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AUTHOR'S NOTE

What a “Sociology of Scotland” might look like can be seen in my book *The New Sociology of Scotland*, Sage Publications, 2017.

- 1 “Scotland” and “sociology” have long had a fractious relationship. While there is a good case for arguing that “Scotland” helped to found the discipline of sociology, or rather more accurately, “proto-sociology” in the work of the historian of the 18th century, Adam Ferguson, it is more common to treat the French theorist Auguste Comte as its founder in the early 19th century. In this chapter I will explore the argument that because Scotland did not fit the conventional notion of “society”, the core concept of the discipline, paradoxically its ambivalence is much closer to what “society” has become in modern times.

What is society?

- 2 Let us begin with a key definitional concept of “society” by the French sociologist Alain Touraine (1925–):

L'idée abstraite de société ne peut pas être séparée de la réalité concrète de la société nationale, puisqu'elle se définit comme un réseau d'institutions, de contrôles et d'éducation. Ce qui renvoie nécessairement à un gouvernement, à un territoire, à une collectivité politique. L'idée de société fut et est encore l'idéologie des nations en formation. (Touraine, 1981, pp. 3–13)

- 3 If we read Touraine’s words carefully, we can see that they apply to Scotland: a national society, a network of institutions, a political collectivity, and, intriguingly, a nation in the making. Patently, Scotland is not a conventional state although it has high levels of civil autonomy and aspirations to independence, and within the European Union. In

sociological terms, Scotland sits at the nexus of three key concepts: civil society, nation and state, that is, between the societal, cultural and political. As such, it is four-square in the concerns of sociology at the beginning of the 21st century.

- 4 When I was a young student, I was taught by Tom Burns, the first professor of sociology at Edinburgh University. In his inaugural lecture he said: “One cannot speak of the sociology of Scotland as one can of the Scottish economy, nor of the sociology of children as one can of child psychology.” (1970, p. 58) His point was that sociology is defined by its perspective and not by its subject matter. That perspective focuses on the social determinants of human action, by a concern with “society”, big or small. It is not the only social science to define itself in terms of perspective: social anthropology focuses on “culture”; psychology on “mind”.
- 5 We can have a sociology of institutions: for example, education, religion, economy, politics, which are in and of themselves obviously not the sole preserve of sociology. Burns did not think that a “territory” like Scotland could be the subject of sociological analysis. The point, however, is not whether Burns was right or wrong in saying you could not have a sociology of Scotland, but how instructive it is to ask the question: what is sociologically interesting about Scotland? In any case, and especially for a student of Tom Burns, his statement became for me the grit in the oyster. In the subsequent fifty years, much has changed in both sociological thinking, as well as “on the ground” in Scotland itself. What, arguably, has not changed is that the key concept in sociology is “society”.
- 6 The key question, however, is what “society” means. Read once more Touraine’s definition. His key points are: that the abstract idea of society cannot be separated from “concrete reality” of what he calls “national society” in terms of “a network of institutions, control and education”. So we are talking about “government”, a “territory”, a “political collectivity”. Furthermore, and intriguingly, “society” is about “nations in the making”. When Touraine wrote that over forty years ago, there was no Scottish parliament or government, or rather, there was a semi-detached bureaucracy called The Scottish Office, which administered Scotland in terms of education, health, development, but under the political control of the ruling government and party at Westminster. If that party did not have support in Scotland, *tant pis*.
- 7 Touraine would have had little difficulty talking about French society, and British society, but what he might have made of Scottish society is impossible to tell. In any case, he would have pointed out, Scotland is not an independent state, and hence less likely to be a “society” in those terms. On the other hand, Touraine’s interest in social movements led him to study “regionalism” in Occitanie in the 1970s (Touraine & Dubet, 1981).
- 8 That, however, still leaves us puzzled as to what “society” might mean. Here is Norbert Elias writing at roughly the same time as Touraine: “Many twentieth century sociologists when speaking of ‘society’ no longer have in mind, as did their predecessors, a ‘bourgeois society’ or a ‘human society’ beyond the state, but increasingly the somewhat diluted image of a nation-state.” (1978, p. 241) If that is so, we can have “British society”, “French society”, “American society” and so on, but no “Scottish society” because Scotland is not an independent state. However, we might ask, does “society” simply equate to the “nation-state”? The concept of the “nation-state” is fraught in any case with even more contradictions, because it yokes together

the cultural (“nation”) with the political (“state”), and we cannot be at all sure that one equates with the other. More often than not, they do not equate.

