

Globalization and Nationalism: the New Deal?

Life and culture continue to yield new emergent social entities, new adaptive forms brought into being in order to pursue survival and reproduction both through and in spite of the specific work of capitalism.

Richard N. Adams, 'The Dynamics of Societal Diversity: Notes from Nicaragua', *American Ethnologist*, Vol 8, No.1, 1981

I know, far too much has been said and written already about 'globalization', *mondialisation*, *Globalisierung*, and also about their opposite numbers, *anti-globalization*, 'glocalism' and so on. No-one should propose adding to this untidy heap, without doubts and reservations.¹ Yet I would like to try my hand again tonight, and ask your forgiveness in advance. The only excuse possible is that of approaching the *Zeitgeist* from a different angle. Rather than adding one more interpretation, I will try to decipher something that is in course of being said, and said not (or not only) by intellectuals, academics and '*intéllos*', the shamans of our age. The emerging message I'm after is the one that may be coming from below, from the electorate of Scotland — from yourselves in fact (assuming you're mostly, unlike myself, on the Scottish voter's roll).

Part of that message was delivered last May, in the vote that returned a Holyrood Parliament dominated by the Scottish National Party, leading to the minority government that has followed. It was a message favorable to the Independence cause, and seems certain to carry the Scots forward to one or more referenda on the matter fairly soon. But I suspect that a great deal more than this was already being said, or half-said, or sought for, in this striking shift. At least part may have come from deeper sources, which surely relate to the current way of the world — 'globalization' and all that — as well as to party struggles, the plight of the British and Scottish Labour Parties, and the weird dilemmas of Westminster's archaic constitution. Political leaders naturally hope people are voting for policies on this and that, after canny calculations of gains and losses; but of course voters are also concerned (often more concerned) with 'directions': general inclinations of society and soul, affected by passions or longings that may well be in the background of debate.

There is perhaps a feature of the Scottish electorate that may help us towards such a diagnosis. It's the one indicated by Professor Tom Devine in his recent history *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000* (1999), where he argues that the Scots have been the leaders in modern emigration. Comparatively viewed, they ap-

pear to have outdone the Greeks, the Irish, Jews, Italians and Norwegians from the 18th to the 20th centuries, and deposited a very extensive global diaspora whose size remains infuriatingly difficult to estimate. Most guesses put it at eight or nine times the size of our present-day population, and research continues today in North America, Australasia and Southern Africa to establish both its numbers and its contemporary outlook. But my point tonight is less the migrants than as what they left behind, a population unusually affected by so much departure, over such a prolonged period of time — around two and a half centuries. In Scotland Romany or Gypsy nomads are usually called simply ‘travelling people’; an appropriate label from residents who, if not travelling themselves, invariably have well-travelled relatives in Calgary, Cape Town, Nova Scotia, Auckland, Chicago or Perth (Western Australia) and who either go there, or receive fairly irregular visits from them and their descendants.

Michael Russell has some amusing phrases about this in his book *The Next Big Thing* (2007). Wherever you go, he points out, you find that ‘Insecurity is part of the Scottish condition. We come from somewhere else, and settle where we feel least uncomfortable. We belong to places that we only visit, yet we are visitors in the place where we live...’ Having returned from Melbourne for this talk, I confess to a personal stake in the long-distance family culture. The dates of leaving my Scots-founded city and university meant that I missed meeting up with a Queensland cousin; but on the other hand I was awarded the chance of catching up with another lot, who were just then visiting the homeland after prospering in the Republic of Ireland. In his book Devine diagnoses what he calls ‘Highlandism’ as one byproduct of this sustained communal haemorrhage: the projection of imagined origins, a famously synthetic folklore of ‘Auld Lang Syne’, an identity deploying the most colorful items from successive wardrobes and cabin-trunks, with appropriate music and displays. The least home-bound population on earth has generated the most home-bound and nostalgic ideology of *Heimat*.

