Making place, resisting displacement: conflicting national and local identities in Scotland

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Place
Displacement
Identity
Monuments
Diaspora

Comedia
First paragraph: In recent years, many commentators have stressed that cultural diversity and immigration are integral features of British history (e.g. see Hall 2000; Kushner 1992; Merriman 1997; Ramdin 1999; Walker 1997). Furthermore, 'four nations' histories of the Isles have highlighted the fault lines of an internally divided series of cultures, which are emphatically hybrid and riddled with conflict (Samuel 1998). Nevertheless, the cultural fault lines that lie within and across the imagined national cultures making up the British Isles tend to be ignored or smoothed over in the context of museums and the presentation of archaeological and architectural heritage. Discourses of national heritage routinely focus on normative cultures which are presented as contained, coherent and homogeneous in essence (see Handler 1988; McCrone 2002), and Britain is no exception (Kushner 1992, Hooper-Greenhill et al. 1997). Admittedly, the ‘Celtic margins’ have been portrayed as a locus of cultural and racial difference in opposition to an English core lying at the heart of Britishness (Norquay and Smyth 2002; Harvey et al. 2002). But this tension has in turn often been associated with an emphasis on smaller-scale, normative, Scottish, Welsh, English and Irish national cultures (e.g. for Scotland see Cooke and McLean 2001; McCrone et al. 1995); a tendency that devolution threatens to enhance. Within these imagined national entities, cultural difference is almost always situated in relation to ‘minority-“non-white”-immigrant’ communities, with the ‘majority-white-indigenous’ population regarded as culturally homogeneous and unproblematic in this respect (Hesse 2000: 10; see also Hall 2000). Not surprisingly, strategies of social inclusion, which play a key role in the contemporary political discourse and social policy of New Labour, tend to mirror this dichotomy in the sphere of heritage and museums. Cultural difference is seen as a basis for exclusion and alienation amongst ethnic minorities, but amongst the majority ‘white’ population exclusion and marginality is attributed to economic deprivation or physical factors, such as ill-health and disability (Sandell 2002: 3). The result of these combined strategies is that a core underlying homogeneous national heritage is maintained, with the ‘problem’ of cultural difference located either at national boundaries, or in terms of ‘non-white’, post-1945 immigrant multicultural heritage. 1 Thus, Britishness (and increasingly, in the context of devolution, Englishness, Scottishness and so forth) is ‘the empty signifier, the norm, against which “difference” (ethnicity) is measured’ (Hall 2000: 221).