- 9 Upper-case “Society” operates at a higher level of abstraction than the nation-state—which we might call lower-case “society”. The specificities of actual or “real” societies can thus be ignored in favour of broad similarities between them. These are, of course, ideal-types. Hence, as Elias comments, sociologists have talked about “human society”, or “industrial society” or “capitalist society” and so on. In this perspective, the common features of societies are deemed to have much more theoretical or predictive importance than their specific features.
- 10 Some sociologists have even suggested that “society” is far too problematic, and should be jettisoned. Michael Mann went so far as to say: “It may seem an odd position for a sociologist to adopt; but if I could, I would abolish the concept ‘society’ altogether.” (1986, p. 2) Using the term society, he says, brings two problems. On the one hand, most accounts simply equate polities or states with “societies”. As a result, Mann comments: “The enormous covert influence of the nation-state of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries on the human sciences means that a nation-state model dominates sociology and history alike.” (Ibid., p. 2) On the other hand, the term “society” implies a unitary social system, but, he says, “we can never find a single bounded society in geographical or social space” (1986, p. 1). In other words, even nation-states are not “bounded totalities”.
- 11 Already we have stumbled into a thicket of competing concepts: society, nation, state, and for good measure, country (*pays*) which shares the complexity and nuances of the others, perhaps even more so. This is a crowded field, and before we choose which, if any, to apply to Scotland, we need to sort them out. Mann argues that society should be treated not so much as a unitary concept implying internal homogeneity, but a “loose confederation”, as “overlapping networks of social interaction”.
- 12 Hence, a society is a unit within whose boundaries social interaction is relatively dense and stable, and while interactions will take place across these boundaries, those taking place within it are the most significant and consistent. The English sociologist John Urry also shared Mann’s misgivings. In his book *Sociology beyond Societies* (2000) he quoted Mrs Thatcher and her (in)famous statement that “there is no such thing as society, only individuals and their families”.
- 13 In any case, it might seem an odd thing for sociologists to abjure “society”, but Urry is making a point. Like Mann, he was arguing that sociology must abandon its practice of studying society as an assumed set of bounded institutions, the study of social structures, and instead focus on mobility; change over stasis. Urry observed: “[...] sociology may be able to develop a new agenda, an agenda for a discipline that is losing its central concept of human ‘society’. It is a discipline organised around networks, mobility and horizontal fluidities.” (2000, p. 3) He was arguing for a society of mobilities that disrupt a “sociology of the social as societies” (ibid., p. 4). Urry was making a plea for casting adrift from the relatively safe boundaries of functionally integrated and bounded societies bequeathed to it by its founders, notably the French social theorist, Emile Durkheim. In his later work on climate change, Urry (2011) appeared to have recanted his desire to jettison “society”, recognising that “global governance” seems especially ill-placed to tackle this global issue. Only “societies” seem able to put in place institutional levers, and above all, to legitimate social change to try and save the planet, or, more precisely, human life on planet Earth.

- 14 Mann, too, despite his aversion to “society” is a critic of the view that “nation-states” have had their day, and is critical of “globalization” theorists who exaggerate the former strength of “nation-states” only to exaggerate in turn their decline, and who, in any case, downplay relations between states.

Imagined Community

- 15 In 1882, Ernest Renan asked his famous question: *Qu'est-ce que une nation* ? For Renan, it was a matter of soul, a spiritual principle. A century later, Benedict Anderson defined a “nation” as an “imagined community” having four dimensions:

It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. It is *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. It is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm. It is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.

- 16 It is important to stress that Anderson was saying that the nation is *imagined* not *imaginary*. He rebuked Ernest Gellner for his famous line that “nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it invents nations where they do not exist” (1964, p. 169). Anderson says that Gellner is confusing “invention” with “fabrication” and “falsity” rather than “imagining” and “creation”; that is why it would be more accurate to say that the nation is *imagined* rather than imaginary.
- 17 Anderson talks of nations being “imagined communities” because they require a sense of belonging which is both horizontal and vertical, in place and in time. The “nation” not only implies an affinity with those currently living, but with dead generations. The idea of the nation is to be conceived of, says Anderson, “as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history” (1983, p. 31). This idea of historical continuity is a vitally important part of the nation as imagined community. It implies links with long-dead ancestors, in such a way that Anthony Smith’s words “the nation becomes the constant renewal and retelling of our tale by each generation of our descendants” (1986, p. 208). There can be little doubt that Scotland, in these terms, is a nation, moving, as Anderson observed, calendrically through time.

