital, London.

London

The English capital has seldom more than reproduced itself and so its growth has always been fed by immigrants, making up about a quarter of its population. From mid 19th century more and

more came from overseas, and from mid 20th century these were increasingly non-white, who could form the majority of London's population by mid 21st century. "Londoner" might be applied to most of the genetic and cultural varieties of people. For most of their waking hours residents identify with a street, a locality, a place of work or of education. It is still a collection of villages. It is only interaction with outsiders which calls for the collective identity. There was evidently enough of a sense of shared interests in the political arena to generate demand for a collective voice, an assembly and a mayor. This involved reinstating the man Margaret Thatcher abolished the Greater London Council in 1986 to get rid of, Ken Livingstone. In 2002 Londoners voted for the man with the most forceful, independent voice to keep their interests to the fore, despite Tony Blair's efforts to scupper his candidacy.

When you cast your mind back to recall when you were first conscious of these broader geographic groupings and tags and of belonging to them, it is difficult to disentangle oft-repeated family myths from personal recollection. I do remember when I was three standing in our flat in 20 Calcott Road, Kilburn, with plaster over everything except the clearing on the cooker where my Mam was making a cup of tea before we turned around and headed back for Stroud. I suppose there must have been a doodlebug (V2) hit locally. Although the British Army family allowance was minimal, wives did get a free rail pass. So I did have early experience of coming from London. I spent some portion of my early years in Thrupp near Stroud, Gloucestershire, where my Auntie Mary and cousins lived. Even though they talked differently, I was aware of being closer to cousins than to the kids next door in Kilburn that I saw every day. I shared a bed with them for a start. To my cousins I was "Pat London," but whether I was a Londoner was another matter. The kids from 18 Calcott Road were Londoners. They were Cockneys. In

Kilburn these were not especially privileged, being incomers like most people. Their folks came from the East End, within the sound of Bow Bells. They had parties at which they sang “Knees up Mother Brown” and did the “Hokey Cokey.” Their culture was represented on British Movietone News by pearly kings and queens in Bermondsey with “Maybe its because I’m a Londoner” on the soundtrack. When I got to Madison, Wisconsin, 20 years later and my appearance and speech prompted the inquiry, I would say I was from London, but by then I had learned to add an inversion of Wellington’s retort to accusations of being Irish because he was born in Dublin, “Being born in a stable does not make one a horse!” It was, of course, easy for a Patrick Michael O’Sullivan, looking as I did, to explain that being born in London did not make one English. Through the 1970s and 80s Special Branch would always take me aside on any trip between Britain and Ireland, on looks alone. When the chance arose I dropped the “Dr.” from my passport to give them less to be pissy about.

I cannot remember ever considering myself English. My Mam assured me that I was classed “a blue-eyed Irish bastard who need not apply” while I was in my pram. When my Dad was demobbed in 1945, we went to Ireland on a holiday and I was hooked. He came from the Dingle Peninsula and my mother from the Comeraghs in Waterford. These are magic places, big skies, sea, mountains, cows, dogs, horses, cowshit, and I was related to everyone we met. This was who I was. This satisfaction came to be challenged regularly on Sundays by Dan Dan the Lavatory Man. Coming back from Quex Road (masses at 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 and on the half hour in the parish hall) turning at the Vic (the Victoria Hotel, later to become the Biddy Mulligan) from Kilburn High Road into Willesden Lane, you pass Dan’s public toilet. He found he could get a rise from me by calling me “a half Irishman.” I would hotly protest my wholeness

in what amounted to a confirmation ritual. I shared this cultural identity with a number of kids at Brondesbury Primary, while others were Ulster Protestants, Scots, Welsh, Jewish, Cockneys or from the English coalfields or countryside. We even had a Peruvian and a Finn. In the 1950s the IRA tried to up the ante in Northern Ireland and being Irish became political. Our response to invitations to go home was, "Give us back the Six Counties and we'll give you back Kilburn!" And that was pretty much my platform when I stood as Irish nationalist candidate in the mock election held in Willesden County Grammar School to parallel the general election of 1959. I think we got 15% of the vote.

Willesden County, disguised as Glenard Oak Comprehensive, was one of the settings in which Zadie Smith explored London's multicultural tangle in *White Teeth*, although she did not go to school there herself. She sets this scene in 1990 when its students were mostly Caribbean or Pakistani. The school and the borough were not a long standing, shared cultural experience, but rather a locale where over the decades an enormous number of combinations of personal and cultural interactions, positive and negative, have taken place. This protracted concatenation was on view in microcosm on a July Saturday afternoon in 2003. The old school building was to be torn down to make way for a glassy erection, symbolizing the transition to a sports magnet school. The acting head, who was Pakistani, gathered as many of us from the past as he could to celebrate before the change. It was not a strictly representative sample, layers of age, information, location, and self selection filtered many components from the past. Willesden as a place does not provoke nostalgia. The school reunion business never took off among the lower orders in Britain, where up to the mid 1950s most left school at 14. Schools did not play the same national indoctrination role that they did in the USA. There have been efforts, aided and

