

Constructing a Narrative: Ontological Security in the Scottish Nation (State)

Written by Alice Creighton

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Braveheart. Rob Roy. Mary Queen of Scots. As a nation we have been fighting for our independence for hundreds of years, battling against the colonial English state that erased our Celtic heritage and looked down on us as northern savages. We are a diverse nation of brave men and kind women who crave nothing more than a peaceful life in the land that is rightfully ours. More or less, this is what I was taught in school. There was a lack of discussion of the history which explores Scottish merchants profiting from British exploits like the Empire, or any history establishing the closer relationship with England and Wales after the 1707 Union of both nations. Thus, it is not surprising that I have no identification with 'Britain' or the United Kingdom as an adult. This status is not unique to me. This can be seen clearly in polling: 65% of Scottish 18-24 year olds identify themselves as 'very strongly' Scottish, but only 23% see themselves as 'British' (Curtice, 2018). In this essay, I will attempt to demonstrate that this is not merely coincidence, but a result of the constructed narrative of the identity of Scotland and its (young) people, as seen in the education curriculum in Scotland.

Ontological security can highlight how the 'Self' has been constructed in national identity and individual pupil identity. Ontological security is defined as 'security as being' (Steele, 2008, p51) and having "a sense of continuity and order in events" (Giddens 1991, p243). It originates in psychology, as applied to the individual's security (ibid), but has been transferred to the security of the state or nation as well (Berenskoetter 2014; Kinnvall and Mitzen, 2017). The security of being comes partly from a coherent self-narrative which uses a blend of history and myth to organise past, present and future, referred to as the autobiographical narrative (Mälksoo, 2015). This essay will use the changes in the Scottish curriculum to demonstrate the creation of a distinct autobiographical narrative within Scotland which separates Scotland from the rest of the UK. This can be linked initially to the attempt by all Scottish parties to create a coherent 'nation' after devolution. However, once the Scottish National Party (henceforth SNP) gained power in the Scottish Parliament, this can be linked to their aim of achieving independence as a state.

While Scotland has always had a distinct culture within the Union (Paterson, 1997), there is increased interest in Scottish independence from the United Kingdom. This is evidenced by the rise of the SNP and the close, but ultimately unsuccessful, independence referendum in 2014 (ScotCen 2017; Soule, Leith, and Steven 2012). For Scottish independence to be popular Scotland has to be perceived as a distinct political and cultural entity which has no benefit from membership of the union (Arnott and Ozga, 2010). I posit that this requires a narrative of a Scottish nation which has a distinct identity, as well as highlighting the 'otherness' of the rest of the United Kingdom, particularly England. This will be explored through an analysis of the broad Curriculum for Excellence, as well as a focus on the content of Scottish National 5 History Exams. The exam content will be explored in relation to previous curriculums, as well as the exam content from other nations across the UK to demonstrate the distinct framing within the current Scottish curriculum.

Following the work of Inayatullah (2011) this essay recognises the benefits of autoethnography, and an awareness of subjectivity in writing. I have lived in Scotland during SNP governments and independence referendums, and have been educated through the Scottish education system that is analysed in this essay. As a result of my close relation to the topic, I will at points of the essay relate to my experiences, but I attempt to primarily draw on generic sources to demonstrate that my experience is not uncommon.

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Ontological Security in Scotland

Scotland has been a member of the United Kingdom since the Treaty of Union in 1707. However, throughout the late 20th century Scotland's electorate increasingly rejected Thatcherism and Westminster rule (Soule, Leith, and Steven, 2012). In 1997 the Scottish electorate voted overwhelmingly in favour of devolution – gaining 74.3% of the votes (Denver et al, 2008). This was campaigned for by many national political parties, including the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats and the SNP. Thus, the interest in a Scottish nation was not limited to one party. Devolution gave a Scottish parliament powers over social policies, including health and education (Arnott and Ozga, 2010). Since devolution the SNP has gained prominence, resulting in an unexpected SNP minority government in Scotland in 2007 (Law and Mooney, 2012). Their popularity has continued through subsequent Scottish and general elections, with 50% of the Scottish vote for the SNP in 2015, and 45% in 2019 (Audickas, Cracknell and Loft, 2019). The core aim for the SNP is Scottish independence from the UK. However, with their rise to prominence in Scottish politics, initially, there was not an equal rise in support for independence. For example, in 2007 when Alex Salmond became Scotland's first pro-independence First Minister only 24% of the Scottish population favoured independence (ScotCen, 2017). Thus, despite strong support for a devolved state, the SNP needed to increase support for independence. I argue this creates a need for an autobiographical narrative of an independent Scottish nation (state). While the Scottish Government is not fully devolved, it can still use policy to achieve this aim (Arnott and Ozga, 2010). Having been described as a 'nation without a state' (McCrone, 2001), Scotland is an interesting frame of analysis for an ontological approach as it is a nationalist government with limited power to enact change.

