

Minorities and Memories

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**Survivals and Extinctions in
Scotland and Western Europe**

Andrew Strathern

and

Pamela J. Stewart

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To those held in the mind
Crystal clear
Fleeting but resilient

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About the Authors

Andrew Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart are a husband and wife team. They have published many articles and books on their fieldwork. Their most recent co-authored books include:

Curing and Healing: Medical Anthropology in Global Perspective. (1999, Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press).

Collaborations and Conflicts. A Leader Through Time. (1999, Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers).

Arrow Talk: Transaction, Transition, and Contradiction in New Guinea Highlands History. (2000, Kent, Ohio and London: Kent State University Press).

The Python's Back: Pathways of Comparison between Indonesia and Melanesia. (2000, Westport, Conn. and London: Bergin and Garvey, Greenwood Publishing Group).

Stories, Strength and Self-Narration: Western Highlands, Papua New Guinea. (2000, Adelaide, Australia: Crawford House Publishing).

Humors and Substances: Ideas of the Body in New Guinea. (2001, Westport, Conn. and London: Bergin and Garvey, Greenwood Publishing Group).

They have also recently co-edited two further volumes:

Millennial Countdown in New Guinea. Special Issue of *Ethnohistory* Vol. 47. No. 1, 2000, Duke University Press.

Identity Work: Constructing Pacific Lives. 2000, ASAO (Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania) Monograph Series No. 18. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Preface

Anthropologists have for many years now been engaged with developing historical perspectives on their work. The need to do so has been all the more compelling given their involvement with fieldwork in areas where there are numerous historical works available. In addition, theoretical approaches themselves have moved increasingly towards the diachronic domain as anthropologists have grappled with the analysis of processes and events arising out of the colonial and post-colonial experiences of peoples and with people's own constructions of their history and changing expressions of their identity. The resurgence of nationalism in some areas and its recontextualization under transnational and globalizing influences have added further complexities to the enterprise of writing in this new anthropological vein.

In this book we have explored some of these new parameters of the anthropological project, focusing on the topic of Scotland and historical senses of identity among its people. We began our field enquiries with an interest in the specific circumstances of tenant farmers on an estate in a part of the County of Ayrshire in the South-West of Scotland where to our knowledge no anthropologist had previously carried out ethnographic work. Because one of our interests lay in the process of succession to tenancies on estates, the work inevitably acquired a historical dimension, as we tried to trace families through time and space and to understand the wider historical settings into which their lives were set. The context of such settings also influenced the ways in which people saw themselves and experienced their identities. It soon became apparent to us that in Scotland senses of identity are very much bound up with ideas of relationships with England, in particular England seen as a center of state power rather than England seen in terms of individual persons or families of English descent. This perception of identity in terms of a relationship of contrast or difference (whether seen in terms of culture or power or both) seemed to be a persisting feature, its content changing historically but its locus remaining relatively fixed (see Bowie 1993: 177, quoting the earlier fundamental observations of Edwin Ardener on this point; also the Introduction by Sharon Macdonald to the volume in which Bowie's chapter appears). Such a combination of formal stability and historical changes of content again indicated

to us the need for a vigorous incorporation of history into our ethnographic work.

Doing so required that we expand our ethnographic remit to take into account at least a sampling of existing primary and secondary historical materials. Such a process is open-ended and subject only to pragmatic forms of closure. We took our cues here from the existence of local historical research centers in Cumnock and Kilmarnock, two of the towns within our research area. These proved to have good collections of local works on Ayrshire, testifying also to the keen interest in these topics on the part of Ayrshire people themselves. In 2000 we came across a similarly valuable collection of works in the Public Library in Forfar, Angus, bequeathed to it by a local enthusiast. Everywhere we went we found the same considerable interest and knowledge, sometimes based on genealogical work, sometimes on an interest in social conditions generally, sometimes on a particular element such as the game of Curling or local poetry (or both together, as we discuss in chapter 5). From this expansion of our work and the deliberate blurring of its edges, we learned that history was not only important to us in analytical terms, but was a vital and regular part of people's own contemporary lives, as Family History and Local History Societies and their publications abundantly testified.

Work on history in turn made it clear to us that small localities of the kind where we began working were also very much part of wider histories. Their stories and the poignancy of these stories depended in fact on an awareness of these wider contexts. So it was that we decided, for example, that the story of Scotland's South-West could not be separated from that of other parts of what from 1801 onwards became known as the United Kingdom; and that parts of the story of the South-West led naturally to the discussion of Ulster or Northern Ireland and hence also to Ireland as a whole; while issues to do with language and identity in Scotland could well be compared with analogous, though different, issues in Wales. Within Scotland itself, as we traveled north in 2000 in order to gain glimpses of life in Perth and Kinross, Angus, Sutherland, Caithness, and the Orkneys, we came increasingly upon an earlier phase of history which was of considerable interest to people in a way we had not found in Ayrshire: the question of the Picts and their relationship to the idea of Scotland. We found the Picts and their intricately incised standing stones to be a major focus for a series of quite new Museums and Heritage Centers set up from Perth northwards. The Picts, seemingly "extinguished" by their absorption into the Kingdom of the "Scots" from the 9th century c.e. onwards, were making a big comeback in people's imaginations of national identity today, we found.