But more than folklore is at stake here. This outstanding (and continuing) hemorrhage from such a small population may have fostered an unusually exposed and outward-looking mentality, a mind-set forcibly attuned to a wider view, and to contrasts of culture and custom. More than most other nations, Scots have been so to speak ‘pre-globalized’ by such mundane circumstances. This matter-of-fact *Weltanschauung* has little to do with the new *intéllo* fad of ‘cosmopolitanism’ — the aloofness deemed ethically appropriate for the globalizing times.ⁱⁱ When Scots explorer Charles Macdouall Stuart reached the centre of the Australian continent in 1860, during his famed South-North expedition, the flag he proudly planted on a small hill there had to be the Union Jack, not

the Saltire. Such was the old 1707 deal, the enchantment of that age. And what one might call the 'self-colonization' implicit in such triumphs has proved much harder to recover from than other, cruder forms of imperial hegemony.

The Theory of Scale

At which point, let me return to the enchantment of today. In spite of the reservations about 'globaloney' I mentioned at the start, *some* theory of what global circumstances means is of course needed. And here, one way forward in the morass may be to look back more carefully at certain neglected views of nationhood. What I have in mind is the curious question of the *scale* of modern countries and states. This tends to be taken for granted in most commentary and policy-formation; but should not be. It relates quite directly to what the last century's main theorist of nationalism, Ernest Gellner, always posed as *the* crucial problem in his field.

The underlying puzzle has always been not why there are so many nation states and distinct ethnic cultures but — *why are there so few*. In his classic *Nations and Nationalism* (1983) the social anthropologist Gellner observes that, although no one will ever know exactly, there can't be less than somewhere between six and eight *thousand* identifiable ethno-linguistic populations scattered round the globe. Why, then, are there less than two *hundred* or so national states? When he was writing in 1983 there were well under two hundred U.N. representatives, and though this number has grown, forecasts for the later twenty-first century don't usually envisage more than something between two hundred and twenty or thirty new (and naturally mostly smaller) independent states.

Gellner's characteristic explanation of this disparity was in terms of overall social and cultural development. The culprit, he argued, had been first-round industrialization and urbanization. These were not processes planned by some celestial council from a suitably all-powerful centre, such as Beijing, Delhi, Rome, Madrid (or wherever). No, industrialization evolved chaotically, in fits and starts, out of the unlikely fringe location of the North Atlantic seaboard, and was marked throughout by chronic unevenness and widespread antagonism. It was impossible for industries, larger-scale commerce, greater market-places and banks to develop at a small-town or region scale. Nor were they ever likely to be set up by the sprawling dynastic and military empires of antiquity, whose essential concern remained expansion, hierarchy and secure military dominance of an inherited rural world. By contrast, Capitalism (as it would later be called, notably by Scots) was able to evolve only at an intermediate level, within

societies smaller than the antique dynasties but much bigger than most ethno-linguistic groups. It demanded the formation of *relatively* large socio-economic spaces, to be viable.

Viability in that sense may never have been a fixed or unalterable condition. However, in retrospect we perceive that for over two centuries it did come to mean (as it were) ‘something like France’ or like England (in the familiar ‘Anglo-British sense): *not* something like Brittany, Provence, Monaco, Wales or Ireland. The Scots of course had already situated themselves within the bigger-is-better expansion, via the 1707 Treaty of Union. Their fate was to be the unusual one of successful ‘self-colonization’ in that world. That is, they avoided conquest or assimilation, and conserved a distinct civil society — but only by accepting (and in fact eagerly embracing and preaching) the broader rules of the new age, as laid down by France, England and other more viable polities.

As Gellner points out, such rules required a sufficiently common culture and language, and the cultivation of popular assent. This should not (incidentally) be confused with present-day ‘nationalism’. Nationhood and nationality culture and politics may have been primordial; but the ‘-ism’ is a different and far more peculiar story. Nationalism didn’t enter common parlance until the last third of the 19th century, after Abraham Lincoln’s victory over the American secessionists, and the Franco-Prussian War. Gellner always emphasized the general point, and newer historical analyses have strongly confirmed it. In all languages, nationalism became commonsense in conjunction with ‘imperialism’, as part of the climate leading into the world wars, and finally the Cold War of 1947-1989.

