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THE POST-MODERN CONDITION OF SCOTTISH SOCIETY

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My talk is divided into three parts: the first part examines what we mean by the term post-modern, and how we should interpret it and the major changes which are such a feature of the world we live in; the second, looks at how and why Scotland was neglected as an object of analytical study (especially by sociologists); and the final part focuses on what the post-modern condition of Scotland might look like.

What is the post-modern condition? Let me start with some definitions. We should be aware that post-modern conveys nothing of its substance - it is 'post' something else, in this case the 'modern'. Anthony Giddens put it this way:

> '"Modernity" can be taken as a summary term, referring to that cluster of social, economic and political systems brought into being in the West from somewhere around the 18th century onwards. "Post-modernity", hence, refers - in some sense or another - to the incipient or actual dissolution of these social forms.[1]

In other words, post-modernity is a term which recognises that the old certainties of 'modernity' are in decline.

At this stage we need to make a further distinction between the 'ity' and the 'ism' - as in post-modernity and post-modernism (and modernity and modernism). Following Giddens, we should confine the 'ism' to a particular set of cultural or aesthetic styles, discernible in various realms of architecture, the arts, poetry and literature. Modernism emerged in opposition to classicism with its emphasis on finding the inner truth behind surface appearances. While post-modernism tries in some sense to recover a classical, romantic look, its emphases is on the profusion of styles and orientations without any possibility of identifying deeper reality. It celebrates pastiche and irony, and is eclectic in style.

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Our concern here is not with art and architecture - the 'ism' - but with the social, economic, political, intellectual and cultural processes which comprise the 'ity'. Let me summarise these in a simple ideal-typical way:

MODERNITY	POST-MODERNITY
1. scientific rationality; predictability & control of nature	erratic & unpredictability of nature; eg chaos theory
2. industrialism & organised capitalism	consumerism & disorganised' capitalism
3. alignment of national economy, polity & culture	dealignmen of economy, polity & culture - 'limited sovereignty'
4. national citizenship to sovereign state - single national identity	multiple allegiances & sources of power - plurality of identities
5. social & political movements as 'class' based: in industrial terms politics as male-centred activity belonging to 'public' sphere.	new social movements eg women's movement, ecology, neo-nationalism - etc. pluri-centred politics, & loss of legitimacy of traditional politics.
6. state~society~nation	dissociation of state, society and nation

The key social thinkers in the discipline - Marx, Weber and Durkheim - had in their different ways tackled the problem of the coming of modern society. As Gian Poggi pointed out: 'The notion of society as normally used in sociological argument reflects historically distinctive circumstances associated with the advent of modernity'.[2]

All lived, worked and theorised at the time of the great transformation to modern industrial society.

Modernity implied industrialisation - in economic terms the shift to a market, property-based economy; in social terms, to a system of wage labour and the dominance of the nuclear family as that most suited to industrial capitalism; and in political terms, to a self-governing society in which the state required the explicit allegiance of its citizens to govern on their behalf. The ideal-typical state form was the nation-state in which the state required the legitimacy of the nation, and the nation sought its political expression in a state of its own. The nation-state claimed the notion of sovereignty - that it had supreme authority over the territory in question.

In this scheme of things, 'modern society' was industrial, a vast productive enterprise, whose political expression was the nation-state which provided citizenship rights for the population, and demanded its national allegiance in return. By the 20th century sociologists were struck by the sameness of the industrialisation process, by the similarities between societies - that is, nation-states - deemed to be industrial and modern. This gave rise to kinds of theorising which focused on 'convergence' rather than difference between societies, and to an assumption of the homogenisation of culture.

Scotland had no reason to be studied other than it was one of the first such societies (after England) to cross the great divide from pre-modern to modern via industrialisation. Once it had done so, it ceased to be interesting. The fact that post 1707 it was part of the UK made it doubly uninteresting, because it had forfeited its claim to separate poltical status in exchange for economic benefits of the Empire.

