



RECENSÃO

*The Case for Scottish Independence:
A History of Nationalist Political Thought
in Modern Scotland,*
de Ben Jackson,
por David Pimenta

Análise Social, LVII (1.º), 2022 (n.º 242), pp. 191-194
<https://doi.org/10.31447/AS00032573.2022242.09>
ISSN ONLINE 2182-2999

<https://doi.org/10.31447/AS00032573.2022242.09>



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The Case for Scottish Independence: A History of Nationalist Political Thought in Modern Scotland, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020, 210 pp.
ISBN 9781108793186

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In a post-Brexit political context and after the sixth election in history for the Scottish Parliament, where the pro-independence parties won a majority, it is vital to understand the Scottish nationalism phenomenon. In this sense, *The Case for Scottish Independence: A History of Nationalist Political Thought in Modern Scotland* presents itself as a major and recent account of the intellectual development of contemporary Scottish nationalism.

The author Ben Jackson, an Associate Professor of Modern History at the University of Oxford, is a long-time researcher on Scottish nationalism and his book, published in 2020, evolved after the writing of two key articles in 2014 –the year highlighted by the independence referendum.

Ben Jackson starts his case by stating that the origins of Scottish nationalism are not medieval, but, in fact, they have seen the light of day in political movements of the 20th century, gaining prominence in the 1960s and 1970s, and maturing in the 1980s and 1990s. Also, the author points out that the uniqueness of this form of civic nationalism is not focused on ethnicity matters but instead

motivated by the creation of a new Scottish state, independent from the UK neo-liberal political agenda that arguably fails to protect Scotland's best interests.

The ideological foundations of early Scottish nationalisms, before the 1960s, are described in the initial chapters. Jackson starts with a biography of the political movements and parties' creation, specifically the Scots National League, the National Party of Scotland, the Scottish Party, and the Scottish National Party (SNP), while clarifying the different and sometimes opposing strategic political trends regarding the choosing of a more gradual or instant path to the independence. After the 1960s, the author presents SNP establishment and development, coinciding with major political and economic changes (e.g., deindustrialization, British Empire dissolution, North Sea oil discovery, Scottish Parliament creation).

Scottish independentist leading figures and their lines of thought are thoroughly explored, namely the likes of Hugh MacDiarmid, John MacCormick, Archie Lamont, Douglas Young, and SNP leader Robert McIntyre. Ben Jackson emphasizes the socioeconomic diver-

gence between Scotland and England as the main driver of Scottish independence ideology. In this regard, the 'first' nationalists widely supported a political and economic model based on small governmental units, private businesses, and a decentralized and agrarian economy (more adapted to Scotland's geological features), to promote better democracy, economic prosperity, and communitarian citizenship. The Scottish nationalist ideology is described as a unique construction with influences ranging from Christian personalism to libertarianism and opposing industrialization and excessive state intervention from a distant and bureaucratic central government of London.

Jackson approaches what he considers the most central aspect of Scottish nationalism's cultural side that emerged in the 1960s – the norms and social institutions. For this matter, the author examines George Davie *magnum opus*, *The Democratic Intellect*, where it is presented the argument regarding the English cultural and political menace (characterized by an elitist, technocratic, and hierarchical education from the so-called Oxbridge) over the unique Scottish education institutions and traditions (described as being more egalitarian, independent, inclusive, and with a generalist curriculum where philosophy occupies a central role).

The third chapter is focused on the political thought of another central character – Tom Nairn, a notorious modern nationalist who distinguished himself from the early nationalists by rejecting

the imperialist argument that presented Scotland as a victim nation colonized by the British Empire. Instead, Nairn advocates that Scotland was part of the British Empire, partnering with England as a dominant overseas power.

Jackson describes a first stage Nairn that followed a continental European Marxism inspired by Antonio Gramsci. Alongside British intellectual Perry Anderson, Nairn saw the British Empire's dissolution as an opportunity to modernize the economy and political structures inherited from the imperial past through a socialist nationalism.

In the context of the Soviet communist collapse and Margaret Thatcher's government, the author also examines later stage Nairn as a critic of the Scottish left. Thus, Nairn supported nationalism (with its progressive and regressive mixed features) framed by European integration and disapproved of the socialist framework rationale of the working-class social struggle.

