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The Political Writings of R. M. MacIver

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Nationality, Community and the National Question: The Political Writings of R. M. MacIver

David McCrone

Who reads R. M. MacIver today? That may seem like a somewhat impertinent question, probably unthinkable 30 or 40 years ago. If one looks at the date-stamps on his books in university libraries, what one might call in terms of social research method an ‘unobtrusive measure’ (Webb, 1966), the answer is that fewer and fewer people seem to do so. Taken as a whole, his work might seem proto-sociological rather than in the mainstream of modern sociological thought, schematic rather than substantive, general rather than specific.

This chapter focuses on his ‘political’ sociology, and in particular his writings on nationality, as he called it, what we might these days refer to as nation-ness rather than citizenship, which is by and large its modern meaning. There is added interest for us in that MacIver was born and brought up in Stornoway, educated at Edinburgh University, began his academic career at Aberdeen before migrating to Canada, thence to the United States. He was one of the first to teach sociology at a Scottish university, and remarks in his autobiography: ‘I had become particularly interested in sociology, as the central study of society. It was regarded by the pundits as outside the pale, a bastard, quasi subject with a bastard name—the purists scorned its title derived half from Greek and half from a Latin word. It was the kind of subject that caught on in the woolly American Midwest.’ (1968:65). If he had stayed at Aberdeen, indeed in Scotland, who knows what his impact would have been on the discipline, but it is fair to surmise that it would not have taken virtually another 50 years before becoming established.

In his autobiography MacIver described himself ‘as a social scientist—not as a sociologist or a political scientist or an economist’ (1968:73), but there is little doubt that a sociologist is what he was. In this paper, I wish to explore his writings on nationality and political sociology, to argue that his work is remarkably relevant to conditions of today, and that his Scottishness was not something he left behind when he migrated to North America, but which in an implicit way he carried with him, providing a perspective which is distinctively Scottish, albeit unacknowledged. First of all, I will explore a remarkable essay he wrote for a special issue of *The Sociological Review* in 1915, an issue

devoted to understanding the Great War. In that essay he not only provides a schema for understanding individual states and their cultural and social composition, but develops an analysis of the concept of ‘nation’. I will then trace his account of nationality through his more mainstream works, notably his study of *Community* (1917), *The Elements of Social Science* (1921), *The Modern State* (1926), and *Society* (1931, and 1950). Finally, I will try and answer the question: to what extent is MacIver and his writings Scottish? Did his place of birth and upbringing figure much, if at all, in his sociology?

What is Nationality?

In his 1915 essay ‘The Foundations of Nationality’, MacIver writes ‘In the eyes of its early prophets Nationality was a principle either too holy to be analysed or too simple to require analysis’ (157). What has changed, one might ask? Almost a century on, are we any the wiser? It is a mark of MacIver’s contribution that so much sounds as if he lived through the events of the twentieth century as we have, and had the benefit of serious scholarship on nationalism since Hans Kohn wrote *The Idea of Nationalism* in 1945. Echoing (though as far as I can see not alluding to Renan’s classic essay, ‘Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?’, written in 1882), and anticipating Benedict Anderson’s ubiquitous and telling definition of a nation as an imagined community, MacIver wrote: ‘No quality or interest, however common, can be a basis of nationality *unless it is regarded as common by those who possess it*, and any quality or interest whatever, *if so regarded*, can be a basis of nationality’ (157: my emphasis).

In other words, regard—or recognition—is all. He goes on: ‘For we may not only fail to recognise factors of community which really exist, we may also “recognise” factors of community which have no reality beyond the recognition’ (ibid.). He takes as his example ‘race’, or rather the consciousness of ‘race’, once thought of as the corner-stone of nationality, but subsequently proved ‘to be in nearly every case a delusion’. From our vantage point in the twenty-first century, that seems so much common-sense, but remember that we have the advantage, if that is what it is, of having passed through the rise and fall of fascism, as well as the academic critique of ‘race’ by writers like John Rex, Robert Miles and Michael Banton.