The question of social order

- 18 But is Scotland a society? Why should it matter to sociologists? The short answer to that is to say that it is necessary because people are not simply driven by politics (“state”), or culture (“nation”) or economics (“market”), but how they relate to each other, what we call “social order”. In the words of the American sociologist Dennis Wrong, “how are men (sic) capable of uniting to form enduring societies in the first place?” (1961, p. 184). His concern was that the question focused over-much on the way social norms were internalised, and so human behaviour conformed to the social expectations of others.

- 19 What this kind of sociology produced, said Wrong, was an over-socialised and deterministic conception of human behaviour, that people acted out the social roles allotted to them. This is “structuralism”, simply reading off from social structures how people behave and what they think, because that is what is expected of them. Subsequently, the pendulum swung a long way back towards a concern with “social agency” whereby people were treated as having much more awareness and influence over their actions and thoughts.
- 20 We have moved, in recent years, away from Wrong’s concern with the “over-socialised conception of man”, towards the view that human beings are responsible for their actions. This is to treat social actors as free agents whose social identities are highly liquid, that we can be who we *want* to be by donning the appropriate garb. The rise of methodological individualism complements the *zeitgeist* of our economic, political and cultural worlds, and Wrong’s central question—how is society possible—no longer seems central, even to many sociologists.
- 21 The question is as old as sociology itself. Despite being caricatured as *the* sociologist of “structuralism”, Durkheim sought to balance properly structure and action:
 The characteristic attributes of human nature [...] come to us through society. But on the other hand, society exists and lives only in and through individuals. Extinguish the idea of society in individual minds, let the beliefs, traditions, and aspirations of the collectivity cease to be felt and shared by the people involved, and society will die [...] society has reality only to the extent that it has a place in human consciousness, and we make this place for it. (2008 [1912], p. 258)
- 22 So it turns out that while he is often seen as the supreme theorist of the “social”, Durkheim had a proper understanding of the active role of the individual, and of social action.

Refining “society”

- 23 At this point in the argument, we need to refine the concept of “society” to make it clear that it is not simply equated with the “state”, with “political society” but rather, with “civil society”. Civil society refers to these relatively dense networks of organisations and institutions resulting from, and in turn, framing the day-to-day interactions of people. As Ernest Gellner (1994, pp. 7–8) put it, civil society is the social space located between the tyranny of kin and the tyranny of kings; between the intimacy of family life and the impersonal power of the state. It is related to the “state”, the political level, but is not coterminous with it. Neither does civil society equate with the “nation”, for a sense of “nation-ness” is sustained by institutional autonomy, rather than the other way round (McCrone, 2010, p. 184).
- 24 We can see, then, how the assertion of “nationalism” derives not from elemental emotions based on historic memories, but from the day-to-day contemporary social associations of people. It arises from patterns of sociability structured by organisational life, with “civility”. A nation is an “imagined community” *because* of its associational and institutional distinctiveness, and, as a result, it follows Durkheim’s definition that: “A society is not constituted by the mass who comprise it [...] but above all by the idea it has of itself.” (Fournier, 2013, pp. 625–6)
- 25 This sense of being a “nation” is sustained by its sociality, and together, nation and society may encourage a quest for some kind of state-like characteristics even if these

fall short of formal “independence”, as currently in Scotland: recall Touraine’s observation that a society is a nation in the making. There is considerable, and repeated, interaction between “society”, “nation” and “state”—the social, cultural and political levels, but they remain distinct levels; we cannot subsume one into the other.

Thinking socially

- 26 The view that humans are thinking, sentient, and, above all, *social* beings, transcends narrow disciplinary boundaries, and was usefully called the “sociological imagination”, by the American scholar Charles Wright Mills in the 1950s. The concept is not the preserve of sociologists: here are two non-sociologists employing it in all but words. The late Neil MacCormick, an eminent Scottish theorist of law, observed that: “The truth about human individuals is that they are social products, not independent atoms capable of constituting society through a voluntary coming together. We are as much constituted by our society as it is by us.” (1999, p. 163)
- 27 Secondly, the social philosopher Alisdair MacIntyre (also a Scot, born in Glasgow) observed that:
- We all approach our own circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity. I am someone’s son or daughter, someone’s cousin or uncle; I am a citizen of this or that city, a member of this or that guild or profession; I belong to this clan, that tribe, this nation. Hence what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles. As such, I inherit from the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations. These constitute the given of my life, my moral starting point. (2007, p. 220)
- 28 We are, in other words, encumbered selves. To paraphrase Marx: we make ourselves, but not under conditions of our own making. Famously, Marx observed: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.” (*The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*)
- 29 So what are these non-sociologists telling us about “society”? Each in their different way is arguing that there *is* such a thing as society; that we are not isolated, stand-alone, individuals, but that we are sustained by people around us. Without them confirming our social identities, we would not function at all.

