Scotland’s Quarrel Is With Globalization, Not the UK

Scotland rejected declaring independence from the United Kingdom, 55 to 45 percent. Businesses, investors and political leaders are relieved about some certainty moving forward. Many analysts credit the outcome’s wide margin to a last-minute, passionate appeal from former Prime Minister Gordon Brown. Those who fear globalization may “seek to insulate themselves against what appears like an unstoppable juggernaut of economic disruption and social dislocation,” he wrote in an essay based on his speech. “But because change seems to threaten to sweep aside long-established customs, values and ways of life, political nationalism becomes a credible vehicle for their response.” Leaders cannot be slow in responding to citizen concerns. Any community can instigate new purposes and reforms, preserve cultural identity and institutions, while controlling and benefiting from cross-border cooperation. In enticing Scots to stick with the union, many promises were made. Interdependence, the ability to cooperate, marks progress. The referendum fueled a civil engagement in Scotland that could be a model for citizens in Europe and the world. – YaleGlobal

Promises were made to Scotland on autonomy; strong civil engagement and cooperation could be a model for citizens elsewhere in Europe and the world
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EDINBURGH, Scotland – The referendum in Scotland has sent shockwaves through the political system. With talk of the possible end of the United Kingdom in prospect, commentators are asking what is happening to the politics of advanced industrial states.

And across Europe we are having to confront a new, basic truth. While the rise of xenophobic, anti-immigration parties was the most publicized feature of the recent European elections, the reappearance of well-supported, secessionist movements now raises an existential question: not whether the European Union can achieve greater unity but whether the 28 states of the European Union can survive intact.

Globalization comes down, in practical terms, to the shift from the national sourcing of goods and services to their global sourcing, and from a reliance on national flows of capital to global flows, and it is matched by our ability to communicate easily and instantaneously beyond old borders and around the world.

And secessionist groups may be on the rise not in spite of these global forces -- but because of them. In the years of the Industrial Revolution, people turned to political nationalism to cushion their regions against the uneven, inequitable patterns of growth. Now, people who see themselves as victims of change are turning back to -- and organizing their politics around -- old loyalties and traditional identities. They seek to insulate themselves against what appears like an unstoppable juggernaut of economic disruption and social dislocation. But because change seem to threatens to sweep aside long-established customs, values and ways of life, political nationalism becomes a credible vehicle for their response.

An independent Scotland is today seen by many as the potential “poster boy” for what is thought to be the adaptability, innovative capacity and maneuverability of small independent states and for the belief that small independent states claiming an egalitarian philosophy can achieve social justice in a way that grows more difficult in complex, slow-to-change larger units.

But while commentators look to Scotland as a northern light for a new wave of social democracy and see the September referendum as a point at which history will turn in favor of small independent nation-states, could it not yet become a moment of destiny for another reason? Could the rejection of separation, if that happens today, demonstrate that in this new global era, nations can combine strong and vibrant identities with a willingness to engage in even deeper cooperation?

In short, could the referendum result become a turning point in favor of a connected world that is coming to recognize and act upon its interdependence?

Scotland’s union with England was only ever a partial union, with Scotland’s religious, educational, legal and civic institutions preserved as distinctively Scottish and generally autonomous and free from London control.

So why now? What’s new is the impact of global change upon an already strong Scottish identity.
Since the 1960s, Scotland has moved from being an economy dominated by manufacturing and mining to one where the Scottish manufacturing sector is even smaller than Northern Ireland. Scotland has thus felt itself to be at the sharp end of a bewildering, alienating and seemingly uncontrollable set of global changes. While professional employment has multiplied, manual jobs now seem less skilled, of inferior status and worse paid than before.

Yet as the industrial economy has gone into rapid decline, so, too, have the civic institutions that for centuries expressed and carried Scots identity but which now seem incapable of providing answers amidst new anxieties and insecurities. In 1951, nearly 60 percent of Scots -- two million men and women out of an adult population of 3.5 million -- were members of a Presbyterian or Roman Catholic church. Today, only around 5 percent of Scottish children now go to Sunday school. While declining membership and attendance is a worldwide trend, it is the speed and scale of its impact on what was described even in the 1950s as the most religious Scotland that has been so traumatic. Indeed the weakening of attachments to almost all of our traditional Scottish institutions -- from our municipal authorities to our once-dominant banks, including even our once world-renowned football clubs that managed to balance a pro-Scottish cultural nationalism with a pro-British political unionism -- has left a vacuum for someone to fill. People feel no less Scottish and, indeed, need vehicles by which to express this, so into the void has come a resurgent political nationalism that now claims to be the premier institution standing for Scotland.