What is especially relevant is MacIver’s comment following that one: ‘...it is important to remember that the opposite error [*by which he means the opposite of assuming that markers such as race are ‘real’*], the failure to recognise

existing community is far more common, and that all actual consciousness of community has some true basis, though it may not be that which it seems to have' (ibid.). Scotland, anyone? There is no evidence that the Scottish frame of reference had anything much—explicitly—to do with MacIver's theorising about nationality, just as his predecessor Adam Ferguson did not have Scotland directly in mind when he wrote his famous essay on civil society. Nevertheless, what he had to say fits the Scottish case rather well. After all, over the past thirty years, we became used to the assertion that Scotland did not have sufficient, and sufficiently strong, distinctive cultural markers—language, religion, and the like—to be considered 'different' from England. After all, even Benedict Anderson said so in his book *Imagined Communities* (1983). Thankfully, we no longer have to assert the opposite, or rather to point out, as MacIver did in his own context, that 'recognition' of difference is what matters, or, in the famous words of his contemporary, W.I. Thomas, the definition of situation ('If men define things as real, they are real in their consequences', 1923) is what matters in spurring to social action. MacIver also picks up another by now familiar trope: 'it is of the very essence of nationality that it rests on the consciousness of difference no less than on that of likeness. For each nationality is determined by contrast with others, and a nationality regards itself not only as distinct from others, but nearly always as possessing some *exclusive* common qualities [his emphasis], being thereby separated from others as well as united within itself' (157–8). The play between similarity and difference interested MacIver, especially the way that, *contra* conventional wisdom, 'Differences lie on the surface; likenesses have to be sought deeper' (158). One might have expected him to say the opposite, that we are more likely to assume similarity *a priori* than we are difference, but it is an important point nonetheless.

In the central part of this article, I want to spend time looking at MacIver's schema, what he calls the foundations of nationality. Remember that he published this in 1915 in an issue on the First World War; his 'national' categories only make sense in that frame. In particular, let us remember that in 1915 there was no state of Israel, so his category of 'Jews' has a quite different meaning than the one we have inherited. MacIver identifies a number of what he calls 'the chief qualities or interests in the recognition of which, either as common or exclusively common, the foundations of exclusive nationality lie' (ibid.). These are

1. Race
2. Language
3. Territory ('as occupied effectively, not as politically owned', which I take

to mean resulting from the practice of power rather than legitimacy, which makes a lot of sense if you think of the shape of Europe at the start of the Great War)

4. Economic Interests
5. Culture ('characteristic standards and modes of life')
6. Religion
7. Political Unity
 - 7a. Political Tradition ('outcome of political unity when long established')
 - 7b. Political Subjection
 - 7c. Political Domination

These factors are not wholly independent of each other, and found combined and separated. They may be common but not exclusive to a particular nationality, or both common and exclusive. Nationalities where a factor, in this case, 'race', is both common *and* exclusive are Jews, Japanese, Poles, Czechs and Magyars; the British are deemed common and exclusive with regard to 7a, political tradition, and 7d, political domination, but more about the characteristics of 'national groupings' anon. MacIver gives the symbol 'I' to factors common and exclusive, and 'X' to those common but not exclusive (such as the English language, shared by a number of national groupings including Americans). Similarly, with regard to territory, when a nationality occupies the whole of a particular area and is not territorially intermingled with other nationalities, they are denoted by I (Japanese, Spaniards, Swiss, Poles, Czechs, Magyars) but not the British, Americans, Russians; the French, Italians, Germans are denoted by X+ to signify 'nearly I'. Almost all 'imperial nations' are marked X, reflecting in the British case the Dominions, presumably, including Canada where MacIver migrated shortly after he wrote this article. Where 'nation' and 'state' coincide (interesting that he does not make the mistake of later writers in assuming they are synonyms), they are judged to be I (common and exclusive), under Political Unity (examples are Japanese, Spaniards and Swiss); whereas X (common but not exclusive) under Political Unity is used for instances where nationality and state (what I would call citizenship) do not correspond (e.g. British, Americans, Russians, Germans and the Magyars). The American case is interesting, in passing, 'since they have admitted negroes to their political rights' (159). He takes it as obvious that factors such as those relating to economic and cultural differences are differences of degree not of kind: 'In the civilised world national differences, whatever they amount to, are not differences in "culture-stage" – they are differences in the subtler group-qualities, differences of moods and manners and temperaments, not in the universal character

