

## **REVIEW: BEING ENGLISH IN SCOTLAND**

*Richard Kiely*

Murray Watson, **Being English in Scotland**, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003, xi+208 pp, pb, £12.99, ISBN 0 7486 1859 7.

One gets a sense, not least given the commendable variety and extent of sources consulted, that this was a 'labour of love'. Watson's premise is that historians have consistently ignored Scotland's largest migrant group, the English, and he aims to fill this gap. In doing so, he has produced a readable and at times humorous account. It avoids many of the pitfalls of rapidly turning a thesis into a monograph, and where he fails, some blame lies in editorial hands. However, after ten years of research into national identity in Scotland, English migrants – their identity claims in different contexts and the receipt of these by 'indigenous Scots' – is an area of broad experience and some serious problems remain with Watson's account.

This review examines the chapters in turn, partly because their ordering felt slightly misdirected. The introduction came across as a little dull, surprising given the author's obvious enthusiasm for his task elsewhere. Watson makes a number of points with the aim of dispelling several myths that have developed around English migrants, primarily that they are overwhelmingly middle-class and relocate to rural communities as 'white settlers'. Chapter 2 outlines how such myths have generally been reinforced by his discipline's previous lack of substantive, rigorous analysis. Here certain prominent historians are 'named and shamed', and the author amusingly insinuates that their oversights may result from some of them being English migrants

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### *Scottish Affairs*

themselves. They either take the phenomenon for granted, because it reflects their own experiences, or they are complicit for certain (unspoken) reasons, in maintaining these myths. The citing of 126 footnotes in this chapter identifies the source discipline but, for a general readership, is an editorial oversight.

Chapter 3 concentrates on census data and provides some statistical gems. For example, by 1921 the English overtook the Irish as the largest migrant group in Scotland, and from 1951-2001, English migrants increased by 84% from 222,161 to 408,948 (8.1% of the Scottish population) whilst nearly double that figure of Scots-born moved to England (796,049). Watson's interpretation of the data is generally persuasive but not wholly justified in claiming to debunk the myth that the English are (perceived as) largely middle-class. He might have unpacked further that the *perception* is they are, relative to their Scottish 'hosts', even if in reality the actual percentage difference is small.

Watson's examination of the proportions of English migrants by region is sound. The Borders has the highest figure of 17% English-born in 2001 but, unlike the Highlands and Islands, it has not figured as prominently in studies of English migration. Many simply argue that the latter is prioritised because of 'visibility' and 'impact', given the migrant proportions of population. However, the Borders figure suggests that this Highlands and Islands interest may stem more from the symbolic importance it has as a key element of representations of Scotland's uniqueness, through appeals to forms of cultural difference and distinctive place.

Chapter 4 considers the **Third Statistical Account of Scotland** and its value in *qualitatively* unmasking English migrant experiences. This is an excellent data source, sensitively handled by Watson. His reflections on both the experiences and perceptions of English migrants as 'services personnel' and their associational activities, coupled with his section on 'language, meanings and attitudes', are excellent. This chapter provides contrast to the previous *quantitative* census material and a bridge into his oral testimonies. Regarding chapter ordering, leaving the rich oral testimonies almost exclusively to the latter half of the book seemed an oversight, as by this stage of the book some readers' interests may have waned. This decision seriously affects the overall balance of the book. Occasionally illustratively placing testimonies in the earlier chapters would have helped.

*Review: Being English in Scotland*

Throughout the second half of the book, where Watson analyses his own data, what had begun as niggling concerns become more significant issues. A number revolve around Watson's methodology, particularly his claims to its infallibility but also his sample recruitment. Moreover, his handling of and claims for his essentially qualitative data to be representative are highly problematic. His treatment of the phenomenon of anti-Englishness does not do justice to its complexity. Also, a more trivial criticism, is Watson's apparent attempt to inject Foucault's ideas late-in-the-piece, instead of outlining them in detail along with more coherent connections to his data. The regular two line 'nods' to Foucault's concepts that pepper the book increasingly became rather irritating.

It is disappointing to be told, early on, that those requiring detail on his methodology should consult his unpublished thesis, not the most accessible of sources. How Watson recruited his sample of 64 migrants (the cited oral testimonies) never really becomes clear and is critically important. Their occupations, extremely high levels of associational activity/responsibilities and the number with media profiles suggests quite selective sampling, which itself has repercussions for claims to being 'representative'. Of further concern is the belief that, given his face-to-face interviews were open-ended oral testimonies, he need not concern himself, even consider, any 'interviewer effect'. Moreover, statements such as '93.1% of my oral testimonies...' suggests at best an unusual handling of *qualitative* data, as does his willingness to unproblematically generalise from the specifics of his small selective sample to the entire population. Watson also talks of 'seeking internal consistency' given 'contradiction' within respondents' testimonies. This suggests that he mistakenly views contradiction as problematic rather than a feature of studying identity construction/maintenance where people interact with a variety of others, in different contexts.