‘Nationalism is not the awakening and assertion of mythical, supposedly natural and given units...’ is how he sums it up, ‘It is, on the contrary, the crystallization of new units, suitable for *the conditions now prevailing*’, by which he means these emergent circumstances of primarily capitalist socio-economic development, at first in the North Atlantic area and then more globally.ⁱⁱⁱ It was those conditions that favoured the norm, the typical scale and standards for the political entities of (approximately) 1789 to 1989. British nationalism was of course just one chapter in that story, a value-parade both enforced and widely exported — and defended down to the present with mounting desperation by New Labour governments.

From Fixed to Sliding Scale

But what I want to suggest tonight is that it is precisely ‘those conditions’ that have changed, and are changing. Gellner was thinking in the 1980s, when the

old identikit 'nation-state' rules remained in place, albeit shakily. But one aspect of globalization has (notoriously) been the collapse of at least some of these rules. When commentators declare so confidently that it 'undermines' borders and flags, as well as customs posts, they usually fail to make a vital distinction. Yes, possibly blood is draining out of the '-ism'; but not out of nationalities, identities, cultural contrasts, and the wish (or the determination) to have, or to win, different forms of collective 'say' in the brave new globe. If we simply deconstruct his historic argument it follows, surely, that *scale* also must be changing its significance.

However, speculation in this zone has been limited by a curious monotheism of outlook: the child, doubtless, of Christianity, Islam, and their kind, as well as of the odd theatre of the Cold War's Iron Curtain.^{iv} Globality is decreed in advance to possess *one* overall or commanding meaning: either Neo-liberal progress *or* some new universal oppression, choose your side. In fact, what globality may be ushering in is more like a range of conflicts, it may be too much to say 'battlefields' — but certainly terrains of decision, alternative directions and possibilities. Umberto Eco has identified one of these alternatives clearly, and amusingly, in his *Putting the Clock Back*.

Look at the world since the First Gulf War, he asks: just *who* is so plainly clinging to past patterns and habits? We see the explosion and spread of what he labels 'neo-war', the curse of US-led globalization. That is, of threatened and actual incursions against largely phantasmagoric enemies like 'Terrorism' and Islam or (on the other side) 'the West' and crusade-style Christianity or Evangelism. The aim of these is to maintain and mobilize the mass public opinion upon which great (or would-be great) power élites still depend, against the individualism, privatization and indifference that accompany so many transnational blessings and successes. Societies have mutated far more than states. And this is why the latter find themselves tempted into another version of the 19th century Restoration that tried to impose stability, values (etc.) between Napoleon 1st and the 'Springtime of Nations' in 1848. Brown and Bush can't literally put the clock back, any more than Prince Metternich could; but at least they can try to slow it down a bit, with plausible aggression (ideally involving Mass Destruction threats), and of course the new forms of persuasion provided by the revolution in communications.

The guilty parties here are unmistakable: they are the old lags of Gellner's bigger-and-better epoch, plus new members and applicants to join the Body-builders Club — countries endowed with that favourite attribute of British Leaders, 'clout'. America First, naturally, but with Great Spain, Great Russia,

Great Serbia alongside cheer-leader Great Britain, plus rising muscle-flexers like India, Indonesia, Iran and China.

At the same time as it tries to take over globalization, this great-at-all-costs club is busy acquiring its own academic credentials as well. That is, Professors who seriously believe that the globe is safer — more secure — with well-padded, first-round veterans in control. An astonishing volume entitled *No More States?* appeared last year from the stables of University College, Los Angeles, arguing not only that there should be no more of these small nuisances, but that possibly a reversal of thrust may be possible, in the sense of ‘agglomerationism’ — returns to one or other metropolitan fold by populations tempted astray by romantic delusion or bad verse. In case anyone fears I’m making this up, let me quote from Professor Richard Rosecrance’s summing up:

‘Potentially dissident Scotland, the Basques, Quebec and other provincial populations have gradually come to see the federation-metropole as a less hostile environment, and their independence movements have declined in proportion...(hence) few new states are likely to be created...It is possible, even, that the number of fully independent states may decline as political units begin to merge with each other...’^v

This conclusion had the good luck to be published not long before the 2007 elections in the U.K., and in that sense comment may be superfluous. But the general sense is unmistakable: global history must be frozen in its tracks, for the convenience of existing agglomerations, including the United States and loyal fan-club Great Britain. Only thus will stability and reasonable global order prevail. ‘Bigger is Better’ was therefore not just a phase social evolution had to go through, to improve the general lot. No, it has to be made permanent, virtually eternalized, in the imagined interest of the species, indistinguishable from the established interest of the Body-Builders Club.