Within ontological security, identity is understood as formed from two elements: the 'I' and the 'Me' (Berenskoetter, 2014). The 'I' is related to the internal construction of identity, whereas the 'Me' focuses on social relations with others, or the Self that is defined in relation to others. This essay will focus on the 'I' (the self that is defined internally), and specifically the role of the autobiographical narrative in creating this. The autobiographical narrative is the 'narrative of the self' (Giddens, 1991, p243) which creates the conceptual 'idea' of the state and provides it with an identity beyond spatiality (Delehanty and Steele, 2008). This narrative is based on ideas of past, present, and future iterations of the self, using carefully selected aspects of national history to provide a sense of continuity to the Self (Berenskoetter, 2014; Steele 2008). As I argue, an autobiographical narrative is essential to Scottish nationalism because it creates an identity of Scotland as a nation and as a potential state. History is seen as 'the backbone of nationalism' (Carvalho and Gemenne, 2009, p1) as it can be used to evoke emotions and encourages voters to have allegiance with the nation, as well as providing the idea of the nation through past and present (Berenskoetter, 2014). Hence a prominent Scottish identity can build support for independence as allegiance with a putative Scottish 'state' over the United Kingdom. This can be through a historical narrative which creates a sense of continuity, but also through creating a distinct Scottish society. This is linked to Anderson's (1991) idea of an imagined community, by which the 'nation' is socially constructed by people perceiving themselves to be of that nation. An autobiographical narrative is recognised as essential for a successful imagined national community, as it provides coherence to the nation (ibid). The cultivation of the idea of the nation not only creates allegiance, but also unifies Scotland as a coherent nation, through creating an alternative story of the past which overcomes many internal historical divides (Steele, 2008). This use of history in identity formation is linked to the idea of ontological security through a focus on national memory and myth within public discourse to create a coherent state narrative (Mälksoo 2015; Bell 2003).

There are many historical divisions within Scotland, such as the resentment of the role of Scottish people in the Highland Clearances, and the wider religious divides that started with the reformation that are still present today (Davidson, 2008). However, these are mostly not covered in the Scottish curriculum, and many topics are painted as 'Scottish' that were in fact only a minority of the population. This can be seen, for example, in the teaching of Charles Edward Stuart, more affectionately referred to as 'Bonnie Prince Charlie'. His story, with the Jacobite Uprising, is regularly taught to primary school students, typically aged eight or nine, and framed as a 'Scottish Rebellion' against the English. However, this does not make clear that the 'Bonnie Prince' was brought up French and the rebellion was a faction of both Scottish and English people and was not largely popular in Scotland. Thus, the framing of this as a Scottish rebellion, as I was taught, can be understood as a 'national myth' which changes history to become more appealing to the present-day environment.

The use of myths and history can involve the securitisation of identity which prioritises the national story and can

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'reinstate historical animosities' (Mälksoo, 2015, pg223). The encouragement of Scottish independence from the rest of the UK could be linked to increased animosity to England, with whom the Scots have had a long historical relationship as both allies and adversaries. There is a perceived link between Scottish national identity being related to anti-English sentiments. For example, a study by Hussain and Miller (2005) showed that anti-English beliefs are strongly linked to Scottish national identity, and many media commentators proclaim that Scottish nationalism is 'Anglophobic' (Adams, 2014; Massie, 2015; the Garrel 2017). There are even some who compare the Scottish experience with England to colonialism (Connel, 2004). The SNP, however, are not explicitly anti-English in their policies or speeches. Instead, their creation of difference is a more subtle 'othering' which is promoted through their discourse as well as their social policies, notably education. Within this, the focus is on the state of England, and not its people, as having too much control over Scotland resulting in the national interest of Scotland and the Scottish people being neglected (McCrone, 2001). The SNP use their devolved powers related to education and health to distinguish Scotland from England in policy. For example, this can be seen in the free education and free prescriptions Scotland provides (Arnott and Ozga, 2010). This helps to create an 'imagined community' of the future, in which Scotland is not affected by Westminster rule (ibid). The focus on England is based on historical relations, as well as the location of centralised power in the UK. Little attention is paid to Northern Ireland and Wales, despite Scotland's historical relationships with them, and independence affecting these relations.