In chapter four, Jackson examines SNP ideological definition as a social democratic party, after the 1960s and 1970s increasing growth, with major protagonists like William Wolfe and George Reid embracing a more moderate political centre stance regarding the defence of the welfare state and full employment. According to Jackson, this centre stance 'masked the ideological heterogeneity of the party's membership' (p. 95). Nevertheless, the author states that left-wing radical nationalism was still well alive, specifically in the political thought of Ray Burnett and John McGrath, which

supported a political solution capable of mobilising the working class towards the socialist side of nationalism (in this context, the Scottish Labour Party was created).

Considering the disappointing results of the 1979 devolution referendum, Jackson explores the creation and impact of the famous '79 Group – an SNP left-wing faction that was formed to ensure the complete SNP ideological left metamorphosis. This heterogeneous group included well-known intellectual figures like Maxwell and Gavin Kennedy and emerging talents such as Alex Salmond. The '79 Group aimed to clear SNP ideology leaving the political centre ambiguous positioning, by defending left-wing policies 'in order to win over working-class and public sector middle-class Labour voters' (p. 106), while offering a more modern and decentralized socialist model when comparing to the Labour Party. And, again, the main argument was that Scottish social justice could only be achieved through independence from the UK ruled, at the time, by Margaret Thatcher.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, it is presented another change in the ideology of SNP, headed by Alex Salmond. With a new generation of Scottish people with less and less ideological loyalties, the party embraces liberalism as a tool that could turn Scotland into a competitive country in the context of European and global economic integration. The recipe presented was a successful mixed model inspired by Nordic social democracies and Ireland, distinguished by being

'based on investment in education and training, participation in European economic integration, fiscal discipline and a reduction in corporate taxation' (p. 122). The 21st-century SNP turns the Scottish government into a social democracy with liberal trends, by mixing the role of public investment and the role of private sector wealth creation to achieve a prosperous, socially cohesive and independent democracy.

In the final chapters, Jackson approaches the concept of sovereignty. Firstly, it makes the important distinction of Scottish sovereignty tradition from the English one: Scottish tradition find its roots in a proto-democratic era, namely in the 1320 Declaration of Arbroath, and it is characterized by placing sovereignty in the hands of the people; to the contrary, English tradition 'emerged from the transfer of the absolute power of the monarch to Parliament' (p. 128). While Scottish sovereignty has a communitarian basis (even in a monarchy), the English one is hierarchical, coming from above.

Subsequently, Jackson analyses the resurgence of sovereignty in contemporary independence movements arguments, from both gradualists (advocates of independence after a devolution stage) and fundamentalists (supporters of immediate independence). The legal philosopher Neil MacCormick and Alex Salmond are presented as two major figures with post-nationalist and post-sovereignty stances, in which independence is viewed as a gradual process where an independent Scotland establishes institutional, political, economic,

social, and cultural ties with the UK, EU and NATO. Arguably, this stance would blend a newly greater power of the Scottish Parliament and a sovereignty sharing logic with other partner nations, in order to thrive in a growing interconnected global economy.

In the conclusion, Ben Jackson takes the reader to the emblematic 2014 referendum – a historical momentum that represented the zenith of modern nationalist political arguments, that were born mainly with the so-called ‘79ers and mediated by Alex Salmond SNP since the 1990s.

Overall, the author doesn’t analyse deeply the existentialist side of nationalism, referring to ‘those who thought Scotland was entitled to be independent simply because we are a nation (p. 177), linked with Scottish ethnonationalism. That would require a broader historical range analysis, considering the ethnosymbolic approach developed by Anthony D. Smith, by positioning nations an early nationalism elements (comprising ethnic features) as a pre-modern phenomenon connected with contemporary political movements (Smith, 2013). Although not so explored as the civic forms of nationalism in Scotland, ethnonationalism also contributed to the foundations of modern

Scottish nationalism, having influenced intellectuals and political activists of groups like the secretively 1320 Club or Siol nan Gaidheal. Yet, Ben Jackson’s book takes a very complete and well-documented journey through contemporary Scottish nationalism thought, mainly on the utilitarian side, by exploring a series of nationalist trends that evolved and responded opportunistically to the different political, economic, social, and cultural contexts across the 20th and 21st centuries’ different decades.

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