(In passing, we might note that Ferguson's theorising drew upon the social tensions he found in late 18th century Scotland, tensions he felt more than most being raised at Logierait in Perthshire, on the border between Lowland and Highland Scotland. He is credited with inventing the term 'civil society' in his famous essay on the history of civil society in 1767. Of course, he was not referring to

Scotland as such if at all, and used the term in a much wider way to mean 'civilisation', the political in the widest sense of the term.)

If Scotland disappeared as an explicit object of sociological study in the late 18th century, why has it re-emerged two centuries later? The simple answer is that the dominant - modernist - paradigm of sociology is going out of fashion. In the last decade or so, and with hindsight since the late 1960s, a new paradigm is emerging sometimes labelled post- or late-modern. We do not have to buy the whole post-modern package to see that something new is happening to our world and the way we interpret it. Post-modernism is less interesting for the answers it gives than for the questions it raises.

How are we to characterise this paradigm shift?

- Modernity stressed scientific rationality, post-modernity emphasises the erratic and unpredictability of human behaviour.
- Modernity associated itself with industrialism and organised capitalism; post-modernity focuses on consumerism and 'disorganised' capitalism.
- Modernity aligned the national economy, polity and culture in such a way that citizenship and allegiance to the sovereign state provided a clear and dominant identity. Post-modernity on the other hand points to the limited nature of state sovereignty in an inter-dependent world, and stresses the highly contingent and multiple identities on offer to us.

State-based societies become heavily porous. Globalisation carries with it an implication for locality; the global and the local become part of the same dialectic. We enter a world not of standardisation and homogenisation, but of difference and unpredictability.

Globalisation, it seems to me, is another way of articulating this post-modern world (post-modern indicating simply that it is not the 'modernist' one within which sociology as a discipline was formed). In part, it recognises that in Daniel Bell's words: the nation-state has become 'too small for the big problems of life, and too big for the small problems of life'[3]. There is an unprecedented flow of goods and ideas. Information, comments the Polish sociologist Zigmunt Bauman, 'cannot be arrested by any border guards, however zealous and heavily armed'.[4]

Globalisation can of course imply a shift to universal standardisation - to a 'sociology of one world'. But writers like Giddens argue that there is a complex dialectic between the global and the local. It involves 'the intersection of presence and absence, the interlacing of social events and social relations 'at a distance' with local contextualities' .[5]

However, globalisation involves not simply 'broadening' but also 'deepening'. It can enhance 'threats from below', and stimulate searches for new identities, or the refurbishment of old ones. In other words, a global-local nexus emerges, a process of relocalisation, and a reordering of time and space (time-space distanciation, Giddens calls it in a singularly ugly phrase).

Stuart Hall has tried to work out the cultural and political implications of this. He argues:

> Globalisation does have the effect of contrasting and dislocating the centred and 'closed' identities of a national culture. It does have a pluralising impact on identities, producing a variety of possibilities and new positions of identification, and making identities more positional, more political, more plural and diverse; less fixed, unified or trans-historical.'[6]

The key feature which all this points to is the rapid and increasing rate of social change in the late 20th century. As Giddens points out: 'The modern world is a "runaway world"; not only is the pace of social change much faster than in any prior system, so also is its scope, and the profoundness with which it affects pre-existing social practices and modes of behaviour' [7]

With social change, the older forms of social explanation begin to decay. Hence, the grand, meta-narratives of religion and science (its old protagonist) lose their power of explanation. There is a shift away from 'faith' in these systems of humanly engineered progress with their linear paths of past, present and future. Similarly, the decline of the grand political ideologies, most obviously of socialism (and its assumed hegemony of social class as the motor of conflict), but also conservatism, suffer from this loss of faith. (It is interesting to place the revival of neo-liberalism in this context. It appears to be

more in tune with the times as it has its own, ready-made, model of human behaviour in the form of 'consumer choice'. Whether it conveys actual and open choice as opposed to imaginary and restricted choice is another matter, and not everything can be reduced to the market-place).