The Stowaways Club

And on the other side, what about the no-hopers, nuisances and parasites? Here the list could hardly be more different, but in newly surprising ways. The best approach to it remains *Foreign Policy* magazine’s ‘Globalization Index’, a now long-running attempt to estimate and compare national successes and failures of the global times. The Index takes a variety of social and cultural variables into account, not only ‘GDP’ and other strictly economic data. I only have the 2006 ‘Top Twenty’ list with me, and have only just received 2007. But in

fact its overall aspect has changed little from year to year: ‘Singapore, Switzerland, Ireland, Denmark, Canada, Netherlands, Sweden, New Zealand, Finland, Norway, Israel, the Czech Republic and so on and on, down to Slovenia, currently at No. 20 (as well as providing us with the head of the E.U. Commission). I noted that the new entrants for 2007 are Hong Kong, Jordan and Estonia.^{vi}

True, there are also some exceptional entries. The USA appears in the Top Twenty because (as the Editors apologetically explain) in spite of manufacturing decline and job exports, it shows up because most of the new globe’s spare cash has been washing irresistibly through it, at least until the regrettable ‘sub-prime’ property hitches of 2007. And the U.K. also figures, for related if more peculiar reasons: the inherited institutional role of City of London institutions in all such massive financial flows (at least, until the weird lapse of Northern Rock, now part of the state). However, the broader picture remains unmistakable: a springtime of victorious dwarves, one might say. No more convincing illustration of globalization’s new ‘sliding scale’ can be imagined. And with equal ease, anyone can see Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland queueing up to claim their places.

Sooner or later, one or more formal referenda will be of course be required for such entrants, but a kind of referendum movement, or direction, is already under way in Scotland, a gathering mixture of questioning and hardening conviction.^{vii} Among Scots this takes the form of a firming ‘self-confidence’, a kind of matter-of-factness I mentioned earlier. Again, Michael Russell puts it well in *The Next Big Thing*, where he points out the most significant trait of the post-May 2007 minority government may be its contribution to this cementing process:

The real main purpose of our Parliament may merely be to stop us moving back — to create the space in which we can get on and learn some other lessons. Lessons of confidence, and self-confidence. Lessons about who we really are, and what we really want...^{viii}

Societal Diversity

As we have seen, the old question used to be: ‘Are you big enough to survive and develop in an industrializing world?’ The advent of globalization is replacing this with another, something close to: ‘Are you *small and smart enough* to survive, and claim a positive place in the common global culture?’ Not too surprisingly, the most common answer coming up from the bowels and steerage

accommodation of the common ship is: 'You bet we are...nor do we mean to be deprived of the chance.' I think a sense of this may have been part of the election groundswell last May, in both Wales and Scotland — and maybe most notably in Scotland, for the historical reasons already noted. On the emerging global vessel, it's presence or nothing: speak up and act up, or the already existing officer and first-class passengers — the body-builders club in charge of the bridge — will not only stay there, but reinforce their grip over the lower-deck rabble of dependents, servants and migrating stowaways.

In a remarkable recent essay called simply 'Presence', the Dutch social historian Eelco Runia has made the point with a humorous metaphor.^{ix} Globalization can't help meaning that we're all 'in the same boat'; but on this noble vessel, most of the occupants can't help being virtual 'stowaways', travelling either on fake documents and overdrawn credit-cards, or just secretly, smuggled or bribed aboard at night or in disguise. Now however, as the global process continue its erratic and ambiguous course, the rabble has begun appearing on deck, in broad daylight. And not just for the fresh air, or to admire the views.

No, *they want their tickets*. It's time they were recognized, and released from the dank lower levels of ballast, coiled ropes and awful stairwells. 'Equality' is the standard demand, accompanied naturally by demands for use of the cafeteria and lounges, spare beds and some formal presence by representation on the bridge. There used to be bigger-is-best techniques for avoiding this nuisance: alibis like 'federalism', 'devolution' — home rule for the steerage classes, as it were. Allow them enough folk-dancing and local government, that'lll keep them out of trouble.