Emerging civil society

- 30 We have reached the point in our argument where we focus more directly on “society”. There is a particular Scottish dimension to this. We can even claim that sociology, the science of “society” *par excellence* had its origins in Scotland, that it was a pure case of civil society, because it was not formally speaking a “state”. It would be absurd to argue that Scotland had no sociological meaning because it had ceased to be a state in 1707. Patently, it had assets of “governing” institutions dealing with law, religion, education and local administration which were the foundations for further self-government in the following three centuries.
- 31 Adam Ferguson’s *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), provided the foundations for sociology as a discipline, or, better put, proto-sociology (Eriksson, 1993). Eriksson argued that the Enlightenment, and in particular the Scottish Historical School, associated with writers such as Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith, and William Robertson,

was the general prerequisite for the emergence of sociological thinking. Such writers shared a common key question: how is society possible? The answer could not be found simply in adopting a rational calculative view, or one based on utilitarianism. The “sociological” answer to the question is not based simply on economy or polity but on *society*, the emergence of organically emerging and maintained institutions and patterns of social action. Thus, “society is possible because of the connection between the sociality of men, and the social patterns of institutions which are produced and reproduced in society” (Eriksson, 1993, p. 270). “Rationality-based” answers are too superficial, and cannot grasp the kernel either of human sociality or of social dynamics. Thus, says Eriksson: “Ties between men and society [...] cannot be reduced to relations of individual advantage and individual calculation. They are much stronger and much deeper.” (Ibid.)

The role of the Scottish Enlightenment

- 32 The Enlightenment was the general context for the emergence of sociological thinking, and Scotland was one of its key locales. Why so? Adam Ferguson, for example, was born and brought up on the cusp of the Highlands and Lowlands, at Logierait in Perthshire, and so appreciated that Scotland was a sociological test-bed of stages and modes of social development. Further, in the 18th century Scotland underwent a “professional revolution”, among professionals such as churchmen, lawyers and academics who epitomised the “spirit of the age of improvement”, and who formed in a loose sense the Scottish “Historical” School whose model of analysis mirrored the specific characteristics of professional life. Thus, concludes Eriksson: “[...] the sociological framework developed out by the Scottish Historical School fetched its variables from the very specific type of professional society in which they all lived, a society which differed markedly from that larger society outside their circles.” (1993, p. 276)
- 33 This was not “sociology” so much as “*proto-sociology*”, its emergent discourse before Auguste Comte in France formalised and was credited with the discipline’s formation. To be sure, these “*proto-sociologists*” did not call themselves sociologists, nor did they articulate a specific sense of “Scotland” in their work. Rather, they were interested in what we might call “Society” (capital S) through which actual societies evolved through stages of social development. Scotland was the context, the exemplar, and the unusual social and cultural conditions to be found there in the 18th century meant that it was an appropriate testing ground. Above all, Scotland was not a “state”, an overtly political entity, and thus we were far more likely to see the independent operations of (civil) society. Indeed, the debate over constitutional change in the late 20th century, for example, evoked the distinctiveness of Scottish civil society, and its capacity to frame economic and political issues independent of (central) state effects.
- 34 Civil society comes to refer to the relatively dense networks of organisations and institutions resulting from, and in turn, framing day-to-day interactions of people. That is the meaning of Gellner’s distinction which I introduced earlier, between the “tyranny of kin” (the familial, the intimate) and the “tyranny of kings” (the state and its apparatus). “Society” is the key intermediate realm, and is held together by the everyday relations of people and institutions as they go about their lives. It also invokes “*demos*”, the sense that people are bound together by sharing common procedures and

manners of thought, in contrast to “*ethnos*”, which places the focus much more on cultural homogeneity, and “tribal” identity.

- 35 Despite subsequently being hijacked in the cause of extreme individualism and private self-interest, Adam Smith was at pains to stress that much of the authority of the social order derived from “society” rather than “government”. Thus, “society” is not the state, nor, indeed, the economy, but sustains both state and economy because it operates on the basis of social trust between people. Society, then, precedes the political and the economic. Without “social trust”, state and economy cannot hold.
- 36 The term “civil society” with its *marxist* overtones also evokes the contribution by Antonio Gramsci, “the marxist de Tocqueville”, as Krishan Kumar calls him (1993, p. 381): “Civil society is the sphere of culture in the broadest sense. It is concerned with the manners and mores of society, with the way people live. It is where values and meanings are established, where they are debated, contested and change.” (Ibid., pp. 382–3) In short, “the concept of civil society that is most widespread today is fundamentally Gramscian” (ibid., p. 389).
- 37 In modern societies, it is difficult to find the dividing line between state and civil society. On the one hand, there is the state—“political society”—the arena of correction and domination, and on the other, “civil society”—the arena of consent and direction. The state intervenes considerably into civil society, and civil society expects the state to resolve social issues.

