James Kennedy, *Liberal nationalisms. Empire, state, and civil society in Scotland and Quebec* (Montreal - Kingston - London - Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013) 322 pp., ISBN 9780773538986.

Review by **Ludger Mees**

Inverting the habitual structure of this kind of review essays, I would like to initiate this brief comment on James Kennedy's recent book by forwarding one of the conclusions I reached after having read his 322 pages on liberal nationalisms in Scotland and in Quebec. Without any doubt, this publication is a major contribution to the research on nationalism. This contribution is important and interesting for mainly four reasons: because it deals with a complex historical topic which so far has been remarkably under-researched; because it is based on the methodology of comparative history, which helps both to highlight the common features and to underline the differences between the case studies; third, the structure and the prose of the text are perfectly constructed, fluent and easily understandable even for non-experts on Scottish or Canadian nationalisms; and, finally, the main arguments, which might even sound somewhat provocative to the ears of some readers, invite to further debate.

To begin with, Kennedy's book is probably the first scientific monograph dedicated to the comparison of early francophone Canadian nationalism in Quebec on the one hand, and Scottish nationalism, on the other. Normally, the references for both nationalisms are other cases, the most important probably being the Irish one in the case of the Scots. However, Kennedy's choice to bring together Scotland and Quebec makes sense and opens new analytical perspectives, since both territories were part of the broader British Empire, both had been able to maintain a certain level of self-government, and both developed reacting to imperial policies aiming at a

centralisation of the Empire's rule which put pressure and strain on local governance in both cases. The author identifies these measures of centralisation analysing the consequences of the South African War (Boer War, 1899), tariff reform, naval re-armament and, in the Canadian case, the restrictions on education in French-speaking schools. His chronological time frame comprises the period between the Boer War and the outbreak of World War I, which gave rise to major political changes in the history of Scottish and Quebec nationalisms. At the center of the analysis Kennedy places two organisations and their respective leadership. In Scotland it is the Young Scots' Society (YSS) formed in 1900, and in Quebec the *Ligue nationaliste canadienne* founded three years later, in 1903.

According to Kennedy, both organisations represented a liberal type of nationalism. What does this mean? The concept of liberalism and its different historical expressions are nearly as broad and complex as that of nationalism and it might have been convenient to dedicate a special theoretical section of the book to this issue. The introduction and the first chapter ("Liberty and Nationality") place much more emphasis on 'Nationality' than on 'Liberty'. Thus, without going into details, and drawing on authors as John Stuart Mill, Charles Taylor or Will Kymlicka, Kennedy forwards a definition of liberal nationalism as a movement made up by nationalists who seek a reconciliation of liberalism and nationalism by 1. considering that a sense of nationhood is compatible with democracy; that, 2., moreover, nationality is conductive to the good working of democracy, and that 3. the cultural expression (choice) is itself a liberal right. Furthermore, other more concrete features of liberal nationalism are the defense of typical liberal claims of the historical context (land reform, free market, women suffrage, etc.) or the intertwining of nationalism with the self-regulating agencies of civil society and their normative commitment to tolerance (Church, education, press, social movements, etc.).

Kennedy organises his analysis in seven major sections. As already mentioned, chapter one is an excellent theoretical introduction which, however, might have deserved some more attention to the concept of liberalism. In chapter two ('Empire, state, and civil society at the fin de

siècle') the specific political and institutional situation of Quebec and Scotland as parts of the British Empire is analysed. Chapter three deals with the performance and the social background of the 'liberal nationalists' within this context. In both cases nationalists were 'young, urban, and professional', but in the Canadian case, their nationalism was more elite-led and channeled through specific newspapers, whereas the Scottish was a more grassroots nationalism spread through a broad organisational network. In the fourth chapter ('Empire and industry') the nationalist reactions to different challenges articulated by imperial policy are scrutinised (Boer War, tariff reform, industry and trade). Chapters five and six deal with the particular political aims formulated by Scottish and Quebec nationalists (federation and consociation, respectively). Finally, in chapter seven ('Liberalism and the politics of civil society'), Kennedy discusses the relationship between nationalism and civil society.

As a result, the author unfolds a multicoloured picture of a complex historical reality, in which similarities appear side by side with remarkable differences. Kennedy's general conclusion reasserts the existence of a liberal nationalism in Quebec and in Scotland. Both movements arose and got stronger responding to political decisions taken by the Empire that were understood as menaces to the interests of the Quebecois and Scottish people. Yet neither of the two articulated a demand for independence, but rather a desire for broader autonomy within the Empire. Completing Michael Mann's typology, Kennedy calls them 'state-reforming nationalisms'. And in both cases this liberal nationalism, incarnated by the *Ligue nationaliste canadienne* and the Young Scots' Society, vanished by assimilation into other more radical nationalist organisations opposed to the classical bi-nationalism defended by the prior organisations. But together with these remarkable similarities, there were also very important, and even more numerous, differences. Both territories, although part of the British Empire, had very different weights and statuses within it. In general, Scots, unlike the Francophone Canadians, had a disproportionate involvement in the Empire and, in terms of economy and business, Scotland was a beneficiary of the Empire. The Dominion of Canada, and especially the Francophone region, suffered, as Kennedy puts it, 'something of a "core"/"periphery" relationship' with the