Essential to ontological security theory is that identity is not fixed or natural but is constantly being formed through interactions and being in the world (Berenksetter, 2012). This also means that political leaders are capable of (re)formulating the narrative and identity of the state over time (Steele, 2008). This essay aims to focus on the narrative formulated by the SNP through education curriculums, and the use of history to provide a sense of Self for Scotland and a justification for future independence from England.

Education

Ontological security in International Relations recognises that states can be both providers of ontological security for their citizens, as well as searching for their own ontological security (Zarakol, 2017). The field of education is an interesting realm of analysis as education is essential in constructing pupils' identities, but through this also constructs the autobiographical narrative of the state through spreading the 'idea' of the nation in past, present, and future (Harrison, 1997). Korostelina (2008) has shown that school curriculums are an important element of creating a national identity, and a way of interpreting overall national policy. Hence the curriculum in Scotland today can illuminate the wider aims of the SNP in creating a national identity in Scotland, and one that is culturally, politically, and crucially historically oppositional to the rest of the UK.

The Scottish SNP Government oversaw the development of education policy through the 'Smarter Scotland' strategy and furthering the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence (Education Scotland, 2020a). This increased focus on Scotland as a nation, through education on Scottish culture, traditions, and history. At one point, the SNP's attempt to introduce Scottish studies – in particular, Scottish history – was described as 'brainwashing' by a Scottish Labour MSP (BBC, 2011). Thus, the Scottish emphasis was seen as a tool of nationalism by other Scottish politicians. While this has been dismissed by the SNP (ibid), this correlates with the increased support for independence amongst young people in Scotland, especially stark when contrasted with the support from older adults. As of 2016, 72% of 18-24 year olds supported independence, compared to just 26% of those aged 65 and over (ScotCen, 2017). While the increased support could be due to experiences of devolution, it is interesting to note that all those in the 18-24 category were in education at the time of the implementation of the SNP's policies.

There are two distinct themes relating to Scotland's autobiographical narrative that I find within the education curriculum. First, there is the distinction of Scottish as unique – not simply a part of Britain, but as an independent country with its own history and narrative. The other theme is the otherness of England – this is more subtle and comes implicitly from the content of the courses.

Wide Curriculum

Due to the nature of education, with multiple subjects and limited time, there is often little opportunity to impose a

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'nationalist' curriculum (Phillips, 1998). However, since 2007 the SNP governments have encouraged a focus on Scotland through the introduction of Scottish themes across all topics and ages, including learning Scottish music, Scottish literature, and in some places, the 'Scottish language'- Gaelic (Scottish Government, 2008; Education Scotland, 2020b). This is in stark contrast to the UK-focused curriculum that preceded it (Harrison, 2002). Instead, in the new curriculum pupils are asked to put themselves in the context of a Scottish citizen. This is essential for creating an individual identity as a Scottish citizen, but also for a wider understanding of Scotland as a nation and an imagined community (Anderson, 1991).

In the first three stages of learning (ages 5-14) the curriculum aims to encourage learning "across a broad curriculum, covering science, languages, mathematics, social studies (including Scottish history)" (Scottish Government, 2008, p20). Scottish history is particularly emphasised in this statement, showing that it is a key element of learning. This emphasis on the Scottish context is distinct from that of any other nationality – including British. Indeed, throughout the curriculum's social studies benchmarks, in the subject of history, the word 'Britain' is not mentioned until the fourth level of social studies (Education Scotland, 2017). The fourth level is in S4-S6, the last three years of education, and one in which subjects are chosen and social sciences are not compulsory, and this is the time at which students are asked to be aware of themselves as 'a British, European, or global citizen' (ibid, p18). The focus on Scottish-ness comes in my experience from varying cultural activities, such as 'creating your own clan' at a young age, or the encouragement of the use of Scottish dialect in writing.

As a result of teaching Scottish-focused education, children can become associated with the history of the Scottish nation, and understand themselves as part of it (Korostelina, 2008). This can be part of what Law and Mooney (2012) have described as 'dense Scottishness' in which people are attached to the idea of Scotland as their home not through allegiance to institutions, but rather through interaction with others and awareness of shared cultures and histories. Through integrating 'Scottishness' across all areas, pupils feel part of a nation as their identity. Individuals identifying with the nation and its ability to provide ontological security about the past, present and future assists in the political process of creating the state itself. This does not replace other identities – such religious or community identities – but is a shared identity of all who study. This is boosted by the encouragement of civic nationalism within Scotland, rather than one based on ethnicity (Hussain and Miller, 2005).