State and civil society

- 38 In truth, the line of demarcation between state and civil society these days is fuzzy. Gianfranco Poggi commented that civil society “may need the state as ultimate guarantor, but their subsistence in a realm separate from that where the state predominantly operates is intrinsic to the very nature of the state, as a set of differentiated, specifically political institutions complementary to that realm” (2001, p. 145).
- 39 Reifying “state” and “civil society” gives a hardness to these concepts which they do not have, other than in theoretical, ideal-typical, terms. The philosopher Charles Taylor observed that, juxtaposed to “political society”, “civil society [...] exists over against the state, in partial independence from it. It includes those dimensions of social life which cannot be confounded with, or swallowed up in the state” (1990, p. 95). Taylor argued that there were five roots to western “civil society”:
- society was not defined in terms of its identification with its political organisation;
 - the Church was a society independent of the state;
 - feudal relations of authority involved quasi-contractual relationships of rights and obligations;
 - civil society had its roots in the autonomous “city states” of western Europe, something Max Weber identified in his essay *The City*;
 - the autonomous social space of “civil society”, emerged out of those roots, “not so much a sphere outside political power; rather it penetrates deeply into this power, fragments and decentralizes it. Its components are truly “amphibious”. (Ibid., p. 117)
- 40 Is this distinction between civil society and political society meaningful anymore in the modern age? It is noticeable that the concept “civil society” has more currency in some places than others. It also has a curious history. Associated with the Scottish

Enlightenment, it disappeared from view as sociology came to focus on self-contained “societies”. In terms of actual social and political change, “civil society” re-emerged in the 1980s and 1990s to account for the collapse of political communism in state socialist societies, notably where it provided a robust and alternative platform to state power, as in Poland where the Catholic Church had set up parallel social institutions to the communist state.

Civil society and nationalism

- 41 Closer to home, “civil society” has been vested with normative and analytical significance to explain the rise of neo-nationalism, challenges to the British state (in Scotland and Wales), the Spanish state (in Catalonia and Euskadi [Basque Country]), as well as in France, the classic bastion of the Jacobin state. Whether badged as “nationalism” or “regionalism”, it became clear that the more developed and autonomous associational structures in these territories, the greater the challenges to central state legitimacy.
- 42 Scotland—in contrast to Wales—had a framework of autonomous institutions, of law, religion, social governance dating from the Treaty of Union with England in 1707, and much developed subsequently. Since that Union, Scotland has continued its separate system of law, jealously guarded by its judges and legal establishment; also part of “the state”, or rather the “semi-state”, that collection of government and quasi-government departments in the Scottish Office, which was, at least nominally, until 1999 governed by ministers from the ruling party at Westminster.
- 43 Nowadays, Scotland has a parliament and its own directly elected ministers in control of the bureaucracy of state, if not a “state” in the orthodox sense of the term, enough to describe Scotland as an “understated nation”, but a “state” in high degree. There are *degrees* of state-ness, and Scotland has more of it than it used to have pre-1999, though not as much as most of its people would like. We can conclude that the precise dividing line between “state” and “(civil) society” is unclear, but there is little doubt that they are not synonyms of each other.
- 44 If “civil society” is not “the state”, neither is it simply to be equated with “the market”. There is, as Sunil Khilnani (2001) pointed out, a distinction to be made between the “liberal” position which argues that the effective powers of civil society reside in the economy, in property rights and the market, and the “radical” position which locates civil society in “society”, independent of both the economic domain and the political apparatus of the state.
- 45 People are neither determined by market relations and defined as economic actors, nor simply by the rights and obligations conferred by the state. We are neither solely “consumers” (still less “customers”) nor simply “citizens” (of the state).
- 46 If “civil society” is neither “state” nor “market”, is it simply a synonym for the “nation”? Not quite. Feeling and being “national” is the *outcome* of the process of civil societalisation, sustained by patterns of sociability which teach us how to behave appropriately. The feeling of being a national, of belonging to a community, is the result of the channels and mechanisms which shape us and make us feel that way rather than the other way round.