of their standards and achievements' (159). However, if a nation regards its own culture as unique, or is deeply conscious of 'the severance of economic interests' from its neighbours, then MacIver regards such cultural or economic interests as 'pure determinants'. Thus, the establishment of tariff-walls can determine unity and separation (so much for Renan's comments that a customs union—a *zollverein*—is not a *patrie* (Renan, 1882 (1996):51). In passing, it is interesting that by and large MacIver is critical of Renan, even though, it seems to me, that they have much in common. For example, in *The Modern State* (1926) he addresses what he calls Renan's famous definition of nationality, 'what constitutes a nation is not speaking the same tongue or belonging to the same ethnic group, but having accomplished great things in common in the past and the wish to accomplish them in the future'. But, MacIver says, 'this condition could be fulfilled by a family or a ship's crew or a band of conspirators, but they do not on that account become a nation' (1926:123–4).

Nevertheless, MacIver wishes to stress the consciousness of common quality or interest, rather than its 'objective' status. So to the matrix:

Reading across his table for ourselves, we see that the British, in his view, are only recognised as distinctive in terms of their political traditions and political domination, presumably imperial. Like the Americans (who, perhaps remarkably, are judged to have no distinctive feature compared with other nationalities, not even political ones like the British), and the Swiss, they are not racially distinct in the sense that community does not align with nationality. The French, Russians, Italians and Germans are recognised as having common but not exclusive features (X). The Czechs have the largest number of exclusively common factors (I)—race, law, territory, economy, but their culture is deemed to be common but not exclusive (X). One can quibble with MacIver's characterisations of individual 'nationalities'—and it is clearly influenced by the characteristics of the world of 1915—but the fact that he is able to produce such a matrix describing key factors is remarkable.

MacIver himself draws what he calls 'significant conclusions' from his table:

1. There is no single factor present in *all* cases of the consciousness of nationality;
2. In no two cases are the factors on which this consciousness is based exactly the same;
3. It is not necessary for nationality that there should be any 'pure determinant' whatever.
4. Nor do nationalities need to represent distinct types (he observes that

TABLE SHOWING THE FOUNDATIONS OF NATIONALITY
(MacIver 'The Foundations of Nationality', The Sociological Review, 8, 1915, p.160)

	Race	lang	territory	economy	culture	relign	Pol Unity	Pol trad	Pol subjn	Pol dom	'pure determinants'
British	O	X	X	X	X	O	X	I	O	I	7a, 7c
Americans	O	X	X	X	X	O	X	O	O	O	None
French	X	X	X+	X	X+	O	O	I	O	I	7a, 7c
Italians	X	X	X+	X	X	O	O	O	O	O	None certain
Russians	X	I	X	X	X+	O	X	I	O	I	2,7a,7c
Germans	X	X	X+	X	X+	O	X	O	O	I	7c
Jews	I	O	O	O	X	I	O	I?	I	O	1, 6, 7b
Japanese	I	I	I	X	X	O	I	I	O	?	1,2,3,7,7a
Spaniards	I	X	I	X	X	X	I	I	O	O	1,3,7,7a
Swiss	O	O	I	X	O	O	I	I	O	O	3,7,7a
Poles	I	I	I	X	X	X	O	O	I	O	1,2,3,7a,7b
Czechs	I	I	I	I	O	O	O	O	I	O	1,2,3,4,7b
Magyars	I	I	I	X	O	O	X	I	O	I	1,2,3,7a,7c

I = factor recognised as exclusively common;

X = factor recognised as common but not exclusive;

O = no community co-extensive with nationality;

X+ = near approach to I

1. Race

2. Language

3. Territory

4. Economic Interests

5. Culture

6. Religion

7. Political Unity

7a. Political Tradition

7b. Political Subjection

7c. Political Domination

American nationality undoubtedly exists, although there is no exclusive basis for it in a specific common quality or interest).

