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Migration and diaspora in European history prior to 1650:
The Scottish and Irish cases in context

Students and researchers encountering migration and emigration studies for the first time, are confronted with a daunting range of publications. Jan and Leo Lucassen have compared the situation to a forbidding landscape „full of canyons and fast flowing rivers", which divide demographers, economists, political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, theorists of culture and historians from one another (Lucassen and Lucassen, 1999, 10). Although leading writers seem to agree with Everett S. Lee's definition of migration as „a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence", with respect to more sustained „talking across disciplines" the results have been limited (Moch, 1992, 18; Brettell and Hollifield, 2000). The situation can be complex even within specific departments and institutes. Historians, for example, whose academic subject was founded in order to buttress the idea of the geographically-fixed nation-state, have pondered the sociologist Charles Tilly's statement that „the history of European migration is the history of social life" besides Klaus Bade's more recent assertion that „migrations are as much a part of the human condition as birth, reproduction, sickness and death" (Bade, 2003, 1). Yet, in developing models of their own, they have disagreed as regards periodisation and geography. Most recently, Dirk Hoerder has argued for a „world systems" approach instead of what he perceives as a fixation with the industrial period, and thus with western Europe and the Atlantic (Hoerder, 2002).

With respect to Britain and Ireland, surviving evidence from the pre-census age suggests that short-range and temporary migrations were a common feature of life, as was, increasingly, emigration. The early attempts at plantation in Ireland provide the most obvious evidence of this, although England too, attracted immigrants from Wales, Scotland and Ireland: for instance, deserted wives, unmarried (and sometimes pregnant) women, pedlars, farm and domestic servants, coalminers, shipyard workers, scholars, and, in London, financiers and courtiers (Whyte, 2000). But, more is known about the Dutch, Flemings, Walloons, French Huguenots, Palatinate Germans, Swiss and Rhinelanders in the English capital (and in English provincial

cities) than about the Welsh, Scots and Irish (Games, 20-22, 36; Pettegree, 1986). Thus it is not surprising that the study of those British and Irish people who left for more distant locations has usually involved extensive international archival research. Although figures for the pre-1600 period have remained impossible to estimate, it has been concluded recently that the early seventeenth century witnessed extraordinarily high levels of Scottish and Irish overseas emigration in particular, most of it in an easterly direction. Somewhere between 60-80,000 Scots, from a population of less than one million, went to Europe (excluding England, Wales and Ireland) between 1600-1650 (Murdoch, 2001, 19-20). Ireland may have lost around 30,000 people to the same locations in the same period (Cullen, 1994).

Of course, numbers do not reveal everything of importance in migration history. The historian Keith Brown has criticized the „Scotland in Europe tactic", a tendency, as he sees it, for scholars of Scottish migration in the immediate post-Reformation period, to present glamourised pictures of the country's links with particular European powers, ignoring the sometimes-enforced movement southwards to England and westwards in the service of the nascent British empire (Brown, 1999, 243). From one perspective, Brown's criticism misses the point, however, in that it focuses only on those studies that assume the need for spatial fixity in the creation and maintenance of transnational identities. James Clifford's work on „travelling cultures", besides a variety of other publications on „diaspora", suggest otherwise. A precise definition of the latter term remains difficult, it being a Greek word meaning „dispersal", subsequently associated with the Jewish people in Babylon, and later with the Armenian expatriate community. As the editors of the journal *Diaspora*, founded in 1991, recognised, by the late twentieth century none of these „traditional diasporas" could be considered a definitive model. Instead, as Clifford has argued, they should „be taken as non-normative starting points for a discourse that is travelling in new global conditions" (Clifford, 1994, 305). Robin Cohen has responded to this, suggesting that the definition of „diaspora" may have widened too far. According to Cohen, an understanding of the concept should continue to account both at one extreme, for the possibility of „a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism", and, at the other, for a sometimes „troubled, uncomfortable relationship" with those same societies (Cohen, 1997, ix, 203). Here, one might contrast „the Italians outside Italy" covered recently by Donna R. Gabaccia, with the „more sinister and brutal meaning" attached to diaspora in the Jewish, African, Palestinian and Armenian cases (Gabbacia, 2000).

