

REVIEW: SCOTTISH NATIONALISM AND THE IDEA OF EUROPE

Peter Lynch

Atsuko Ichijo, **Scottish Nationalism and the Idea of Europe: Concepts of Europe and the Nation**, London: Routledge, 2004, 176pp, hb, £60, ISBN 0-7146-5591-0.

This book is the outcome of the first PhD thesis in Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Department of Sociology at London School of Economics. The book itself sets out to examine the ‘what and why’ aspects to Scottish attitudes to Europe and the European Union, through exploring the elite views and perceptions of 35 Scots from academia, journalism, business, politics and the trades unions. It also seeks to evaluate and utilise the various theories of nationalism to determine their explanatory potential and seek to locate Scottish nationalism within a wider framework of nationalism and ethnic studies. The manner in which these two sets of questions are combined make for an accomplished piece of scholarship.

Whilst basing a book on 35 interviewees might seem a rather narrow base compared to using mass data surveys – and readers will recognise many of the interviewees from political and academic life in Scotland – the interviews do in fact produce a range of recognisable views with which to investigate Scottish views of Europe. The book is also very much focused on how the idea of Europe is perceived and utilised, rather than how it is received by the mass population in Scotland. It also provides an account of the Europeanisation of Scottish politics in the 1990s, with the linkage of European integration and constitutional politics by a range of political parties as well as civic Scotland.

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Choosing these elites also enabled a journey into the sociology of knowledge to examine the special position of intellectuals in society, how they understand history, nationalism and identity and seek to mobilise them for political purposes. As most of the interviewees had some level of activity in politics as activists, commentators or opinion-formers, each would play some role in shaping public attitudes. Specifically, this meant examining how intellectuals harnessed Europe and the European Union to their own political projects such as independence (in the case of the SNP), a more socially just Scotland (trade unionists and the left) and also how Europe became a substitute for the British empire for a range of elites.

This might make attitudes to Europe sound unduly instrumental, though most of the attitudes expressed by interviewees in the book are more complex than this. However, they do show Scots elites in a particular time period rationalising 'Europe' as a positive factor for Scotland – whether as a political construction to facilitate trade, economic development or social justice, or as a replacement for the demise of empire in the absence of statehood. Moreover, elites buy in to Europe to the extent that they are seen to become active promoters of Europe and the EU too, transmitting positive views to the mass population. Elites also use the idea of Europe as a mechanism to differentiate Scotland within the UK, and the Scots from the English, through reference to myths of an egalitarian, democratic and racially-tolerant Scotland – myths that readers will recognise, even though they might not think they are actually myths.

Centrally, the book tries to determine the kind of images of Europe that Scots project into national identity, and yet it also examines the conundrum of Scots identity, with its vague content and lack of objective markers of what is a Scot. Despite this, proponents of nationalism in Scotland have a rich, shared history to maintain and promote. The analysis here addresses history, territory, culture, etc, through the lenses of both modernist and primordialist accounts of nationalism. It also examines the reasons for the absence of nationalism in Scotland in the nineteenth century, through focusing on the work of the main theorists of nationalism. The absence of an interventionist state and the opportunities provided by Empire were both seen to be important in preventing the rise of Scottish nationalism in the age of nationalism.

If there is a problem with the book, it is that it is out of date, with the interviews having taken place in the mid-1990s. However, this gives the book a distinctive flavour by examining Scottish elites at a set moment in time. The

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interviews were conducted in the years following the European Union's 1992 single market programme, when the EU was popular. It was a time when a Europe of regions idea had more currency than now, as Europe formed new links with regional governments to finance regional economic development through the reformed European Regional Development Fund after 1988.

It was also a period of Nationalist and nationalist mobilisation over Scotland's constitutional future from the Doomsday scenario through the Constitutional Convention to Democracy Day on 12th December 1992 when the EU held a summit in Edinburgh. Elites were interviewed after a decade of Conservative government that featured opposition to devolution, anti-EU feelings and Mrs Thatcher. For Scotland this could be seen as a period of both Euro-optimism and also devo-optimism, and it certainly influences the views of the various interviewees and captures the prevailing mood of the time. They might be less sanguine about Scotland and Europe if interviewed a decade later in 2004, though most of the positive attitudes to Europe would likely survive.

However, despite the time-bound nature of the research, this is a well-constructed, readable and very clear account of the attitudes of Scottish elites towards Europe and the way in which these elites project images of Europe and the European Union onto Scottish national identity. The interview material is skilfully deployed in the main empirical sections and backed up by some wider statistical data to assess changing public attitudes to Europe too. Both the analysis and the conclusions benefit from an outsider's perspective and academic rigour and will prove thought provoking.

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