- 47 There remains the point that civil society is difficult to define, or rather, as Kaviraj observes: “[...] it is a minor curiosity that ‘civil society’ appears to be an idea strangely incapable of standing freely on its own: it always needs a distinctive support (that is, support by being one half of a distinction) from a contrary term.” (2001, p. 288)
- Civil society is usually defined *vis-à-vis*, in terms of what it is not, as much as what it is. Thus, in the works of Adam Ferguson, civil society is contrasted with “*natural society*”, that is, the state of nature.
 - Secondly, civil society is defined *vis-à-vis* the state, its counterweight as well as its complement. Kaviraj argued that all civil society arguments stem from some deep disillusion with the state and its mode of functioning: “Those calling for a re-assertion of ‘civil society’ are basically calling for people to gather up all resources of sociability to form their own collective projects against the states.” (2001, p. 319)
 - Thirdly, civil society is about sociability, not in the sense of intimate *gemeinschaft*, the essence of community, but, *vis-à-vis* once more, as *gesellschaft*, the ordering of relations between people not intimately connected, not of kin, but of sociability among strangers.
 - Civil society is also defined *vis-à-vis* market and nation, closely connected, but not the same thing. Thus, civil society is more than market relations; in like manner, it is the “cause” of national feeling, not its outcome.

Politics and civil society

- 48 It is best to see civil society as a set of human capacities, moral and political, and not a determinate end-state. One cannot assume a necessary association between civil society and a specific form of government such as liberal democracy. Indeed, just as one can have too much state power *vis-à-vis* civil society (compare East Germany and Poland pre-1989 state socialism, for example, the former being much more coercive than the latter, because of the influence of the Catholic church),¹ so it is possible to have an overweening civil society *vis-à-vis* the state, at least in terms of party politics. Thus, for much of its history since 1921, the statelet of Northern Ireland generated very predictable politics, each so-called “community”, whether unionist or nationalist, squeezing out opportunities for the political arena to have an independent life. Whenever elections were held, so votes stacked up behind political parties which were creatures of these communities rather than of the political space within which negotiation could take place. Little has changed in that regard one hundred years later.
- 49 As Bernard Crick pointed out in his classic book *In Defence of Politics* (1992), there has to be a public sphere for negotiation between political organisations which are neither the hidebound creatures of the state nor of narrow social interests. In a telling comment, Crick observed: “Democracy is one element in politics; if it seeks to be everything, it destroys politics, turning ‘harmony into mere unison’, reducing ‘a theme to a single beat’.” (1992, p. 73)
- 50 One can, then, have an overweening civil society, just as one can have an overweening state. Civil society presupposes a concept of “politics” with an identifiable territorial and constitutional scope, a distinctive set of practices. It also requires a particular type of “self”—mutable, able to see interests as transient, and with changing political and public affiliations. This is not to reduce “self” to a rational, interest-maximising self, guided by simple economic self-interest, as economic liberalism argues; nor to treat the “civil” self as the “citizen”, the passive recipient of rights and responsibilities simply

conferred by the state. Pushed to extremes, treating all rights as citizenship ones would enhance the power of the state, not circumscribe it.

Autonomous civil society

- 51 It should be clear by now that “civil society” is related to, but not a creature of the state, the market and the nation. It cannot be reduced to the level of the political (state), to the economic (market), or the cultural (nation). It stands in contradistinction to these even though it might appear to be their creature. Still less is civil society reducible to the “private” sphere. Civil society can also claim to precede rather than derive from the state and political realm, can unmake political authority and refashion it. That is why the concept was pressed into political service in Scotland (as well as eastern Europe) in the 1980s and 1990s, and why doctrines of popular sovereignty in the “People’s Claim of Right” were re-imagined.

Civil society and the Scottish dimension

- 52 Why should “civil society” be an important part of current Scottish public discourse? In late 20th century Scotland, it became plain that the political realm was at odds with the informal and quasi-formal networks of civil society; in short, it was perceived to be unresponsive to its needs and demands, across the socio-economic spectrum, from professional bodies, voluntary groups, to trades unions. This was in large part because of the “democratic deficit”, the fact that no matter how people in Scotland voted at Westminster elections, they got a government elected by people in England who represented 85 per cent of the UK population.
- 53 The task was not to overthrow the state, but to re-fashion it—parliament and government—more in keeping with the wishes of the electorate. Thus, people think of themselves as Scots because they have been educated, governed and embedded in a Scottish way. It is a matter of government, not of sentiment; and the latter derives from the former.