National 5 Exams

The Scottish curriculum allows choice for teachers over the content of primary education, so pupils can learn anything from Vikings, Romans in Scotland, and the Jacobites – all located within the context of Scotland (Education Scotland, 2020a). This makes it hard to analyse on anything other than an individual basis. To see a more unified content, it is useful to look at the topics set in the national exams, as it gives an insight into the way in which history is taught and the perspective it encourages. The National 5 exam course was introduced in 2014 by the SQA and is taken when pupils are 14-16 (BBC, 2014). Within the National 5 History Curriculum, there are three different areas on which students are assessed, and within them, there is a choice of five topics (for teachers to decide) each. Since the introduction of National 5's in 2014, there are three areas of study assessed: Scottish, British, and Rest of World. This division is already showing that there is a clear separation of being Scottish and British, emphasising these as separate identities, as well as creating a narrative of difference.

The content of these topics illuminates the distinction of Scottishness, as well as the historical division between Scotland and England. Of the five topics which are part of the Scottish Context, three are based on historical divisions with England: The Wars of Independence (1286-1328); Mary Queen of Scots and the Reformation (1542-1587); The Treaty of Union (1680-1715). These are all distinct periods of history but have in common a narrative of English domination of Scotland. This can be further seen by the phrasing of questions within this paper to focus on 'tensions between Scotland and England' or 'worsening relations between Scotland and England'. Furthermore, when speaking of the Union, a source claims 'that the Union would lead to the end of Scotland's identity as an independent nation' (SQA, 2019a, p7-9). These phrasings show that the division is not coincidental. There is an explicit focus on the divisions and tension between the two nations, as well as the independence (literal or otherwise) of Scotland. This reinforces historical divisions and a narrative of division. This can also be seen in the British Context with the topic: 'War of the Three Kingdoms, 1603-1651'. Here the content is focused on the *Scottish*

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rebellion against the English King Charles I, despite the fact that the *English* also rebelled (ibid p10). In addition, the title is a significant departure from a period which is commonly referred to as the English or British Civil War (Scott, 2004).

This does not explicitly state that Scotland is not aligned with England. However, it creates a narrative that Scotland is and always has been 'different' from England. Furthermore, in two of these contexts England eventually 'won' their way against Scotland- which places Scotland as an 'underdog' within the context of the union. The construction of an autobiography is not just about the past, it is also about how the past relates to the present and the future (Berenskoetter, 2014). This is important as Steele (2008) has stated that the past can be used to create the basis for action. If Scotland is placed historically against England, this impacts how relationships with the English relations are viewed by pupils in the current context. When this narrative is enlivened by the SNP demonstrating that the past ten years have been of an English Tory government that Scotland didn't vote for, it feeds into a wider narrative of Scotland and England being distinct entities, and of England forcing itself onto Scotland. This further feeds into a 'utopian vision' of a Scotland independent from English rule and imposition, achieved through independence. This is supported by polls which suggest that the young population has a hopeful view for Scotland's future: almost 50% of 18-24 year olds think that 'Scotland's best years are still in the future'; and 60% believe it is 'better than most other countries' (Curtice, 2018).

The only one of these three topics in which England did not 'succeed' is the story of the Wars of Independence. This is the founding story (myth) of the Scottish nation (Edensor, 1997), and is an essential point in the creation of a national autobiography towards independence. This story is often highly romanticised and used to promote the historical nature of the Scottish independence movement (Harrison, 1997). While it is important to learn this history, it is important to recall that it occurred 800 years ago (before the concept of an independent nation-state even existed). However, it remains a highly emotive story which engages a sense of national pride (Edensor, 1997).

To assess how much of an impact this new curriculum has, it is useful to look at the previous curriculum. In the 1990s, pre-devolution, the broad general education (8-14 years) did not include the subject 'history', only a subsection of environmental studies entitled 'understanding people of the past' and did not contain any specific curriculum of learning (Phillips et al, 1999). Furthermore, in the history qualification (Standard Grade, equivalent to National 5's) that was available to Scottish students from 1986, the history covered was limited to selected time periods which all occurred after the 1707 union "and required Scottish experiences to be placed in a broader British context" (ibid, p163). This continued in the introduction of the Intermediate 2's, the exam in place in Scotland before National Fives, in which the history course was divided into two parts: Part A; Scottish and British contexts, and Part B; European and World Contexts (SQA, 2015). In both examples, there was so much conflation of Scottish and British identity that there was little academic knowledge of a distinct Scottish history within the general population (Phillips et al, 1998). The introduction of Scottish-focused subjects, particularly history, has thus been a major change in Scottish education as the Scottish and British contexts have been divorced.