5. On the other hand, nationality, though not identified with any or all of its foundations, is something essentially 'psychical' (his word) and necessarily indefinite, 'being a certain consciousness of likemindedness which may be developed in a great variety of ways and under a great variety of conditions' (160)

What is it, then, which makes nationality if it is varied in origin and expression? Sounding very modern, he observes: 'It can only be in the desire of a group for political unity, for a common (not necessarily exclusive) political organisation. The criterion is by its very nature imperfect, but no other seems available' (161). Other forms of group consciousness are also available even if they do not share in a common political life. Thus, he says (remember that he wrote this in 1915), the Jews 'have lost the desire for political union' and with it 'national self-consciousness', but retaining a racial sense of unity. He was not to foresee twentieth century history unfolding. Again, where a self-governing colony lacks desire to be at least federated to the mother-country, then it has lost its original nationality and becomes a new nation (in passing, one wonders how he judges Canada and Australia in this regard, for by then they were formally independent though retaining dominion status).

So, why, he wonders, does the sense of nationality expand, contract, or become transformed? He starts from a premise which we would call 'modernist' as opposed to 'primordialist' (he was not privy to later, sometimes tedious, debates about the extent to which nationalism is a feature of modernity or of times more ancient). With much common-sense, he observes that 'the sentiment of nationality' as he calls it is quite a modern phenomenon; 'it would perhaps be more accurate to say that this sentiment has in modern days revealed itself in new and decisive forms' (161). He does, however, identify different stages of societal evolution—quite Durkheimian, in fact. First, society is held together by 'an intense and exclusive communal spirit, the spirit of the clan, or even the tribe, the former less common than the latter'. In these, community consciousness depends on a number of factors common and exclusive. In terms of his schema, all factors are represented by 'I'. The second stage is where conformity is institutionalised into loyalty to ruler or chief, though allegiance to sub-groups, notably classes, breaks tribal homogeneity. MacIver alludes in passing to what we have learned to call civil society (though he doesn't use the term) insofar as different associations come to be distinctive from the State, 'in the name of the specific interest for which each stood, to make claims

contradictory to those of the State—or rather of the actual governments of existing states—on the common members of both’ (163). Only in the third stage did the sentiment of nationality proper emerge, whereby people could distinguish diversity of loyalties from ‘the claims of the complete community to which they felt themselves to belong’. This occurred under the historical circumstances of the two main, and linked, political movements: the growth of nationality, and the growth of democracy. Nationalism develops as the spirit of protest against political domination, but nationality ‘can be a true ideal only so long as and in so far as nationality is itself unrealised’ (164); that is, as an aspiration. Once achieved, it is no longer an ideal. Once met, there is a danger of a move to chauvinism if no other ideal is put in its place. In the fourth stage, inter-dependence develops, and with it a shift to supra-nationality: ‘It has been making modern nations, almost against their will, or at any rate the wills of their governments, parts of a greater society, partners in a common interest’ (165). Inter-state coordination is necessary and desirable. Writing in 1915, MacIver makes the prescient comment:

The future of the nations of Europe, for a long time to come, will be decided by their ability to see past the accumulated hatreds and losses, tragedies and errors, of this almost universal war, to the necessity of establishing some saner system, some international organisation as permanent and as extensive as the common interests of the nations. (ibid.)

