

Robert C. Thomsen. *Nationalism in Stateless Nations: Images of Self and Other in Scotland and Newfoundland.*

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REVIEWS

Robert C. Thomsen. *Nationalism in Stateless Nations: Images of Self and Other in Scotland and Newfoundland*. Edinburgh: John Donald, 2010.

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If you were to compare Newfoundland and Labrador to its most similar province, state, or country, which would you choose? This question garnered some attention in 2005 when the CBC's *The Passionate Eye* aired a documentary titled "Hard Rock and Water" featuring author Lisa Moore, which compared Iceland and Newfoundland. Despite some problems with the comparison, the similarities that Moore observed were real and numerous. The none-too-subtle insinuation in "Hard Rock and Water": if Iceland can be independent, why can't Newfoundland? Since then, romantic comparisons have been made with Ireland, Norway, and various other oases of North Atlantic self-rule.

In *Nationalism in Stateless Nations*, Robert C. Thomsen, a lecturer at Aalborg University in Denmark, puts this question to the test by comparing the emergence of nationalism in Newfoundland and Scotland. This is an academic though reasonably accessible book that does the important job of situating modern Newfoundland in a global-comparative setting. Very few works deal as specifically, thematically, and comparatively with Newfoundland, let alone Newfoundland nationalism. Nationalism in Newfoundland history is a phenomenon that has been frequently identified but rarely defined.

Thomsen's arguments for the Newfoundland-Scotland comparison are intriguing though not without problems. Perhaps the most important similarity is that both are among the few societies in the world to have willingly given up parliamentary government and independence. The Scots Parliament voted itself out of existence in 1706 by passing the Act of Union. Newfoundland's legislature did the same in 1933. Both societies ultimately became constituent

parts of their larger neighbours, Scotland with Britain in 1707, and Newfoundland with Canada in 1949. The alleged nationalism we see in Newfoundland and Scotland is directly linked to this common history of being small, peripheral, defiant (though perhaps also defeated) peoples or nations being swallowed up by a more powerful “other.”

Thomsen is cognizant of the delicacy around labelling Newfoundland as a “nation” that evinces “nationalism.” Occasionally, however, the inconsistencies in his definitions outweigh well-made points. He argues, “We should not deny Newfoundland its recent history of nationalism and national identity” (40), though later he states that “It is not the purpose to establish here whether Newfoundland is a ‘real’ nation or not ... national identity remains a subjective matter and objective definitions of the nation cannot be made” (108). Newfoundland, unlike Scotland then, occupies a strange space where its nationality is both undeniable and yet not objectively real. Thomsen’s decision to relegate Labrador to a dismissive endnote in the book is indicative of some of the major problems with his discussion of Newfoundland’s nationhood.

Thomsen’s compromise is that Newfoundland, like Scotland, evinces the politics of “autonomism” rather than nationalism. This is perhaps the weakest argument of the book. Newfoundland arguably has neither the nationalism nor autonomism that would make this comparison work. Meanwhile, a few months after the publication of Thomsen’s book, the Scottish National Party (SNP) won elections and formed a parliamentary majority at Holyrood. At the time of my writing, a referendum on secession is planned for September 2014. No one, including Thomsen, could have predicted this. But the SNP’s agenda was and is no secret. Its desire for secession from the United Kingdom has been its *raison d’être* for decades. This is not “autonomism.” At the same time, autonomism cannot be found in the jurisdictional turf wars and high-conflict regionalism that typify Newfoundland’s experiences under federalism. Often, Newfoundland politicians have successfully fought efforts at giving Newfoundland more autonomy (for example, Clyde Wells with the Meech Lake Accord).

Michael Keating (2001), Ailsa Henderson (2007), and James Kennedy (2013) have compared Scotland with Quebec rather than Newfoundland. Quebec shows demonstrably more evidence of political nationalism, cultural nationalism, and autonomism in its politics, culture, and history. A more meticulous literature review that mentions the existing comparative scholarship at the time of this book’s publication may have been useful if only so Thomsen might have better explained why Newfoundland, or indeed any Canadian province, provides the best case study.

Thomsen notes that unlike Scotland (until 1999), Newfoundland had its own legislature after Confederation in 1949. Thus, Scotland's nationalist movement grew under conditions where the central government ignored it (the Thatcher years, for example) and Scottish voters had no other outlet to seek redress for grievances. This is a highly perceptive observation: the closest equivalent to the Scottish National Party in Newfoundland and Labrador is the House of Assembly itself.

Perhaps Thomsen's most eloquent points are in his discussion of the cultures and cultural nationalism in both societies. Scottish national culture transitioned from a type of inwardly focused parochialism and victimhood, or "Scottish Cringe" (before the 1960s), to a forward-looking rejection of the past (after the 1960s), to a mixture of the two (the present). These are the pre-modern, modern, and post-modern stages of the development of Scottish cultural nationalism. Scottish political nationalism developed as a vehicle to counter the parochial self-images of Kailyard literature and tartanry. Early Scottish nationalists were projecting a defiant self but one that was also highly self-critical. Newfoundland, however, did not go through these stages in the same way. Its 1970s cultural renaissance embraced the past as a marker of Newfoundland's "authenticity." The persistence of traditional Newfoundland culture after Confederation and after the cultural renaissance perhaps helps explain the relative lack of political nationalism. Why secede if one's culture is not threatened?

This book's interdisciplinary approach would be received well across the humanities. Its comparison of Scottish and Newfoundland ethnocultural history since the 1960s was particularly insightful. My sense is that observers of Scotland would appreciate the analytical parts but would prefer the Quebec case study, especially in light of recent events. But one is left with the question: which case study is most similar to Newfoundland? The question remains open, but *Nationalism in Stateless Nations* shows that Scotland is a striking place to start to find answers.

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Louie Montague. *I Never Knewed It Was Hard: Memoirs of a Labrador Trapper*, ed. Elizabeth Dawson. St. John's: ISER Books, 2013. ISBN 978-1-894725-12-5

Louie Montague's voice rings strong and clear in his 2013 memoir — the result of a natural gift for narrative but also the fruit of a rich and laborious process described by the editor, Elizabeth Dawson. Born on Valentine's Day in 1935 and weighing no less than 11 pounds, Montague has lived a life that details recent Labrador history — especially economic history.

Montague trapped as a boy, staying in school until only Grade 7. At 16, he was making \$80 a month cleaning pots on the newly constructed air force base at Goose Bay, the institution that effectively ended the trapping that was once so central to the Labrador economy. As Montague says, "Trapping was never steady; you never knew if you'd make any money even if you did the same amount of work.... With the Base there was a steady paycheque" (84). And so a Hudson's Bay Company official who traded with 90 trappers the year before the base opened, traded with only five the next year. (In addition to Louie's account, Robin McGrath's introduction provides further detailed analysis of the decline of trapping.) Trapping never left Montague, though; he left his pot-cleaning job after a few months to return to the trapline, beginning a work-life pattern that he and many other Labrador men returned to time and time again.

In common with others of his generation, Montague worked on many important initiatives in Labrador, including the DEW Line system, road construction, geological surveys, prospecting, the cable car at Northwest River, and the Churchill Falls hydroelectric project. Collectively, these projects comprised the industrialization of Labrador and the alteration of the landscape that was the pivot of the peninsula's Indigenous cultures. In Montague's assessment, the base was "the best thing that ever happened to Labrador" (89), as it curtailed economic privation and food shortages, and enhanced external communication. The base may have caused some erosion of internal Labrador