Empire (106). Conversely, this situation was reversed in the political realm. Whereas Quebec possessed a legislative assembly, Scotland did not. Its recovery became the core demand of the home rule campaign. The different configuration of civil society had far-reaching consequences. In Quebec, it was marked by the enduring and nearly unchallenged predominance of the Catholic Church, whereas in Scotland the confessional fragmentation reduced the power of Presbyterianism which, nevertheless, was entwined with the Liberal Party. As a consequence, 'liberalism was more firmly established in Scotland and more fragile in Quebec' (226). The result of this relative strength or weakness of liberalism for the nationalist movements was that 'in Scotland nationalism was often subordinate to Liberalism, in Quebec liberalism was often subordinate to Nationalism' (ibid.).

These are only some of the most intriguing findings forwarded by the author in his book on *Liberal Nationalisms*. As I have already stated before, the book is important since it allows for further debate and also for some critical comments, with which I would like to conclude this review essay. My first question is related to a methodological problem. I wonder whether a sample of five leading personalities of the *Ligue nationaliste* is a sufficient grounding for the formulation of general conclusions concerning liberal nationalism in Quebec. Of course, Kennedy displays a profound knowledge of each of these five biographies, and not one single detail escapes his scrutiny. Things become even more complicated if the findings do not coincide in all of the cases, that is, if in certain situations some of these five leaders think or act in one way, and the others in a different way. The author seems to be aware of these problems, for instance when dealing with the attitude towards the Catholic Church defined by the leaders of the League. The empirical data provided and prove the 'divisions among the Nationalistes' (216), but, after mixing Canadians and Scots, Kennedy concludes 'that they were indeed liberal nationalists' (217). Is this a realistic conclusion if three among the five Quebec nationalists campaigned for a 'leading role' of the Catholic Church in civil society?

A second and final doubt is related to terminological problems. Agreeing with Kennedy's criticism to Gellner's point of view that all nationalism is

by nature a state-seeking movement and ideology, and considering valid the definition of nationalism as a political project that 'seeks an arrangement in which the status of the nation is politically and/or culturally enhanced' (16), I think that Kennedy's concept of 'binationalists', which he introduces and uses without further explanation, deserves a little more epistemological attention. It is well known that some of the authors who have studied the phenomenon of nationalism do not even label organisations like the Ligue or the YSS as clearly nationalists. In Eric Hobsbawm's bestseller, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, for example, the Scottish case is considered a ramification of Liberalism or Socialism.[1] Thus, the question may arise as to what extent the Ligue or the YSS are (more or less liberal) nationalist organisations or, to the contrary, (more or less) liberal ones. Moreover, if both are 'binationalist', does that mean that there are two nations that share the place on the top of the scale of values and that both are receptors of their people's loyalty? How does that work in reality? What about possible conflicts within this binationalist behavior? Wouldn't it be more reasonable to introduce the concept of regionalism in this debate? Some of the quotations of Henri Bourassa reproduced in the book seem to suggest that he, in reality, was a supporter of what might be considered a peaceful coexistence of a *patria chica* with its singular cultural particularism within a broader Canadian nation. Here just one example: 'To pursue a union of the two peoples of Canada, without mutual respect for their respective rights, is to build a nation on a fragile basis; it is to provide an element of ruin and destruction as a foundation stone' (221). Is it only by chance that the Quebec leader refers to 'two peoples' and one 'nation'? Or was he simply referring to the Canadian 'state' when using the term 'nation'? Might the concept of 'patriotism', introduced but not explained on page 234, be helpful here?

These doubts, however, do not curtail the great value of Kennedy's study. His findings also open new analytical perspectives for the investigation of other nationalisms which emerged in the context of different Empires (Spanish, Turkish, Austria-Hungary), whose particular political, social, economic and cultural structures proportionated a visible impact on the configuration and evolution of these nationalist movements. If at the beginning of this brief commentary I held that Kennedy's book might also

be perceived by some readers as a provocation, I was referring to those who still stick to simplistic and ahistorical, frequently more normative and Manichean than analytical visions of nationalism. After reading *Liberal Nationalisms*, they will have learned that nationalism is not black or white, good or bad, *per se*. In the words of Anthony D. Smith, nationalism only 'offers a broad and abstract framework' which has to be filled out 'by all kinds of secondary concepts and particular notions'. In a nutshell: 'Whether nationalism helps to "fill out" other ideologies, or is filled out by them, is a secondary matter; it varies with the historical context.'[2]

Endnotes

[1] 'The national feelings of the Welsh and Scots in the United Kingdom did not find expression through special nationalist parties, but through the major all-UK opposition parties -first Liberals, then Labour.' See E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, myth, reality* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 125.
[2] Smith, Anthony D.: *Nationalism*, Oxford: Polity, 2001, p. 24.