Intellectual Affinities

I have alluded to the Durkheimian quality of much of MacIver’s thought: his social evolutionism, notably the shift from tribal community consciousness to civic consciousness—from ‘organic’ to ‘mechanical’ solidarity in Durkheim’s terms. There is also a strong similarity between them as regards their social liberalism, and, indeed, with Ernest Renan who predated both of them. Renan’s famous essay, ‘What is a nation?’, had a deliberate political purpose. His comment about nationality requiring a daily plebiscite, the everyday affirmation of national identity, has entered the canon of nationalism studies. It is important however to bear in mind that Renan was making a political point, that Alsace-Lorraine had been annexed by Prussia in 1871 on the grounds that it was ‘objectively’ part of the Reich. By invoking the ‘daily plebiscite’,

Renan was saying that the inhabitants had to give their continuous—hence, daily—affirmation for this to be so. Over forty years later, Renan’s compatriot, Emile Durkheim was making the same point. At exactly the same time as MacIver—1915—he wrote a trenchant piece entitled ‘Germany above all’ which took issue with the dominant German view that the State has absolute power (*der Staat ist Macht*).¹ Observe the similarities between Durkheim and MacIver on nationality:

Durkheim writes:

A nationality is a group of human beings, who for ethnical (sic) or perhaps merely for historical reasons desire to live under the same laws, or to form a single state, large or small, as it may be; and it is now a recognised principle among civilised peoples that, when this common desire has been persistently affirmed, it commands respect, and is indeed the only solid basis of a state. (1915:40)

We cannot really fault MacIver (or Durkheim, for that matter) for failing to predict later twentieth century events, but what does seem to me remarkable is how prescient he was in picking out the key variables and processes which make up what he calls ‘nationality’ (in passing, it is obvious that he was not adopting the later usage of the term as ‘citizenship’, revealing in itself, for that helps to account for the common failure to distinguish between nation and state which has bedevilled the study of nations and nationalism since 1945).

Nation and State

MacIver, on the other hand, is well aware of the distinction nation and state. In *Community*, published in 1917, and the preface for which he wrote at King’s College, Aberdeen, in 1914, he observes: ‘The completest type of community [*community being defined as ‘a social unity whose members recognise as common a sufficiency of interests to allow of the interactivities of common life’*—my comment] is the nation, and when a nation is allowed free expression it creates an autonomous state’ (107). He stresses that ‘nation’ is not coterminous with ‘locality’ (he alludes in passing to the organisation of students at Aberdeen and Glasgow into ‘nations’ or localities, ‘a relic of the times when universities, in the poverty

¹ I am indebted to David Inglis for bringing this to my attention, and for pointing out the similarities in the views of Durkheim and MacIver.

and uniformity of their studies, were organised according to local divisions' (258), and goes on to say that when barriers of locality and class are broken across by recognition of wider common interests, then 'nation' or 'people' emerges as an integral community (261). 'Nationality' then is the affirmation of the superiority of common interests over differences of locality and class, and in his scheme of things, a higher order of social development. The state becomes the 'ministering association' of the nation. Most sociologists would take issue with attributing higher order to issues of nationality over those of social class (and presumably other social dimensions such as gender), but it is interesting to me that he doesn't conflate nation and state. Nation, he says, is a community, not a hypothetical structure like race, but 'a concrete living reality' (265). These are strong statements, and somewhat at odds with the Gellnerian notion that nation is a social construct, which is undoubtedly the conventional wisdom of most scholars of nationalism today. MacIver's prioritising of nation seems to reflect his developmentalist model,² fulfilling a double function—to resist superior claims from supra-national bodies (such as 'political Rome over the world', or 'ecclesiastical Rome over the world'), and to provide ground for uniting localities and social classes. 'The idea of nationality is thus...an expression of the widened social thoughts of men' (267). And more strongly, 'The fact of common nationality is definite and determinative, not to be denied or renounced, a real basis of unity and condition of common action' (ibid.). MacIver is at pains to distinguish between the fact, and the ideal, of nationality. Somewhat surprisingly, he claims that the ideal of nationality (rather than the fact) is vague and confused. 'Nationality, in a word, is properly the ground and not the inspiration of common action' (267). He quite accepts that nationality is aspirational, hence an ideal, that the nation should govern itself and become, through the state, an autonomous unit for the achievement of intrinsic interests. Once this has been achieved, nationality, *per se*, ceases to be an ideal, and instead 'is a way of being human, a common individuality' (268). Thus, in his example, Factory Acts were passed not because workers are 'national' (he gives the examples of German, and English (sic) workers), but because workers need protection, not because they are German or English. Basic, human, civilised values are pursued through 'nationality' because they are general, not specific to a nation, though expressed by its political agency, the state: 'it is the protector and maintainer of each concrete nation, the