The Scottish semi-state

- 54 The growth of separate political administration for Scotland since 1886 has undoubtedly helped to reinforce this sense of “Scotland”. It is easier to visualise what a separate Scotland would look like precisely because by the 1980s the Scottish Office had become a Scottish semi-state with a powerful administrative apparatus. The proponents of devolution in the 1979 Referendum could set out their case for political autonomy in terms of extending democratic accountability over this bureaucratic structure. Throughout the 20th century, increased agitation for reform in Scotland resulted in increased responsibilities accruing to the Scottish Office to the extent that *de facto* Scottish self-government, “limited sovereignty”, resulted. The demands for democratic accountability over this “Scottish semi-state” in the late twentieth century represented recognition of the limits which bureaucratic devolution reached, and helped to bring about the devolved parliament in 1999.
- 55 At this level, Scotland plainly existed as a political-administrative unit, as a governed system defined by the remit of The Scottish Office. In one hundred years of existence,

the Scottish Office had given a political meaning to Scotland. There is irony in this, because by treating Scotland as an object of administration, Westminster government had to live with its political consequences. If the Scottish Office had never been created, it would have been much more difficult to address “Scotland” as a meaningful political unit. The northern territory could have been handled as the North British regional province of the central British state, although the power and influence of civil society could never be ignored. This was reflected in the creation of The Scottish Office in 1885, and the building of St Andrews House in Edinburgh in 1939.

- 56 What of the hyphenated “nation-state” which is in common currency in political as well as sociological thought? States are described as such in a fairly unthinking manner. However, the nation-state implies that the cultural concept “nation” maps neatly on to the political one, “state”; that a “people” with a common culture and a sense of imagined community seek self-determination in having an independent state. Whatever else the British state was, it was never a nation-state; perhaps a state-nation, but in that respect, most national states are, including France (see Beaune, 1985).

The exceptions prove the rule

- 57 In effect, there are few states which are nation-states, in which culture (notably language) correspond with state boundaries. Even taking a simple linguistic measure, there is a distinct lack of correspondence between language and state. Thus, the same language will be spoken in different states (English, German, French to take but three), and within states there will be multiple languages spoken (Belgium, Canada, Spain).
- 58 The classic case is Switzerland, usually treated as “an anomaly”, the case which proves the rule that every state needs a cultural nation, or rather, a dominant ethnicity. Andreas Wimmer makes the point: “Switzerland [...] presents a good example of a fully nationalised modern state built on an ethnically heterogeneous basis—contradicting the idea that industrialism or democracy demand cultural and linguistic homogeneity to work properly.” (2002, p. 223) The point he is making is that matters of language and ethnicity never became politicised, and that Switzerland became a “nation by will” (*Willensnation*).
- 59 Scotland is not an analogue of Switzerland, but similar principles applied as early as the 13th century of its history, in both countries. It was territoriality, place, which defined the country, not ethnicity or tribe, and not language. Indeed, if a single ethnicity had been asserted by elites, it is unlikely that the state would have held, either in Scotland or in Switzerland. Monarchs were kings and queens “of Scots” (plural); in contradistinction to kings and queens “of England” (singular), not of “the English” (plural). Furthermore, the assembling of “civil society” and diverse associational forms underpinned the state, even to the extent that when it was formally abolished, as in 1707, the “society” held, and even deepened.
- 60 So why is the term “nation-state” in such common currency?—largely because it represents an ideological claim, an aspiration, that states which “represent” nations are somehow natural. It does not take much effort to recognise that few are nationally cohesive, and that having made France, Germany, Italy, the USA, the UK and so on, it was necessary to “make” nationals (see, for example, Eugen Weber’s fine book *Peasants into Frenchmen* (1976), subtitled *The Modernisation of Rural France, 1870–1914*). First, the state; and only then “citizens”. Even if we do not adopt linguistic criteria for “nation-

ness”, it is hard to find the appropriate correspondence between nation and state. Thus, the UK contains distinct nations—England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland²—and was constructed as a state-nation, not a nation-state.