abetted by Friends United, to do it for the grammar school, bell-curve generation dating from 1944 to 1962, but this is a once-off, dwindling population. However, there was enough drama in the occasion to pull back worthy English and Jewish wrinklies from the 1940s and 50s; retired from academic, professional and managerial jobs; with a distinct bias to public service; exchanging memories of formative teachers, like Miss Stevenson the geographer who ran the sixth form, and sporting heroes of yesteryear. There were a couple of Micks, remembered for their harum-scarum exploits. These all shared a few beers, balti and patties with quiet, upwardly aspirant Indians and Pakistanis, and big, gold-adorned Afro-Caribbeans from the 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s. It was easy going and friendly, but fell into age cliques. We really did not have much except a geographic accident in common. There was little resentment of change by the wrinklies that I could detect. We all knew Willesden's function. It is an immigrant reception area. I only saw one slightly arched eyebrow along with a hint of regret from an English guy from my era, but then he had stood as British National Party candidate in that mock-elections in 1959, and had spent a career as a copper in Watford. My only real conversation was with a school administrator who happened to be a close friend of my sister. Farah is still in love with the place in all its messy turbulence. She is very English, but sees Willesden's variegation as the natural order. Going to national conferences, where the problems of teaching the indigenous population's children predominate, is unreal. While what I heard from many teachers in British schools was a longing for retirement, Farah was in there enjoying the thrills and spills. She represents the realization that simple English nationalism is not possible anymore, and it was never much fun anyways. For myself I happily carry a British passport, reluctant to adopt what I still see as the alarmingly abstract, simple-minded, self-righteousness of American nationality, despite having American children and grandchildren.

Conclusions

There is little doubt in my mind that place is a contingent quality of existence. Geography has a conditional impact as opposed to the basic structural effect on who we are of genetics, the social structure, the formative influences of the people and institutions about us. I am sure that the Butler Education Act of 1944, which created the 11+ system, had more effect on who I became than living in 20 Calcott Road, NW6. Obviously, formation takes *place*. It is located. But the same general outcome can be produced in a wide variety of geographical settings. It does not take much experience of university teaching to see this. Geography in an of itself is an incidental to much that shapes us.

In the past, when travel and communication were more onerous, then geography showed up more strongly in contingencies of speech, habits and opportunities. But looking at third generation suburbanites, nurtured partially by television; coming though schools geared to foster a strong sense of nationhood; surrounded by urban fabric and furniture built to national designs and standards in the streets and the shops, then place has dwindled to insignificance as an experienced, effective condition of life. For marketing purposes an aura of geographic uniqueness is often manufactured to generate a warm nostalgic, glow. Place is a good to be made to please a market segment.

It is indisputable that some places have physical and human qualities in their landscapes that make them especially attractive and provide their inhabitants with a windfall in aesthetic satisfaction or material or intellectual advantage. I have twinges of jealousy for my Kerry

cousins enjoying a unity of kith, kin and culture on one of the more extravagant bits of the earth's surface. It is possible to go back and become part of it. Some of my cousins were born in Kilburn and now function entirely in Irish. But there is a cost and competition. There is a constant stream of folks from around the world who come to partake something of this. It has become a place to collect and property values have soared. I could not afford to live there. I would be hard put to learn Irish. What I yearn for is how it was forty years ago. The lifestyle and many of the people are gone. The memory of what was and the occasional pleasure of what is continues as a part of me, but not a make or break element. And it is *we* not I. For our trans Atlantic sojourns, I happily station myself in a row house in a former-mining, South Wales valley, where my wife belongs and where the deprivation level is high enough to keep council tax the lowest in the country.

Now let us turn to my original questions. In the postindustrial world we are certainly more children of our times than of where we have been. Nostalgia is a commodity with a sickly, golden, Hallmark aura. My experience in the USA over the last three decades is that national identity has continued to grow steadily as the strongest geographic circumference of sympathy to the detriment of local or more distant connections. There was a sharp upturn in this since September 11, 2001. By contrast my experience in the U.K. has been of an attenuation of patriotism of this kind in favor of a real acceptance of cultural variegation and of greater transnationalism. Locality is being cultivated for profit in an economy increasingly supplemented by tourist revenues, but a real, gritty sense of place is still a common experience and a source of artistic and literary inspiration, and there are less than national geographic identities which provide real satisfaction for many.

But, if I understand my favorite novelist correctly, John leCarre would confirm that home ought to be where the heart is for a humane person. In the last resort you must be willing to sacrifice country and even local geographical comfort and pleasure for your beloveds' or friends' sake. People outweigh places or abstract geographic collectivities in the moral order. Displacement, a divorce between identity, geography and political involvement, can be liberating and salutary. My dominant circumference of sympathy and collective identity carries a label that implies embracing all people and places. Catholicism encompasses family and, for me, Irishness, along with many special places, but ultimately, according to the penny catechism "God is everywhere," even in London.

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