² In his later book, *The Elements of Social Science* (1921), MacIver spells out the stages of society: the village community, the city community, the feudal community, the nation community—the highest form.

community of nationality is, as it were, the colour...’ (272). Inter-state action is necessary and inevitable, as states come to share certain problems and solutions. This is especially so with regard to war which he calls ‘a relation of hostility between peoples as organised by States’ (275). So, ‘as intercommunity extends, war becomes more and more irrational’ (ibid.)—clearly a *cri de coeur* in his times.

In his political sociology, MacIver comments that the life of the community is endangered when government extends its functions beyond a certain range. ‘When government becomes the arbiter of the arts, of the faiths, of the philosophies, of the morals, and of the attitudes of the people it cuts the heart out of all these activities, the activities by and for which men live’ (1921:80). The state does have a universality which no other association can claim. It alone has territorial boundaries such that all living within them are subject to its laws and jurisdiction. It has a ‘unique investment with the coercive force of the community’ (1921:82). Nevertheless, ‘force can command only the external, the formal. It cannot enjoin a spirit, a belief, or a form of culture’ (ibid., 84).

Evolving Ideas

Let us return to his comments on nation and nationality. In *The Elements of Social Science* (1921) he reiterates his views which appeared in his 1915 article in *The Sociological Review*. To reprise:

When we realize that nations are not racially distinct entities, it becomes apparent that there remains no single outward criterion of any kind to mark off nation from nation. Take language. A nation may be one though its members, like the Swiss, speak several languages; and a single language, like English or Spanish, may be common to diverse nations. Take religion. The day of the national God is past, and the God of denationalized race (but of course not a pure race) holds the at least nominal allegiance of the divided nations of the western world’ (1921:99–100)

Nationality, he comments, must be a subtler thing than these and other external signs. The criterion of nationhood ‘is the desire for self-government surging out of a sense of likeness and of difference’ (ibid., 101). The world, however,

'is now ripe, and never was ripe before, for an international or more precisely an inter-political system' (ibid., 105).

How did MacIver's view of nationality change over his career? His book *Society: an introductory analysis* was co-authored with Charles Page, and first published in 1950, when MacIver was professor of political philosophy and sociology at Columbia, though actually a revised reprint of his 1931 book *Society: its structure and changes*. Written as it was in revised form just five years after the Second World War, it provides a useful 'book-end' to the 1915 article in *The Sociological Review*. The fundamentals do not appear to have changed, although he uses new materials, such as Hans Kohn's work published in the 1940s, notably *The Idea of Nationalism* (1945), which was the basis for Kohn's *Encyclopedia Britannica* entry of that year, in which he distinguished between 'civic' and 'ethnic' forms of nationalism. For MacIver, the nation remains the largest effective community insofar as it is the largest group permeated by a consciousness of comprehensive solidarity. *Pace* the United Nations, there is no international community to any effective degree. Nations are in essence territorially based, despite, he acknowledges, the enormous problems faced by post-war designers of the new Europe in both 1919 and 1945; which is not to say that plotting nations on a map is straightforward (1964 [1950], 296 ff). Nationality has distinctive features:

1. Its democratic nature: 'Like all communal sentiments...nationality feeling is essentially democratic. In other words, it admits no grades, no hierarchy of membership' (1964:297). It does not depend on peculiar interests or specific attributes of all members of a nation.
2. The basic criterion of nationality is this: it is 'a type of community sentiment, created by historical circumstances and supported by common psychological factors, *of such an extent and so strong that those who feel it desire to have a common government peculiarly or exclusively their own*' (ibid., 298; his emphasis). He draws on Kohn to make the point. Communities such as nations are not merely objective entities, but 'sociopsychological realities'. The sentiment of nationality has different grounds: (a) national likenesses and stereotypes—resting on what members have in *common*. Thus, national stereotypes and caricatures such as Uncle Sam, John Bull, the Russian bear aid in constructing solidarity from without and within; (b) as a result, symbols of nationality sentiment are attached to the group as a whole—the flag, the anthem: fatherland, mother-country, homeland—and can be mobilised as and when. National sentiment assumes diverse forms: patriotism—which he defines as deep, communal

feeling based on altruistic devotion—has to be distinguished from nationalism—which demands that the nation is the object of supreme and exclusive loyalty. In extreme forms, ‘it becomes chauvinism, which is intolerant and boastful, or imperialism, which seeks economic or political domination over others’ (ibid., 301).

3. It follows that nationality may express a beneficial ideal of unity or it may be a cause of serious division. There seems to be greater emphasis on this latter, negative, aspect in his later work, not surprising given the mid-century context (note too the shift to ‘nationalism’). Thus, ‘In the modern world, as a limit to the range of community, nationalism is disastrous. Nationalism first became a potent force in Europe, but there is no better area in which to observe its harmful aspects, not only among the “troublesome” smaller nations of eastern Europe but also among the greater nations. European nationalism has disrupted the economic interest that might be shared, and has fostered the deadly mutual distrust leading to war’ (ibid., 302).
4. How are these destructive effects to be overcome? The obvious answer is through developing the international community, which, for MacIver, must be based on national cooperation. The world is plainly a more dangerous place in 1950, given ‘the possibility of destruction hitherto undreamed’ (304).

Is MacIver Scottish?

This is the final question I want to address. By the question I mean to ask whether or not he was influenced by the country which bred him. At one level the answer is plainly no. One looks in vain for references. But should one bother? After all, MacIver was writing generic social science which, especially at that time, was seeking out what was general not what was specific. He was interested in models of social development, and once societies had reached the level of what he calls ‘national community’, they had far more in common than separated them. So why bother with Scotland? England is there (‘Britain’ figures as empire), but largely as a trope for what we more carefully call these days the UK. And yet. I am struck by this similarity with Adam Ferguson, in whose work one also searches in vain for explicit evidence of roots. On the other hand, both were to my mind crucially influenced by the societies they grew up in. Just as ‘civil society’ seemed a natural thing to write about

for Ferguson, so ‘nation’—especially in contradistinction to ‘state’—comes naturally to MacIver. From the outset, he makes the distinction, and I would argue that his work is suffused with an understanding that nation and state should not be confused.

We have one advantage, if that is what it is, in that MacIver wrote an autobiography, published by the University of Chicago Press in 1968. Having such a thing at our disposal carries health warnings. On the one hand, it is an account, written by the author late in life, with all the caveats such accounts carry. On the other hand, it invites those writing about MacIver to relate what he wrote back to his life story, and at worst runs the risk of amateur psychologising. Given that most writers do not write autobiographies, then the temptation to do this when they are available is sometimes irresistible. Whether we would learn anything significant about the social thought of the three great founders of modern sociology—Marx, Weber and Durkheim—if they had written autobiographies is a moot point. In MacIver’s case it does allow us to see how much or how little he alluded to his native land, and the answer is not much. The bare bones are these. Born in Stornoway on Lewis in 1882, he went to Edinburgh University and graduated in 1903 and 1905, to Oxford for two years, before returning to Aberdeen in 1907 where he remained until 1915 whence he migrated to Canada. He remained there, at the University of Toronto, until 1927 when he went to Columbia in the United States where he taught until 1950. Thereafter he directed various public policy projects, and was president then chancellor of the New School for Social Research until 1966.

