

REVIEW: NATIONS AGAINST THE STATE

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Michael Keating (1996), **Nations Against The State: The New Politics of Nationalism in Quebec, Catalonia and Scotland**, London: MacMillan, ISBN 0333631749, hb, £35, pp.xiii+260

With the prospect of a Scottish parliament seeming daily to become more tangible, and with its approach the intriguing conflicts which such a body would face both internally and externally looming larger, Michael Keating's book comparing Scotland with Quebec and Catalonia is a timely publication. It is much more than just well-timed however, grappling with the apparent contemporary political paradox which has elicited so much comment, both academic and journalistic, namely how to explain the contradictory trends which see the traditional nation-state attacked from both above in the form of supranational integration and below in the guise of autonomist parties.

Keating's answer to this paradox is to go back to the future. He seeks to outline a contractual tradition in each of the three 'nation-states' under consideration which allows us to view the present developments in each of them as a modern updating of earlier negotiations. Under this interpretation national identity in Canada, Spain and the United Kingdom has always been a contested concept. The ante has been upped by the economic and cultural pressures of globalisation and the development of international organisations such as the European Union (EU) or the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA) which have made this contest more explicit over the last few decades :

Nationalism in the modern era is aiming at a moving target since the future of the state and of continental regimes is unknown. It is a process,

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a way of building a society, rather than a constitutional blueprint. The three nations will need to negotiate arrangements for living with their larger neighbours in any scenario. (p.227)

This interpretation is one which captures his dominant theme of growing dependence - it is this which explains the decline in the abilities of existing states to furnish their old gelling agents with the same integrating effect. It is this same factor which limits the horizons for those campaigning for sub-national autonomy, and growing interdependence can be seen as Keating's solution to the paradox outlined.

The book can broadly be divided into the three theoretical chapters at its start which look at definitions of nationalism, contemporary challenges to the state and the rebirth of territory as a political cleavage, and then the three longer chapters which follow, dealing explicitly with the specific Quebecois, Catalan and Scottish situations. There is then a short conclusion which seeks to marry the theory to the practice, and a methodological appendix. Its strength lies in the genuine comparison which is undertaken with much discussion of similarities and differences within the theoretical areas outlined. The three country chapters look at the growth of nationalism; nationalist doctrine; the support base of nationalism; the building of the nation; the economy; civil society and future prospects. This is done in an organised and illuminating fashion. The weakness, other than annoyingly regular typos, comes in the feeling that this author has somewhere along the line gone native. To some extent from Keating's account one would think that the areas under consideration were already fully-fledged, internationally integrated nations. Whilst all three have majorities in favour of constitutional reform, there is significant divergence in the degree of devolution sought, which goes largely uncaptured here, and yet is a crucial factor in the success of any given autonomist project. Also there is a proclivity to use terms which fudge rather than clarify the issue with the use of such expressions as 'regional nations' or 'minority nationalisms'.

The question which most Scottish nationalists will surely ask of the book is to what extent it explains Catalan and Quebecois success against Scottish failure. Both the *Convergencia i Unio* (CiU) and the *Bloc Quebecois/Parti Quebecois* (BQ/PQ) parties have had notable periods of electoral success, which have translated into power, both at the provincial and, in the Catalan case, at national levels. This is in stark contrast to the Scottish National Party (SNP). Keating's book provides partial encouragement and partial caution. The most obvious difference which he highlights is the lack of a 'political

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machinery with which to maintain a national debate'. Thus whilst Barcelona and Quebec City provide a local focus and stronghold for the campaign, Scotland lacks any democratic element to complement the devolved bureaucracy of the Scottish Office in a way similar to the complex apparatus in Catalonia and Quebec. This message will seem manna for the SNP gradualists, who argue that once there is a parliament in Edinburgh, the rest really will be history and it will be a few short steps to independence. However Keating also argues convincingly that the greatest advances in terms of autonomy are made when there is encompassing unity between different social and political groups. The in-fighting and suspicion which has left the Constitutional Convention bereft of Conservative or Nationalist support, and which many predict will threaten a parliament on Calton Hill, would keep Scottish nationalism in the dark ages by providing food for those who will undoubtedly criticise such a body as a talking shop. The Catalan and Quebecois lesson here is one of keeping the ultimate goal to the fore and submerging internal rifts for the greater 'national' good.

How close then is Scotland to these two most admired examples of areas which gain concessions from their dominant nation-states? The most obvious difference is that for two hundred years Scotland has had no significant linguistic divergence from the 'state language'. This provides an important difference from Quebec and Catalonia which Keating draws attention to in the context of globalisation :

Catalonia and Quebec show that it is possible to sustain minority language and culture in the face of the global market and pressures from within the host state. In both, language serves the purpose of social integration and solidarity in the face of the market. Yet the two cases present contrasts. In Quebec language is still a marker of ethnic differentiation. Relationships of the Quebecois majority to the anglophone and native minorities are at best consociational rather than integrative. In Catalonia, language does serve to differentiate incomers from natives but both official policy and the aspirations of incomers work to break this down within a generation. Consequently, language policy in Catalonia is a great deal less conflictual. (p.222)

Language is central to both Catalans and Quebecois in terms of their identity - it is the totem of their difference. However, Scotland need not despair, for despite the absence of a different mother tongue (notwithstanding the Gaelic fringe and considerable dialect differences from BBC Received

Pronunciation), Scottish identity seems to be unaffected. Indeed in data collected by Luis Moreno and presented at a recent conference in Edinburgh on the 'stateless nations' of Scotland, Catalonia and Quebec, the Catalans were much less likely to see themselves as 'Catalan only' or 'Catalan more than Spanish' than the Scots who crowd into the analogous categories in similar surveys here. Unfortunately there is a lack of evidence of a similar nature for Quebec, but Keating presents Scottish national identity as just as strong and active as his other two cases.

It is here that the concept of civil society comes to the fore as a powerful explanatory tool in all three cases under Keating's microscope. It is, of course, a notoriously difficult term to define, but the key point in Keating's use of the term comes in civil society serving as a surrogate for the integrative powers of a state: 'integration takes place through the civil society, in the presence of a relatively weak state' (p.44). An immediate rider needs to be issued here to differentiate the Catalan situation from the other two, given that it endured almost forty years of Francoist suppression in contrast to the institutional and, in Canada's case, constitutional accommodation, of difference between sub-state areas and the official state. However, in all three cases Keating traces the history and contemporary growth of distinct civil societies. Language is important, but it is only one in a matrix of factors including legal and political institutions, religion, culture, folklore, myths, leisure and beyond. The mix is different depending on the specific circumstances, but many of the constituent elements bear similarities, showing the value of analyzing Scotland in comparative perspective, by assuring us that we are not alone in the democratic struggle for accountability.

Keating's book is a valuable contribution to the ongoing debate as to the shape of nationalism at the end of the twentieth century and its possible form in the next century. He highlights the changes which have occurred in a relatively short space of time and gives particular emphasis to the conversion to free-trade of Catalans, Quebecois and Scots through policies such as the SNP's 'Independence in Europe'. The degree to which new terminology is required to capture the new developments in the politics of the nation-state is left an open question by Keating's books. It may be that Scotland can start to furnish empirical, rather than merely theoretical, answers to such questions after the next general election. However, comparisons with Catalonia and Quebec reveal that the greatest advances are made through wide consensus, the creation of which looks likely to provide Scotland's citizens and politicians with their greatest challenge as they approach the next century.

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