Watson's handling of 'anti-Englishness' gives most cause for concern. Primarily outlined in Chapter 8, 'Anglophobia', he visits the topic throughout whilst seeking to support the thesis that anti-Englishness is not a problem. He cites as 'the most significant finding of his research' that '94% of his contributors felt that anti-Englishness is not a problem' (p.143), having cited on p.127 that it was 'not a serious problem'. That difference is significant and not inter-changeable. Here his results diverge markedly from those of Hussain and Miller (2003) and their recent study of English people in Scotland, that was set alongside an examination of minority ethnic people's

### *Scottish Affairs*

views. This as yet unpublished academic research has already received, like Watson's, widespread coverage in the Scottish press, highlighting the media interest in this topic. Watson's willingness to simply take at face-value his respondents' testimonies, without reflecting on the context they were collected in or the sensitivity of the topic, causes concern. That many English migrants deny anti-Englishness in an interview context, albeit one sensitively conducted, may be much more problematic than Watson concedes. There are interactional, even 'self-defence' reasons, why people are unwilling to accuse others of forms of discriminatory behaviour. This point is often expressed in similarly sensitive research into topics like racism.

In contrast, Watson's analysis of anti-Englishness and the media, in his 'Sport, politics and the influence of the media' chapter, is strong. It recognises and details media willingness to exaggerate/distort stories to sell papers and/or support political aims. However, more generally Watson too easily downplays the significance of anti-Englishness, and might wrongly be read as an apologist for such behaviour, too content to unproblematically proclaim the 'blame the victim' views of some of his respondents. When counter-examples to his thesis appear, as they often do in his respondents' testimonies and in other studies, Watson tends either to superficially dismiss them as 'unusual' accounts, or to say that anti-Englishness is perceived as a less serious form of discrimination than, say, sectarianism in Scotland. Assessing other studies, he rather ironically points to deficiencies in their methodology. Working in a closely related field, one recognises that understanding the complexities, extent and significance of anti-Englishness is not easy but feels that Watson has fallen short.

These significant concerns should not wholly detract from the breadth of Watson's coverage. He has an uncanny ability to identify intriguing features within the heterogeneous forms of English migration into Scotland. In his 'Take the high road' chapter, he rightly dismisses 'push and pull', 'cause and effect' migration models as simplistic and instead examines the 'quality of life' thesis and importance of past holidays as 'tasters' to permanent residence for English migrants. That English migrants are disproportionately involved in 'New-Age' spiritual communities in Scotland is another of Watson's fascinating asides.

On the theme of migration, his 'Structural invisibility' chapter is possibly his best. He argues that 'the English' are less visible by ethnicity, religion, migration patterns, social class and occupations than other migrant groups.

*Review: Being English in Scotland*

His points that English migrations are 'an essentially personal affair with inevitable consequences for assimilation and visibility', and that 'the heterogeneous nature of the English, compared with the homogeneity of others', leads to their invisibility, are key. He rightly illustrates the strength of accent as an identity marker, given its audibility and resultant ability to undermine any English migrants' claims to Scottishness. Such claims may surprise some readers, but other studies support this 'changing identities' phenomenon.

Conversely, Watson's 'Fitting in' chapter is weak, partly because he fails to problematise 'acculturation' and 'assimilation' and too easily generalises on 'Scottish' and 'English' values. He seems to view the process as wholly beholden to migrants 'adapting and integrating', not host communities accommodating, even celebrating, cultural diversity through inclusive practices.

Watson's 'National identities' chapter finishes the book strongly with an excellent literature review that, nonetheless, could have come earlier and informed his testimonial analysis. Key points include examples of coming to Scotland awakening migrants' awareness of their Englishness (if not pride in it). He usefully draws on Bechhofer et al (1999) for the importance of context and 'significant others' receiving identity claims and is right to stress that, for some, Britishness becomes an 'umbrella identity', accommodating their English and newly found Scottish elements.

Watson's ringing endorsement of Dickson's (1994) 'Scottishing effect', in respect of his migrants' national identities, was unconvincing, as only 43% of his contributors even mention national identity in their oral testimonies. This is highly problematic and, although it is equally so to hypothesise about the other 57%, might they not simply take their national identities for granted, treating them as unimportant products of birthplace and upbringing? Other work in this area (McCrone et al 1998, Kiely et al, 2001) would suggest so. More convincing is Watson's argument that English migrants, over time, share certain values and attitudes of Scottish 'civic society', and he insightfully conveys that omnipresent here is a sharply defined, usually negatively perceived, 'other' of Englishness.

The lack of any focused review of how his contributors saw constitutional change is disappointing. Material dotted throughout the book suggests that some contributors saw this issue as relevant to their migrations and/or

### *Scottish Affairs*

national identities. The potential 'timeliness' of this study made it unfortunate that these were not analytically drawn together. But, overall, **Being English in Scotland** is an informative read, with enjoyable passages, while significant flaws lessen the persuasiveness of Watson's central argument.

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