Meta-systems of belief - religious and secular - have lost their ideological power to persuade and mobilise. Yet at the same time, lower-case politics (protest) and lower-case religion (spirituality) are vibrant. Parties toil for members, while action- and protest -groups flourish (the micro-politics of power). Churches atrophy and decay, while sects burgeon. We find it difficult to refer any more to 'the people' in either secular or religious terms because it implies homogeneity and predictability. Even phrases like 'the Scottish people' seems not to catch the mood of the late 20th century.

Organisation - in which people are relatively passive in how they are mobilised ('the masses', 'the faithful', even 'the people') - gives way to partial commitment and social movements which subvert the conventional ways of doing things. There is a shift from parties and churches to movements and sects. New social movements spring up across the social landscape, with limited and shifting aims, contrasted with the predictability of class-based organisations associated with modernity. Politics undergo a radical redefinition. Social movements become forms of symbolic challenge. Nation-states lose their authority to forces above and below. Global and multinational forces shift centres of power upwards, while 'civil societies' which have been submerged by broader state forces reassert their right to autonomy. In this context, social identities are reformed in such a way that they become amenable to choice, and hence quite unpredictable. Issues of gender, class, race and ethnicity are remixed in powerful and unpredictable ways.

The search for 'identity' is everywhere - indeed, you cannot move in the publishing world for books with 'identity' in the title. Identities of gender, class, race and ethnicity appear to offer the opportunity to 'pic'n mix' who and what we want to be. The reasons are pretty obvious. Here is Stuart Hall's comment:

> The more social life becomes mediated by the global marketing of styles, places and images, by international travel, and by globally networked media images and communication systems, the more identities become detached - disembedded - from specific times, places, histories and traditions, and appear 'free-floating'. We are confronted by a range of different identities, each appealing to us or rather to different parts of ourselves, from which it seems possible to choose.[8]

This is not the place to get involved in a thoroughgoing critique of post-modernism, but suffice it to say that its basic flaw lies in its cognitive relativism. It does not accept that there are universal principles of validity, truth and rationality, and so presents a severe - probably insoluble - problem of how we are to know from the inside only. It is a world of no absolutes in which everything is part of the discourse (a favourite word), and it is not possible to know what constitutes evidence. All relies on plausibility and 'authenticity'.

It is, however, out of this new intellectual agenda that a sociology of and for Scotland emerges. The uncoupling of nation and state, the looser relationship between economy, society and polity set Scotland in an essentially post-modern frame. The revival of nationalism and of ethnicity are harbingers of a new kind of social order, and a new sociological perspective.

We have to accept that nationalism has underpinned much of the actions of modern states for over a century, and most successfully where it remains quite implicit (as in - 'I am patriotic, but you are nationalistic'). Nationalism however finds itself in the late 20th century in quite different territory, a world in which its traditional object, the sovereign and independent nation-state, is manifestly going out of fashion. Nationalism, on the other hand, is not. It is a particularly important social movement in a dramatically changing world on to which are loaded a whole set of modern (or post-modern) concerns. As the Italian sociologist Alberto Melucci put it,[9] the ethno-national question contains a plurality of meanings:

- it contains ethnic identity, a weapon of revenge against past discriminations and new forms of exploitation;
- it serves as an instrument for applying pressure in the political market;

- and it is a response to needs for personal and collective identity in highly complex societies.

Nationalist movements encapsulate cultural defence, the pursuit of political resources, and the search for social and personal identity in a rapidly changing world. In Giddens' words

> In conditions of day-to-day life in which routinsation has largely replaced tradition, and where 'meaning' has retreated to the margins of the private and the public, feelings of communality of language, 'belongingness' in a national community etc, tend to form one strand contributing to the maintenance of ontological security'.[10]

What, it seems to me, we are encountering in Scotland as elsewhere is our own version of this quest. What is doubly interesting - if a little frustrating - is that our version does not quite conform to others. It does not make much of language, or indeed religion, two of the key cultural identifiers traditionally incorporated into nationalism. These two crucial identifiers of modern culture are worth considering for a moment, for they have largely been the signifiers of national/cultural identity. We can see that in the way ethnic conflict has been shaped by these fault-lines in places like Northern Ireland, the former Yugoslavia etc., to such an extent that we mistake them for the substance of the conflict rather than the cultural means whereby it is expressed.

