By engaging himself in answering the question put forward in the title of the book, James Mitchell, a long-standing scholar of Scotland’s politics, provides the reader with a panoramic view on the process of home rule in the Caledonian country throughout contemporary times. As could not be otherwise, analytical emphasis points to the developments which have culminated in the referendum on Scotland’s independence held on September 18, 2014. The general endeavour of the book is to consider how Scotland has retained its sense of self, and how it has changed against a backdrop of fundamental transformations in society, economy and the role of the state over the course of the union. The author contends the idea that during the twentieth century, a Scottish lobby, consisting of public and private bodies, became adept in making the case for more resources from the British Treasury without facing up to some of Scotland’s most deep-rooted problems.

*The Scottish Question* makes reference to the seemingly intractable and complex problem of Scotland being a country (nation) but not a state, as was put forward by the journalist J. M. Reid (*Scotland Past and Present*, OUP 1959). The subject of study refers to the category of stateless nations, particularly in the Western hemisphere, which have reasserted themselves politically in the last decades. Scotland, Catalonia, Flanders or Quebec belong to a group of polities which have put forward a claim for self-government and an increased level of political power in the running of their ‘own affairs’. The conceptual boundary-building of the term *stateless nation* is crucial for understanding the normative answers given to the main and related questions: What is meant by self-government or autonomy? Are independence, secession, and state formation synonymous processes? Do they imply the same institutional outcomes?

Professor Mitchell reviews comprehensively the three general manifestations of stateless Scotland, which are similar to other Western minority nations: (a) a collective identity and consciousness of community belonging; (b) a centre-periphery conflict within a plural state; and (c) an existence of social mobilisation and political organisation for the achievement of their objectives. Two preeminent schools of thought have put forward
explanations concerning national phenomena: deterministic and functional. For determinists the important factor to be considered is that the nation, whether it is ‘artificial’ or ‘natural’, creates a relationship between individual destiny and the collective future. Functionalists regard nations as modern phenomena resulting from industrial development and associated to the economic, political and social requirements of modernisation processes. Both approaches find a field of inference in the case of Scotland, as this book illustrate with an abundance of historical evidence and data. But the reconciliation of these two epistemological positions in most studies of modern nation-building and state formation are rare, something which hinders the carrying out of cross-country research aiming to achieve broader generalisations.

There is nothing ‘exclusive’ in the Scottish case which could deny the possibility of such comparative endeavours. The latter would greatly help us to realise possible, probable and desirable outcomes of institution building as a result of answering the Scottish Question. If a nation is to equate par force a sovereign state, how can the contours for greater autonomy be established concerning the so-called ‘devo-plus’ or ‘devo-max’ arrangements for Scotland or other stateless nations? Degrees of in(ter)dependence in changing unions such as the UK and the EU are to be envisaged, taking into account not only Scotland’s past, present and future but also political processes in both Britain and Europe. Professor Mitchell suggests that an oppositional political culture was one of the most distinguishing features of Scottish politics in the twentieth century, along the lines of English/British adversarial civic culture. Accordingly, there seems every reason to believe that a sense of Britishness will endure in Scotland.

The Anglo-Scottish Union has always been a complex set of institutions and practices that have to be understood through the lens of informal conventions and unwritten constitutions. Its success was the implicit recognition of national diversity within less than a unitary state but more than a mere marriage of convenience. The situation has changed since the 2007 election. The financial crisis has dramatically exposed the limitations of the nation-state as a ‘sovereign’ actor in global economics. Models of British ‘command-and-control’ majoritarian democracy, as well as of Jacobin vertical diffusionism of power, are in terminal retreat. In Europe, the on-going re-scaling of nation-state structures and political organisation is in line with Europe’s principle of territorial subsidiarity. This crucial tenet of Europeanisation establishes that policy decision-making should be located at the level closest to the citizen. In other words, the purpose of subsidiarity is no other than to limit the power of central authorities by assuming the criteria of ‘proximity’ and ‘proportionality’
in all layers of government. Indeed, the Scottish Question is inextricably linked to both British and European political unions.

The repercussions of the 2014 Referendum on Scotland’s independence provide a formidable opportunity to comply with the European principles of territorial subsidiarity and democratic accountability. Both are to set the pace and the tone in the institutionalisation of the European ‘political animal’. In the post-Referendum scenario, Scottish voters are regarded as political innovators. Their response to the Scottish Question will have far reaching consequences for the future of Europeanisation. Professor Mitchell points out that while the independence referendum may have proved an important event, there can be no definitive answer to the Scottish Question. It would also be mistaken to search for parsimonious explanations and generalisations which could work, *mutatis mutandis*, in other stateless nations. However, the book is also a valuable contribution to the debate of territorial politics which goes beyond the mere focus on Scotland/Britain.

Arguments, viewpoints and discussions unfold throughout the dense pages of the book and are supported by numerous relevant data collected during Mitchell’s long and fruitful academic career. In this volume, the recourse to insert notes has been discarded, something which makes the reading of the text fluent. A bibliographical essay at the end of the book provides the reader with many references on texts published by historians, journalists, political scientists and sociologists, as well as on materials of first-hand accounts of events and developments. The work makes use of sources gathered by the author during a period of three decades, providing a most useful collection of the output of scholars and commentators produced primarily in the twentieth century. However, and unless overseen by this reviewer, two important references are missing. The first one is related to the seminal book written by John Macintosh, *The Devolution of Power. Local Democracy, Regionalism and Nationalism*, published in 1968. The second one relates the various initiatives taken in the late 1970s and early ‘80s by Henry Drucker. He was the promoter of the Unit for the Study of Government in Scotland, an early institution which was acknowledged as the leading centre for studies of Scottish society and politics during the Thatcher years when devolution was plainly dismissed as a ‘dead duck’. The Unit was followed by the Governance of Scotland Forum in 1998, and then by the Institute of Governance in 2002, and was, since 1992, responsible for the publication of this journal, which is now under the auspices of Edinburgh University Press.

The release of this book is timely, concerning the debate on Scotland’s home rule and its implications for the United Kingdom and the European Union. It is most useful for practitioners and experts in public policy-making,
as well as for scholars and students of the UK’s evolving system of governance. It further contributes to shed light on the renewed quest for articulating reasoned responses to the long-standing Scottish Question.

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