His autobiography gives us the following insights: his family did not speak Gaelic at home, though he gleaned enough as a child to follow adult conversation between visitors and kin; he found the religious culture of Lewis oppressive and stifling, even though his family belonged to the big kirk. He said: ‘I am an agnostic, which is very different from being an atheist’ (1968: 126). In short, we might describe him as a secular presbyterian, someone who inculcated particular values rather than an active churchgoer. Indeed, he entitles his autobiography ‘As a tale that is told’, an explicit allusion to Psalm 90 (verse 9). Despite joining the Territorials while at Aberdeen (at the behest of a friend), he left after a year or two, ‘a feeling of revulsion gradually came over me... we were intended to be defenders of our country, but the conception of “our country” entertained by most army men I met was wholly different from mine’—he didn’t say what it was. He retained a sense of his own identity as a Highland Scot (his term) in the context of the three countries furth of Scotland in which he lived. Thus

at Oxford: 'For a Highland Scot, England, in its most traditional enclave, was like a foreign country. Attitudes, codes, manners, showed distinctive differences... I found them ['English public schoolmen'] all courteous and ostensibly friendly. But it was the kind of courtesy you extend to foreigners.' (58). His sense of not being English goes with him to Canada: 'A Scot is not unlikely to feel more at ease migrating to Canada than living in England' (78). Finally, he moved to the United States:

I felt like a semi-foreigner at first among my new colleagues. With my different background and training, and not knowing the folk they gossiped about or the situations they discussed, I was a listener more than a participant in their company—a role I was not used to. I retained and have always kept a bit of a Scottish Highland accent that seemed more conspicuous against the characteristic American intonation of the majority of my colleagues. But the feeling of being an outsider was dissipated soon enough in a society where 'standing on ceremony' is rare and hospitality is warm and pervasive. (97)

This brief dip into MacIver's autobiography simply allows us to see that he took much of his Scottish and Highland background with him, and applied it to new social experiences, in England, Canada and the United States. He does not seem to have been in any way a 'professional Scot', an émigré of caricature, but someone who made an intellectual and public contribution to the societies in which he found himself. No ivory towered intellectual, he. In later life, he took on studies of Jewish Community Relations agencies, the New York public school system, academic freedom, Juvenile Delinquency Evaluation project in New York, as well as presiding over the New School for Social Research in New York, a body with a long history of studying and contributing to the society in which it was embedded. All were informed by his sociological commitment not only to understand the social world but to help to change it.

We can perhaps take his Scottishness further, into his academic work in terms of the assumptions he employs, or indeed doesn't. It is the implicit insight rather than the explicit model which strikes one about his writings, the frame of reference, as it were. He does not have to be told that state, nation, society are different, though his understanding of nation is far closer to society, it must be said, in the sense that the reality of social governance is what constitutes the nation, and not simply some set of emotions. Contrast that with much British and American sociology which simply assumes that

the so-called nation-state is the 'natural' entity for social and cultural analysis: an implicit parochialism masquerading as universalism. See, for example, his comment in *Community* (1917) that the most complete form of community is the 'nation', and where the nation is allowed free expression, it creates an autonomous state. Nation 'is a community, a concrete living reality, not a hypothetical structure like race' (p.266).

Secondly, MacIver observes that the basis of 'nationality' is that people regard it so—'there is no reality beyond recognition'. In other words, there is no pure determinant of nationality. Nationality is in his word 'psychical', 'being a certain consciousness of likemindedness which may be developed in a great variety of ways and under a great variety of conditions'. He observes that the failure to recognise an existing community is far more common than its opposite, something which echoes down more recent debates as to whether Scotland is sufficiently distinctive in cultural terms to warrant being called a nation.

While it would be wrong to assume that MacIver was explicitly aware that his general observations were either derived from or could be applied to the Scottish experience is not the point. Tracing theoretical assumptions from individual's biographical details is a hazardous even pointless exercise. Suffice it to say that MacIver was less likely to make the common errors about nations and nationality than writers from other, bigger countries where assumptions about nations=states are more common, even *de rigueur*.

I like to think that if he were here today, he would have little problem relating to twenty-first century Scotland, the growth in understated nations, of global and inter-governmental forces, the one not negating the other. He might even comment that this is where he came in, and, indeed, where he came from.

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