- 61 It is a reflection of the dominance of the nation-state idea, however, that it has such common currency in academic writing. Thus, critics like Wimmer and Glick Schiller argue that “nationally bounded societies are taken to be the naturally given entities to study”; that “methodological nationalism” abounds. Thus, “the social sciences were captured by the apparent naturalness and givenness of a world divided into societies along the lines of nation-states” (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002, p. 304). Note the unproblematic use of the term “*nation-states*”. States have lost some of their power to transnational corporations and supranational organisations; they have been transformed by in-migration, and yet, the authors claim, social science continues to treat them as the unit of analysis.
- 62 We live in a world in which the conventional state (so-called “nation-state”) finds itself addressing challenges from above and below.
- 63 There is irony in the argument that we should avoid “methodological nationalism”—which we should—on the grounds that the “nation-state” has internal cultural and social unity. The irony rests on the fact that understanding “sub-state” nationalism (in, for example, Scotland, Wales, Euskadi, Catalonia, Quebec) runs far less risk of “methodological nationalism” than the implicit variety attaching to self-styled nation-states of western Europe, Britain included.
- 64 British sociology emerged in the second half of the 20th century out of a strong centralist and ameliorist tradition of social science, influenced heavily by Fabianist centralism and welfare statism. The sociological project was bound up with British “nation-building” post 1945. The underlying assumption was that the UK was a homogenous “nation-state” in which social class was the key determinant of life chances (Pulzer, 1967). “State” and “economy” rather than “society” were the key dimensions. The French social scientist Raymond Aron commented that “The trouble is that British sociology is essentially an attempt to make intellectual sense of the political problems of the Labour Party” (Halsey, 2004, p. 70).
- 65 Granted that this is somewhat unkind, it does reflect much of the nature of British—or more accurately Anglo-British—sociology. In a telling definition, Anthony Giddens once remarked that “a nation, as I use the term here, only exists when a state has a unified administrative reach over the territory over which its sovereignty is claimed” (1985, p. 119). The nation, he commented, is a “bordered. power-container”. There seems little room here either for more cultural diversity or for a purely social, that is, societal understanding, which may seem an odd statement for a sociologist to make. It was a German sociologist, Wolf Lepenies, who observed: “English (British?)³ Sociology always remained curiously pallid and lacking in distinct identity”—quoted by Dominique Schnapper (who is Raymond Aron’s daughter) (2005, p. 110).
- 66 Scotland, we can now see, never really “ended”, but survived and developed as a civil society within a state whose major focus was on imperial ventures in which Scots played a major part. The fact that this empire itself is now “history”, and new processes of cultural and political revival are transparent have made the old pessimistic order *passé*. The interweaving of social, political, cultural and economic processes means that studying Scotland is not the simple preserve of sociologists, political scientists, cultural

historians and economists. It is the fruitful interaction of disciplines and perspectives which have reinvigorated the study of Scotland.

Conclusion

- 67 In this chapter I have traced the development of the key concepts of sociology: society, nation and state. That Scotland appeared to have no “sociology” to speak of reflected the orthodoxy that the proper object of the discipline was the equation of “society” with “state”, and furthermore, “nation-state”. In the last fifty years we have experienced the breaking apart of these concepts, not only the problematising of the very idea of “society”, but its synonymising with “nation-state”. The atrophying of Anglo-British sociology, built upon the assumption of a homogeneous “British society = British state” has allowed us to recover an older notion of Scotland buried in the foundations of the discipline of sociology itself. Indubitably a nation in Benedict Anderson’s terms, Scotland as (civil) society has moved to the centre of the discipline’s concern. A Sociology of Scotland is not only possible, but necessary in the 21st century.

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NOTES

1. Touraine co-authored a book with Dubet and Wieviorka on *Solidarnosc* called *Solidarity. The Analysis of a Social Movement: Poland 1980–1981*, Cambridge University Press, 1983.
 2. Northern Ireland is included to make the general point, even though its people are "nationally" divided along political-religious lines, one owing allegiance to Britain and the other to the Republic of Ireland.
 3. The question in parenthesis is his, not mine.
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ABSTRACTS

This paper examines the ways in which "Scotland" has long presented a challenge to "sociology". It may have helped to found the discipline in its very early incarnation, but it did not fit the conventional notion of "society", sociology's core concept. This predicament, paradoxically, has led in the last fifty years to its relevance in the re-examination of the assumption of the link between nation and state, especially in the context of an "atrophying of Anglo-British sociology, built upon the assumption of a homogeneous 'British society = British state' [dictum]", leading the author to conclude that "[a] sociology of Scotland is not only possible, but necessary in the 21st century".

Cet article examine les manières dont « l'Écosse » présente depuis fort longtemps un défi à la sociologie. Bien qu'ayant participé à la fondation de la discipline à ses débuts, elle n'a jamais correspondu à une définition conventionnelle de la notion de « société », concept central de la sociologie. Cette difficulté, paradoxalement, a contribué à donner une pertinence particulière à l'Écosse, ces cinquante dernières années, dans le processus de ré-examen du lien supposé entre nation et État, particulièrement dans le contexte d'une « sociologie anglo-britannique en pleine atrophie, construite sur la prémisse d'une homogénéité entre État et société britanniques », ce qui amène l'auteur à conclure « qu'une sociologie de l'Écosse est non seulement possible, mais nécessaire au XXI^e siècle ».

INDEX

Mots-clés: Écosse, sociologie, nation, État

Keywords: Scotland, sociology, nation, state

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