But Britain has itself undergone its own post-colonial crisis of identity. Having lost its empire, military dominance and economic pre-eminence, people in Scotland are asking what Britain is for -- and what is its direction, purpose and rationale in 2014?

But none of these changes -- all the product of the new waves of globalization -- should make Scottish independence inevitable. For Scotland's economic quarrel is not with England but with globalization itself. A moment's analysis of Scottish nationalist policies show that their tax cutting agenda would make no impact on income or wealth inequality, almost certainly making it worse.

And it is not English colonization that has caused the disarray of our civic institutions. Indeed it is Scots alone who can repair and modernize them. And while Scots, too, doubt what Britain is for, that does not make them anti-British. Instead, they want British leaders to define the purpose of Britain in the same way that America, France and, more recently, South Africa have done.

Britain has a basis for unity that is not to be found in ethnicity and it is unique in the modern world -- even if too often taken for granted.

Indeed the U.K.-wide welfare state we created across four nations -- with its resources allocated on the basis of need not nationality -- offers itself as a beacon for other countries trying to find ways of living together successfully side by side.

Resources are transferred across four nations in a way that no other group of nations has yet agreed. By pooling and sharing our resources, we lift between 55 percent and 60 percent of Scots, Welsh, English and Northern Irish poor out of their poverty.

This Union for social justice, a social market where four nations share not just the civil and political rights of citizenship but also the social and economic rights of citizenship, is unparalleled anywhere in the world. It is the Union that Europe aspires to and cannot achieve.

In fact, by leading the way through abolishing its own poor law and consciously opting to share its resources with England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Scotland's 20th century leaders met and mastered the problem of maintaining its cultural identity and preserving national institutions, while at the same time benefiting from cooperation across frontiers. As a result, four distinctive nations share a U.K.-wide welfare state, a U.K.-wide pensions system, a U.K.-wide national health service free to all and U.K.-wide minimum standards for worker protection, including a U.K. minimum wage. In this way in the era of nation states, we struck a balance between the survival of distinctive civic institutions and engagement with a multinational state.

But, of course, the solutions of the 20th century are already proving inadequate to the challenges of the 21st -- and the world has moved on. Now in an era of global and not national decision making, we are being forced by events to define a new relationship between proud nations and a globalizing world -- and the lessons Scotland and Britain are learning will be of value to every set of nations around the world.

It is precisely because we are faced with the uncertainties and insecurities of globalization that, strong as their sense of national identity is, Scottish people say they do not want to lose the benefits of pooling and sharing risk and resources across the U.K.

Opinion polls suggest that even more popular than a common economic market or a common defense union is the U.K.'s union for social justice. The polls also suggest a common bond of solidarity between Scots, English, Welsh and Northern Irish who, by overwhelming majorities, support a health service free at the point of need, generous provision for pensioners and the same corporation tax system to distribute funds equitably across the U.K. There is a remarkable degree of support for what I call a "pooling and sharing union."

And it is the sharing of resources, and thus a blow to progressives everywhere, that would be the first casualty of a Yes vote in the September referendum -- particularly so since the system of pooling and sharing risks, rewards and resources across nations offers us a model for the rest of the world.
The 20th century challenge was for Scotland to maintain its cultural identity while at the same time cooperating with the four nations of the U.K.. Now the challenge is even greater: to uphold cultural traditions and national identities in a world where there are no such things as nation-only solutions to climate change, financial instability and even global growth and global poverty, and where states have to share power with wider regional and global organizations -- and thus to strike a balance between preserving national identities and engaging with Europe and the wider world. By answering those who claim that independence can make a difference with policies that show interdependence can make the difference and is thus a bigger idea, we can show the way forward is to think big and not small.

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