How does this relate to pre-1650 Scottish and Irish migration? As has been mentioned, there are a number of cases where a longstanding European connection was celebrated, adapted, or imagined by writers at the time and has been encouraged on occasion in historical works since, some of these of outstanding quality. Consequently, the Franco-Scottish "auld alliance" of 1295-1560 occupies a greater space in collective memory than the country's links with Poland-Lithuania, the Low Countries or Scandinavia (Murdoch, 2006, 139). With respect to Ireland, one sees a similar pattern, in the occasional use of the term „diaspora" as a description embracing the émigrés within Europe, yet with most older works actually outlining a mutually beneficial, often ancient tradition of contacts with a particular power, usually France, Spain or Austria (O'Connor, 2001, 17; O'Connor, 2003, 21; Morales, 2006, 240-243; Leifer and Segarra, 2002). But, it must be added that a less eulogistic historiography has also emerged. The most successful of these latter kinds of studies have, at the sub-national level, elucidated material relating to residential enclaves and places of worship, to xenophobia and to return migration (Murdoch, 2005; Kowalski, 2006; Catterall, 2002; Riis, 1988; O'Scea, 2001; Fannin, 2003; Acedos, 2002; Henry, 1992; Lyons, 2003).

Jan and Leo Lucassen have warned scholars against being misled by primary sources which contrast „subsistence" migrants with travellers pursuing „betterment" in a socially acceptable manner (Lucassen and Lucassen, 1999, 19). However, the distinction was widely made by late medieval and early modern town and provincial authorities. Although the context for understanding the late medieval French proverb which stated that „Rats, lice and Scotsmen: you find them the whole world over", is not immediately apparent, Nina Østby Pedersen has recorded a case from 1587 when a German priest in Bergen compared a visiting group from Scotland's Northern Isles to an influx of the plague-bearing creatures. Scots of higher social standing could be the focus of opposition in the Norwegian city too, albeit again perhaps not so much in the eyes of the native population. Pedersen covered the case of the wife of a Scottish burgess, whose house was broken into by Hanseatic merchants in 1523, this comprising one part of a series of bullying tactics, based on a perception that the Scots had been offered conditions to trade that were too favourable and that they indulged in activities inappropriate for guild members (Pedersen, 2006, 137-8, 147). Fischer found evidence from Silesia, Prussia and Poland, of the term „*der Schotte*" or „*Szkot*" taking on a variety of meanings and associations. In 1558, when the duke of Pomerania ordered the „vagabond Scots" in his territories not to roam, „because they

are the ruin of our own poor subjects", it led to protests from members of local Scottish Calvinist brotherhoods, wishing to disassociate themselves from the targeted group (Fischer, 1902, 31, 36-37, 241-242). Soldiers were another group who could be the focus of antipathy. In Norway, in 1612, three hundred Scots were cut down on the march by local peasants at Gudbrandsdalen, while in northern Germany during the Thirty Years' War, a negative image, albeit with less-horrific consequences, was built around the taste for alcohol of locally-based Scottish recruits serving in the occupying Swedish army (Ruffer and Zickermann, 2001, 280, 287-9). Thus, the controversial figure of „*der Schotte*" should be seen as being synonymous with a petty trader in parts of Europe, rather than being necessarily a description of a person's national provenance, even if, in the guise of soldiers too, Scots were occasionally viewed negatively.