In addition, a key part of creating a narrative is not only the inclusion of certain topics but also the exclusion of them (Steele, 2005). It can be seen in the current curriculum, particularly in contrast to the previous versions, that there is little focus on after the 1707 Union and the positive relationships Scotland has with the rest of the UK. Only in the topics 'changing Britain' and 'the slave trade' is Scotland seen as part of the wider Union. This is also linked to the fact that identities and narratives are always changing – the previous narrative was strongly focused on the positive union between countries.

It is also useful to contrast the Scottish history education with that of other countries within the UK. Within England, there is a focus on 'British contexts' alongside World Context, with a British depth study focusing on a particular period and British thematic studies which focus on power, health and migration (AQA, 2019). However, the focus on the British often conflates to English contexts – something that has been observed in the curriculum from the 1970s (Phillips, 1998). This can be seen in the recent specification for GCSE History, in which the 'British Depth Study' gives four options – Norman England, Medieval England, Elizabethan England, Restoration England (AQA, 2019). Thus, there is an issue of English centric teaching within the curriculum. In the Northern Ireland GCSE, the curriculum is like that of the Intermediate 2 in Scotland with two mandatory sections: one; Wider World and Britain and, two;

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Northern Ireland (CCEA, 2017). While Northern Ireland is seen as separate to Britain, they are still discussed in the same context with the focus remaining on the changing relationship in the 20th century. In Wales, the GCSE 'in-depth study' is on twentieth Century Wales and England, with the two countries viewed as similar and part of the same history (WJEC, 2019). In England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, British identity is linked to the individual country. However, this does not occur in the Scottish course, in which Scottish and British contexts are separate. This shows that Scotland does not align itself with Britain. Furthermore, it has separated from the norm across UK education curriculum of linking union state identities to the British context with the introduction of the new exams. As mentioned above, Scottish pupils are not being told to think of Britain until they are at least 14, and at this point, they are not told to think of it as an integral part of Scottish identity, encouraging the perception of Scotland as an independent country.

Alternative sources of cultural history and memory

This essay focuses on history as part of the identity construction of pupils and the narrative of the state. However, this role is not limited to history and can be seen in the teaching of culture, such as the emphasis on Scottish studies throughout music, arts, and literature. This is implicit but serves to place Scotland, and not the UK, as the culture and country of reference for pupils. However, the media and popular culture can also be linked to the history taught at schools. For example, a popular topic of the Scottish Wars of Independence can be linked to the Hollywood film *Braveheart* (1995). Although it is highly historically inaccurate, it is not uncommon for teachers to show *Braveheart* to classes as an 'end of term' activity. This is not limited to *Braveheart* – the media is known for making romanticizing and dramatising Scotland's past as can be seen from *Rob Roy* (1995) and *Mary Queen of Scots* (2018), as well as the "Kailyard stories" from Scotland itself (Edensor, 1997). These re-enact the myths that perpetuate Scottish nationalism, such as the romanticism of the pre-Union era and the clan-system (the destruction of which was perpetuated by Scottish people themselves). These cultural references are important for young people, as they shape associations (Harrison, 1997). While they may not be providing the full picture of history, it contributes towards a positive view of Scottish history, as well as a perception of its coherence throughout centuries as an independent state.

While the role of education is important, it is also important to recognise that each individual has their own contributing factors to national identity such as local community and family networks (Bell, 2003). Thus, there are limits to the extent that education policy can impact all pupils, and Scottish-ness can be reinforced or reduced depending on external contexts.

Conclusion

To conclude, an examination of the education curriculum in Scotland can highlight how SNP governments have shaped the autobiographical narrative of Scotland, as well as the identity of its citizens. A focus on Scotland throughout the wide curriculum, especially history, makes Scotland the dominant country of reference, not the wider UK. An analysis of the content of the National 5 shows that the content not only distinguishes Scotland from the rest of the UK but also focuses on points of conflict with England. This account is by no means exhaustive of the sources of a Scottish national and individual identity. There are multiple factors which affect national and self-identity, including political speeches and language, as well as community-based factors which affect how people identify. However, it has been useful to highlight how the SNP in government has attempted to use Scotland's devolved powers to influence the identities of pupils across Scotland. This creates a narrative of an independent Scotland, thus crafting a sense of continuity and ontological security for Scotland and its citizens.

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