But of course *presence* in Runia's sense represents none of these palliatives. The spirit of Gertrude Stein is turning out to be quite strong up on deck, something to do with the democratic air. On this bigger, final boat everyone is now aboard, 'self-government' is self-government *is* self-government. What Charles Stewart Parnell meant in the famous remark about nobody having 'a right to fix the boundary of the march of a nation', in the sense of its will and sovereignty. The motto prefixes the recent Scottish Executive's 'National Conversation' on Scotland's future. In the new context this means not (or not necessarily) 'six or eight thousand' states corresponding to Gellner's sources of human diversity. But it does imply that no court of fixers should decide who is in or out, or what their relationships with one another should be. In practice, though, it probably signifies at least something like the foreseeable figures I mentioned before — around two hundred and twenty or thirty sovereignties over this century and next. To an increasing degree these are likely to relate to one another via formulae of *confederation*, quite different from federalism, subsidiarity, devolved

regionalism and other dodges of the bygone era. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are, like many other smaller entities around the globe, simply joining the queue to be heard on that wavelength.

And it's worth emphasizing something else too, at this point — something fundamental that globalization is bringing home, everywhere and to everybody. While the threats of globalizing uniformity are often exaggerated, they do remain real enough to have brought something else, something really new, into recognizable perspective. One might call this, the threat to Babel. Globalization can't help a degree of sameness; but, more strongly than empires of the past, the new mode may be forcing something more profound into existence. The counter to 'all-the-same-ism' can only be *cross-fertilization*, the societal equivalent of Darwin's new species and forms. That's what 'the universal' has always been, the capacity to transcend, to fuse, to breed hybrid novelty rather than merely 'agglomerate' in Professor Rosecrance's sense.

However, the power to do this rests at bottom upon more than the maintenance of diversity — it demands that differentiation be favoured, be positively fostered, by globalization. Globalization will have to perpetuate Babel, as well as confronting all its difficulties and contradictions. At bottom, the reason is that human universals arise only via contrasts, by the transcendence of borders, via cross-fertilization, through hybrids and surprises, from the unheard-of, in communities not just 'imagined' in Ben Anderson's celebrated phrase, but previously unimaginable, from presences whose spell makes the past into a bearable future.

And how on earth can anything like that be achieved without 'independence'? In this context independence surely isn't — or isn't only — backward-looking or inward-looking me-first, chip on the shoulder time, and so on. It's more like seizing the chance — and making sure it isn't the last chance — as the clock-hands move so decisively forward, the chance to contribute and to endure (or increase) with an emerging purpose not yet wholly known, because (as Runia puts it) societies must retain, or rediscover the power and confidence to surprise themselves. As (I would argue) both Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland did in May of last year.

'Absolute Instinct?'

But I've taken up too much of your time, Mr Chairman, and must sum up. With all its daft twists and turns, and hopeless exaggerations, globalization is providing new stimuli for nationality-politics. Not so much for 'nationalism' in the late 19th and 20th century sense, but definitely for the emergence of new, smaller communities of will and purpose — the nations of a new and deeply dif-

ferent age. Mistaken theorists of an earlier time — myself among them — used to complain about Scotland missing or neglecting its national opportunities, or failing to participate in earlier waves of anti-colonial liberation. But of course, the Scots were never colonized: as I pointed out earlier, they ‘did it themselves’ via ‘self-colonization’, the subordinate affirmation of a kind of flightless or contained nationality, which implied exemption from many rules of the former imperial (and then anti-imperial) world.

But today that world, those rules, now are ended, and others are in formation. To resume the power of flight simply means participation in the new forms and rules, alongside many others.^x It’s a matter-of-fact need, neither too late nor too soon, and I suspect that something of this has already sunk into popular sensibility — the nascent ‘common sense’ of a different, dawning moment in history, the moment when Eelco Runia’s ‘presence’ is possible for *us*, as well as for ‘them’ (up, out there).

