

The Scottish Diaspora

Eds. Tanja Bueltmann, Andrew Hinson and Graeme Morton. pp. vi + 298.

ISBN: 98-0-7486-4892-4

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013. £ 24.99 (paperback)

Echoing previous work on the ‘Scots abroad’ by Marjory Harper, Tom Devine, John MacKenzie, Angela McCarthy and others—as well as prior scholarship by the authors themselves—*The Scottish Diaspora*, by Tanja Bueltmann, Andrew Hinson and Graeme Morton, provides a broad survey of Scottish migration and Scottish influence around the globe in the period c.1700-1945. It begins with two historiographical and theoretical chapters in which the book’s approach to ‘diaspora’ as a concept rather than a category is mapped out. The book suggests that diaspora constitutes ‘a set of inter-related actions’ (p.29). As active agents, many migrants constructed ethnic boundaries to distinguish themselves from others and ‘oriented’ themselves towards Scotland, regarded by many ex-patriots and descendants of Scots as a ‘homeland’. The rest of the book is divided into two six-part sections. The first deals with themes concerning diaspora—migration trends; the emigrant experience; encounters with indigenous peoples; associational culture; and the phenomenon of return migration—while the second constitutes geographic case studies of various regions—the British and Irish Isles, North America, Africa, Asia and the Antipodes.

The book is fresh in some important respects. The focus on women’s and children’s perspectives on the emigration experience and the influence of indigenous encounters on the domestic Scottish nation is most welcome. It is unusual too to see Scottish migration within Britain and Ireland, Scottish migration overseas and return migration studied side by side. By bringing these three phenomena together—and by discussing regions that lay outside the British Empire—the book reinforces the idea of global mobility and diasporic connection.

But much that is documented in this book has been said already. Indeed, many of the chapters—particularly in the ‘Geographies’ section—harvest data from, and provide syntheses of, previously published works. There are few new insights from original research. The book misses an opportunity to engage with scholarship on the semiotics of place in colonial landscapes and urban spaces and their centrality to two of the diasporic actions outlined in the book’s introductory chapters: orientation towards a homeland and ethnic boundary maintenance.¹ Critical engagement with the spatial turn would have strengthened the important point made on p. 79, that environmental factors determined diasporic behaviour. At some points reference to wider British experiences—or comparisons with other diasporas—would have helped to contextualise and explain the distinctiveness of the Scottish migrant experience. Did Scots engage with Americana more fully than did other Britons? If so, why? Why did English and Welsh and Irish also leave Britain and Ireland in their droves? Did unfavourable conditions in these regions, as well as opportunities overseas, prompt these migrants to leave? If so, does this explanation answer the question posed on p. 12: why did not more Scots settle within Britain and Ireland instead of venturing abroad? What is the connection, moreover, of ‘Scottishness’ to ‘Britishness’? Does the intrinsic Britishness of the

¹ L. Proudfoot and D. Hall, *Imperial Spaces: Placing the Irish and Scots in colonial Australia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

Scottish military in southern Africa, described on p. 214, complicate the notion of a distinctive Scottish diaspora?

The idea at the heart of the book is an important one—that diaspora was an active process, not a category associated with victimhood. The engagement with this theoretical concept in chapter two is the book's key contribution to Scottish scholarship and diaspora scholarship more generally. It is regrettable, then, that the main texts of the various chapters in sections one and two do not do more to relate the (by now familiar) descriptions of Scottish contributions abroad to the book's theoretical framework. What, for example, does John Witherspoon's contribution to the American Declaration of Independence have to do with ethnic boundary maintenance? More signalling of the book's key arguments on diasporic actions would have reinforced the book's originality.

Undergraduates and newcomers to the topic, to whom the book is pitched, will surely find this volume useful. *The Scottish Diaspora* is not a groundbreaking book but it does constitute a comprehensive and perceptive introductory textbook to the subject of Scottish migration, the concept of diaspora and the impact of Scottish people around the world.

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