Emigrants from Ireland also sometimes experienced xenophobia while on the continent, although there seems to be no evidence of the term „Irish" becoming associated with a social group rather than being simply a description of ethnicity. Gráinne Henry has assessed their experiences in the Spanish-controlled southern Netherlands from the 1580s down to 1621. As with the poorer Scots in Bergen, authorities there feared that newly-arrived „swordsmen", „masterless men" or petty traders would bring plague and social disorder, and thus attempted to prevent them from entering walled towns. Therein presumably lies part of the explanation for the statement of the commander of the Army of Flanders, in 1586, that he wanted the „wild Irish" brought before him so that they might be „killed like dogs", as well as to Hugo Grotius's reference to the Irish soldiers in garrison at Deventer that same year as being „strangers both to humanity and civility" (Henry, 1992, 46-48, 91). Paralleling the fate of the Scots at Gudbrandsdalen, on at least one occasion, in 1589, Netherlandish peasants massacred Irish soldiers. Further examples of anti-Irish persecution can be found in the Basque country where, much later in the seventeenth- and during the eighteenth-century, a community of Irish craftsmen and tanners, known locally as „*chiguiris*", were threatened with robbery and murder, and compared to the gypsy and Jewish populations, both on the basis of their supposed „impurity" of blood, and more mundanely, on their having decimated the local woodlands for their trade (Acedos, 2002, 59-60). Evidence from France suggests that anti-Irish feeling could well up there too. In Brittany, the *parlement* issued an edict in 1598, directed against all „Egyptians", „*bohemiens*", „vagrants", „vagabonds", „beggars" and „base people". Five years later, they compiled a report on the „wandering Irish" who had settled in their cities, suburbs and woods,

and of those mariners who had taken them. Within two years of that, they had ordered the Irish to leave Morlaix, while conditions in places such as Angers, Nantes, Rouen, Bordeaux and even Paris and Lyon, seem to have been equally inhospitable (Lyons, 2003, 177-180). Meanwhile, in Spain, it was not just the economic migrants and part-time soldiers amongst this „new race and generation of gypsies", who could be the focus of opposition: at the Madrid court, the Irish came to be considered, by the end of the sixteenth century, as a „troublesome, fissiparous pressure group" (Morales, 2006, 270).

An approach which might yet enhance our understanding of emigrants in pre-1650 Europe would be to study them in greater context. Ohlmeyer has argued that the world of Scottish and Irish (and presumably also English and Welsh) expatriates in Europe, would be better viewed within „a more comparative and integrated framework", while Thomas O'Connor, Sølvi Sogner, and Lex Heerma van Voss have asserted that „parallels, symbioses and analogies now jostle for attention with inherited, hermetic certitudes" for those working on the theme (Ohlmeyer, 2006, 459; O'Connor, Sogner and Voss, 2006, 378). It is no accident that they have come to these conclusions. One of the stated motivations of J.G.A. Pocock, a pioneer of the „New British and Irish Histories" since the early 1970s, has been to promote a less anglocentric exploration of historical relations between the British and Irish peoples, not only within the islands but in an „expanding zone of cultural conflict and creation" (Pocock, 1975, 620).

Nevertheless, prior to 1650, many Europeans lived in environments that were as ethnically complex as those in which, for example, *Pakeha* and *Maori* would later interact in New Zealand. Besides all those who suffered due to being labelled as „vagrants", the recruitment of migrants for harvesting, fishing, for military or domestic service, the demands of trade, the desire for pilgrimage and the effects of „confessional migration" borne of religious persecution following the Reformation, suggest that semi-permanent changes of residence were commonplace. Seventeenth century Amsterdam's immigrant population, included, for example, southern Netherlanders, Germans, French Huguenots, Armenians, Bohemians, Danes, Norwegians, Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews, besides the Scots and the English. The Spanish, Portuguese, Poles, and, to a lesser extent, the Swedes, Danes and French, attracted foreigners to their port towns too, migrants and emigrants who sometimes braved widespread xenophobia in order to find their place in these similarly multi-ethnic communities (Sánchez-Albornoz, 1994; Lucassen, 1994). Finally, the continuing Spanish fixation with „purity of blood", the desperate strategies for

survival enforced on the native Portuguese, and the foundation of the New Netherlands by the Dutch, are all important considerations in relation to the respective imperial projects of these three powers. However, they should not blind us to the fact that the development of the societies they formed overseas might be considered, to an even greater extent than the early British one, as involving „a kaleidoscopic movement of people, goods, and ideas" (Armitage and Braddick, 2002).

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