It is also worth noting that so-called nation-states (an aspiration rather than a sociological reality, but implying that all states are nations, and all nations are or should be states) have defined themselves as mono-lingual (what else are education systems about, and why are languages given ethnic names - like German, French, Spanish etc - but 'English' has problems?), and mono-religious (why state-churches?). We have grown used to mono-myth histories about the origin of 'peoples' which mobilise around linguistic and religious iconography. We are not immune - look at the splendid myth-history surrounding St Andrew as our 'national' saint, something the Catholic and Reformed traditions have in common.

Our search for self-determination seems to be of a much looser sort, less easily captured by any political party or ideology, far less

exclusive - keeping those who are not 'Us' out - and far more inclusive (if you are here, you are one of 'Us'). Juan Linz , the Spanish political sociologist has argued that nationalism has shifted away from a simple emphasis on 'primordial ties' to a definition based on territoriality:

> The definition would change from an emphasis on common descent, race, language, distinctive cultural tradition, in some cases religion - to one based on 'living and working' in an area, on a willingness to identify with that community, or on both.'[11]

Linz is saying that primordial demands based on exclusivity are not suited to a multi-cultural, interdependent world. Nationalist movements which take a regressive route are doomed to fail. Those which mobilise new sentiments of resistance and cultural development based on new challenges are much more in line with late 20th century reality. The late Raymond Williams, the Welsh literary sociologist, commented:

> It is clear that if people are to defend and promote their real interests on the basis of lived and placeable social identities, a large part of the now alienated and centralised powers and resources must be actively regained, by new actual societies which in their own terms, and nobody else's define themselves.'[12]

That is a plea for self-determination, of limited autonomy, and self-managing communities within which to understand our own predicament and to work out our own solutions.

How does this play in Scotland? Our political future is on the cusp. Who now would rule out Home Rule or even Independence? But what each offers is different degrees of 'autonomy' within the political framework of the EU. It seems to me that the post-modern condition of Scotland has its own Scylla and Charybdis. On the one hand, there is the temptation to try and turn the clock back by reviving the old disciplines of nation, state, church, especially if Scotland achieves the status of nation-state. On the other hand, simply letting a thousand flowers bloom is to cede control of the garden to other more powerful and destructive cultural, economic and political forces (such as the international media and commerce). We need to retain our critical

faculties if we are to build a more humane and social society, and we could do worse than follow the strictures of Zigmunt Bauman to sociologists, that we should focus 'on understanding what makes society tick, in order to make it tick in a more emancipatory way'.[13] How we seize that opportunity is up to us all. The buck stops with us.

1 *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 17 Jan 1992 p. 21

2 Poggi, G, *The State: Its Nature, Development and Prospects*, 1990, Polity Press, Cambridge, p. 182

3 Quoted in Hall and McGrew (eds), *Modernity and Its Futures*, Polity, 1992, p. 87

4 Bauman, Z, *Intimations of Post-Modernity*, 1992, Routledge, London, p. 691

5 *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 17 Jan 1992 p.21

6 Hall, S, 'The Question of Cultural Identity', in Hall,S. (ed.) *Modernity and Its Futures*, 1992, Polity Press, Cambridge, p. 309

7 *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 1991, Polity Press, Cambridge, p. 16

8 'The Question of Cultural Identity', in Hall, S. (ed.), *Modernity and Its Futures*, 1992, Polity Press, Cambridge, p. 303

9 *Nomads of the Present*, 1989, Hutchinson Radius, London

10 *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, 1981, Macmillan, London, p. 194

11 'From primordialism to nationalism', in Tiryakian, E. and Rogowski, R. (eds), *New Nationalisms of the Developed West*, 1985, Allen and Unwin, London, p. 205

12 *Towards 2000*, 1983, Penguin, Harmondsworth, p. 197

13 *Intimations of Post-Modernity*, 1992, Routledge, London, p 111.