There are endless problems and pitfalls as well, sure; but my task of summing up is also easy, since someone else has already said what I’ve been trying to put across this evening, only much more eloquently. So let the last word rest where it should, with our very own, dear Edwin Morgan. Back in 1994 he published a collection, *Sweeping out the Dark*, that included the lines called simply ‘Difference’ —

‘The endless variousness is all for praises.
 The faces, passing, never make an empire...
 You think not?
 You’d rather have the second-best as long as
 millions get it? Mission, you cry, the mission!...
 The endless variousness evolves, the empire expires in frozen
 edicts, you can skate there, but soon you’re off the edge
 ...The faces pass, the individuals, how there can be such
 difference we do not know but what we do know
 is that an absolute instinct loves it different,
 the world, the dialectic, the packed coaches
 whistling at daybreak through the patched countries.’

Thank you very much Mr Chairman, and thank you all for your patience tonight.

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search Council for 2008-09, for whose help the author is most grateful.

ⁱ In a recent *New Left Review* Editorial (No.48, Nov/Dec 2007), Perry Anderson has done me the honour of leading an optimistic faction among globalization merchants, by suggesting that democratization can inspire the new wave of nationalism, rather than disasters, prayer, or messianic and quasi-miraculous hopes. But, he asks, 'Is it not becoming ever thinner as it does so, not accidentally but as a condition of its spread? Fresh nation-states have risen, but nearly all the newcomers are weak or marginal. Boundaries of some kind may be an anthropological *a priori*, but why should these be national, rather than civilizational, regional, cantonal or other?' The question is valid; however, nationhood can only reaffirm its priority by being (as in the past) more effective as an instrument than the other contenders, in the overall conflicts evoked here.

ⁱⁱ On this, see Ulrich Beck's recent 'Seven Theses: a New Cosmopolitanism is in the Air', originally in *Literaturen*, Nov. 2007, also in www.signandsight.com Nov. 24 2007. Beck asserts that 'cosmopolitanism, then, absolutely does not mean uniformity or homogenization. Individuals, groups, communities, political organizations, cultures, and civilizations wish to and should remain diverse, perhaps even unique. But to put it metaphorically: the walls between them must be replaced by bridges'. However, he also thinks that 'cosmopolitanism' is like an earnest Building Society, to be somehow spared the bonfire of bigger-and-better '-isms'. If it is in the air again, this is only because nationalism is there before it (albeit of a different kind).

ⁱⁱⁱ See *Nations and Nationalism*, Second Edition, 2006, with Introduction by John Breuilly, pp.42-48 'A Note on the Weakness of Nationalism', and also 'Scale and Nation' in *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 1973, vol.3, No 1. It is remarkable how little has been written on this key issue, by comparison with the massive consideration accorded Gellner's general theory. Probably because his point has been taken too much for granted, as it still is in nearly all general comment on nationalism. For example, Breuilly's new introduction to another edition of *Nations and Nationalism* doesn't single it out, at the very moment when it is becoming more visibly important and politically relevant.

^{iv} Patrick Wright's recent analysis of the episode has added greatly to our understanding of how it worked: *The Iron Curtain: From Stage to Cold War* (Oxford, 2007).

^v *No More States?* (Edit. by R.N.Rosecrance and A.S. Stein, Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), pp.280-281.

^{vi} From A.T. Kearney's explanatory notes: 'Globalization is a much larger imperative for smaller countries with small domestic markets and limited natural resources. Seven of the top 10 countries in the index have populations fewer than 8 million and eight have smaller land areas than the U.S. state of Indiana. But total trade as a percentage of gross domestic product for countries such as Ireland and Singapore is more than twice that of economic heavyweights China and India.' See www.ForeignPolicy.com/globalizationindex

^{vii} A very persuasive analysis of the Welsh contribution has been published by John Osmond of the Institute for Welsh Affairs: see *Assembly to Senned: the Convention and the Move Towards Legislative Powers*, January 2008, ISBN 9781904773306.

^{viii} *The Next Big Thing* (2007) p.57: 'The problem...isn't out there, it's in here. It's with us...And how can you find your destiny when you cannot find your heart?'

^{ix} 'Presence' originally appeared in the journal *History and Society* (No.45, October 2006), pp. 305-316.

^x Perhaps the most suggestive text on the issue is Paul Sweeney's *Ireland's Economic Success: reasons and lessons* (New Island Publishers, Dublin, 2008).