Such new imaginings do not arise by chance. To a great extent they flourish in the context of changed overall political circumstances. We

relate this renewed interest in the Picts partly to the process of devolution in Scotland and the inauguration of a new Scottish Parliament there in 1999. After discussing a number of issues local to Ayrshire and Perthshire/Angus, therefore, we have taken a more extensive look at the question of Scots nationhood in a chapter whose title derives from the work of the sociologist David McCrone (1992), "Scotland—A Stateless Nation?" We set our answer, for the past and the present, firmly into the context of relationships with England and the patchy process of the incorporation of Scotland into a sense of "British" identity, now countered by a less muted assertion of "Scottish" identity as such. We are also interested here (chapter 7) and elsewhere in the book in notions and perceptions of Scotland's place in Western Europe, with particular reference to the European Union.

The plan of the book is as follows: an introductory chapter explores some of the concepts of identity that underlie the book's overall perspectives, especially the idea of multiple identities and how identities change over time. Two further chapters discuss the local setting of our study in Ayrshire, concentrating on tenant farmers and on landlord-tenant relationships, followed by a chapter examining some identity issues that are salient for the tenant farmers we know today. Chapters five and six look at an important aesthetic dimension of self-expression, seen historically: the game of Curling and traditions of poetry that go with it; and the evocation of ideas of landscape and place in poetry generally. We draw here on the work of many people, including the work of the notable Angus poet, Violet Jacob, whose work has received less notice than some other poets, and the more highly recognized poet Robert Burns and the traditions surrounding poetry of his age. We also argue, for Curling, that it was in the past an important constitutive part of relations between Lairds and their tenants.

Chapters eight and nine broaden the geographical and historical perspective by sketching issues to do with identity in Wales (centered greatly on language) and in Ireland, chiefly Northern Ireland, tracing these issues back to the time of the Ulster "Plantation" of Lowland Scots from the South-West by King James VI and I in the early 1600s. Not only is this history highly relevant to the situation in Northern Ireland today: it also reveals the reasons for the ambivalent sense of relations of the Lowland Scots with the "Irish Question" over time and today, as Graham Walker's (1995) study shows.

From these two comparative chapters we return to a very general issue which emerges throughout the book, the issue of language and national identity. Here we make brief use of some examples from outside of Scotland, viz. Catalonia and Brittany, although our major focus is on Scotland itself and the question of the Lowland Scots language. We con-

clude here that, somewhat paradoxically, Lowland Scots is well adapted to take a place in Scotland as a form of non-exclusive national language, partly because of its degrees of similarity with English. In this regard we contrast it with Welsh. The Welsh language provides for a clear boundary of difference with English, but this is a severe problem for a nation-in-the-making that is so intertwined with England.

Finally, we present two chapters on themes of compelling interest in different parts of Scotland: the Picts and the Covenanters. We explore these themes both historically and in terms of their symbolic role in the expression of nationhood today. Two further short chapters examine emergent issues from our work: horizons and diasporas, the extension of identities beyond the borders of the nation; and the difficulties of writing historical ethnography. All good ends should also indicate beginnings, so we take the opportunity here to explain that the present book can help to launch a second work which will both give more of our own field materials and will take a critical look at existing ethnographic work in Scotland and Western Europe more generally, in terms of ideas of community, place, history, and identity.

The text of this book was completed in January 2001, just before the outbreak of foot and mouth disease on British farms. Those parts of our text which describe the concerns of farmers and their senses of identity should be read as an account at a particular historical moment prior to the outbreak and the devastating losses sustained by many farmers as a result of the slaughtering of animals mandated by government policy. The ruptures and dislocations flowing from the outbreak will enter into people's memories and perhaps into our subsequent work. Meanwhile this book will be a part of a record of Scottish farmers and their lives prior to this most recent challenge to their resilience and tenacity.

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During our research we visited many heritage centres and museums, and we would particularly like to mention here those at Meikle in

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In intellectual terms we want to record here our debt to the work of Dr. John Strawhorn on Ayrshire history, and to the work of many other local historians like him, such as James Mair, whom we have not met but whose work we have read with profit. In terms of general historical work we also want to record here how much we learned from the writings of Norman Davies on “the isles” in general, and of Christopher Smout and Tom Devine on Scotland in particular. We have tried from time to time to relate their historical findings to anthropological themes, drawing on our knowledge of societal changes in the Pacific region where we also work. All photographs in this book are from the Stewart/Strathern Archive, and most were taken by ourselves on our field visits.

For a special grant in aid of the publication of maps and photographs in this book we wish to record our grateful thanks to the Richard D. and Mary Jane Edwards Endowed Publications Fund, administered by the Office of Dean N. John Cooper, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, University of Pittsburgh. The maps have been deftly prepared by Ms Viviana Siveroni. We also would like to give special thanks to Glenn Perkins of Carolina Academic Press for his overall co-operation and support of this work.

Writing this book has been a growth experience for us, one that we have enjoyed and profited from. For all errors and idiosyncrasies, we must accept sole responsibility.