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# 'CRAMPED AND RESTRICTED AT HOME'? SCOTTISH SEPARATISM AT EMPIRE'S END*

*The Berry Prize Essay*

By Jimmi Østergaard Nielsen and Stuart Ward

ABSTRACT. The emergence of Scottish separatism as a viable political force in the 1960s is often seen as a reflection of Britain's wider political fortunes in a post-imperial world. It is indeed the case that the Scottish National Party emerged from electoral obscurity to become a credible political alternative in the 1960s, culminating in Winifred Ewing's by-election victory in Hamilton in November 1967. That this occurred in the wake of Britain's retreat from empire fuelled speculation that separatist momentum in Scotland represented an inward manifestation of the same pressures that had torn the empire asunder. This paper draws on sources from local politics to make two key arguments: first, that post-imperial influences were neither as pervasive nor even particularly prominent in the local politics of devolution as may be assumed. Equally, however, global processes of decolonisation contributed to the separatist agenda in ways more subtle than has hitherto been acknowledged. Indeed, there are several striking similarities between the gathering political momentum of the SNP and the sweep of 'new nationalisms' through the remnants of the British world in the 1960s, particularly in the former British Dominions of Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Thus, the relative absence of decolonising discourse in the local electoral source material does not necessarily rule out these global undercurrents, although the exact nature of their influence needs to be more carefully evaluated.

The idea that the eclipse of the British Empire brought direct and inherently corrosive consequences for the United Kingdom is as old as decolonisation itself, and has been reiterated by historians and commentators for decades. In particular, the emergence of Scottish separatism as a viable political force since the 1960s is commonly regarded as one of the most tangible and lasting domestic repercussions of imperial decline. With this paper, we wish to subject these assertions

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to long-overdue empirical scrutiny, by investigating the ways in which the imperial–domestic link emerged as a topic of discussion in the Scottish nationalist debate. Our focus is the 1960s, the decade when the Scottish National Party (SNP) first saw substantial electoral success. We first present the underlying premises of the claim that there is a causal connection between imperial decline and centrifugal pressures on the British state, exploring the work of historians who have figured prominently on this theme. We then move on to examine the evidence for a post-imperial impetus behind SNP electoral gains. In particular, we turn our attention to the Hamilton by-election of 1967, universally recognised as a landmark event in Scottish nationalist history with the unexpected win by SNP candidate Winifred Ewing. On the basis of this material, we argue that certain variants of the end of empire thesis need to be discarded due to a sheer lack of empirical validation. Yet having done so, the remainder of the paper seeks alternative connections between imperial and domestic contexts. While explicit references to empire's end in the SNP success story are few and far between, global processes of decolonisation may well have contributed to the separatist agenda in ways more subtle than has hitherto been acknowledged. We shall point to striking similarities between the gathering political momentum of the SNP in the 1960s and the 'new nationalism' among the former British Dominions in the same decade, arguing that there were good reasons why the end of empire was never foregrounded in SNP rhetoric. We conclude that the relative scarcity of overtly 'imperial' commentary in the source material does not, in itself, dismiss the pervasive influence of decolonising pressures, although the exact nature of this influence has yet to be properly understood.[1]

## The evolution of an argument

The connection between the end of empire and the strength of political separatism in Scotland has been the source of speculation among

[1] The preparation of this paper entailed extensive research using materials stored in various collections, among these: The National Library of Scotland (P.la.5746 PER, 'Scottish National Party Press Releases 1966–1968'; P.la.7030, 'Miscellaneous Pamphlets and Leaflets of the Scottish National Party 1957–1993'; Acc. 13099, 'Political Correspondence of Dr Gordon Wilson, Secretary of the SNP'; Acc. 10090/113, 'General Correspondence (1967–1968) of Dr Robert Douglas McIntyre, President of the SNP'; Acc. 10090/116, 'Misc. Party Leaflets 1962–1969'). University of Edinburgh Centre for Research Collections (Gen. 890–2, 909–10, 'Collection of Material relating to the Scottish National Party'). The National Archives of Scotland (SOE9/136 and SOE9/139, 'Materials relating to the 1976 Devolution Debate, and Statements and Papers by Political Parties and Other Organizations'). The Library of the SNP Headquarters in Edinburgh (various materials relating to the 1967 Hamilton by-election).

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historians since the 1930s,[2] and cursory references to such a relationship were expressed as early as the late nineteenth century.[3] But it was only with the relatively sudden electoral successes of the SNP and Plaid Cymru in the mid-1960s that the idea of a direct causal relationship took hold. H. J. Hanham's classic 1969 formulation is worth quoting at length:

> At the height of its popularity the Union was inspired by a sense of purpose. Scots felt that they were sharing in a great imperial venture and took pride in the achievements of Scots all over the world. Now that the Empire is dead, many Scots feel cramped and restricted at home . . . To give themselves an opening to a wider world the Scots need some sort of outlet, and the choice appears at the moment to be between emigration and re-creating the Scottish nation at home.[4]

This view gathered momentum into the 1970s, popularised by James Morris's memorable turn of phrase: 'Who gets satisfaction from the present state of the Union? Who is really content with this grubby wreck of old glories?'[5] But it was only with the publication of Tom Nairn's 1977 *The Break-Up of Britain* that it appeared as a fully elaborated argument. In Nairn's view, the British state was decidedly geared towards running an empire. Its success in this regard rested on the uniquely successful large-scale agrarian and then industrial revolutions, developments that turned Britain into the world's first modern nation. This enormous initial success both at home and particularly overseas had immense consequences for the development of the British state itself.[6] To Nairn, it was above all Britain's 'external relations'[7] – of which the existence of a vast empire was the most important feature – which stood in the way of such important advances as constitutional reform, devolution, an abandonment of the hereditary parliamentary principle and a move away from an anachronistic class society. In Nairn's interpretation, the inevitable result of Britain's imperial ambition and success was a 'backward' state configuration and society: a society in which 'bourgeois radicalism and popular mobilisation were eschewed for the sake of conservative stability', and where 'stability had become paralytic over-stability'.[8] The Scottish elite, whose counterparts were responsible for mobilising successful nationalist movements on the European continent, readily sacrificed the Scottish cause for the lucrative business of empire: 'During the prolonged era of Anglo-Scots imperialist expansion, the Scottish ruling order found that it had given up statehood

[2] T. M. Devine, 'The Break-Up of Britain? Scotland and the End of Empire', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 16 (2006), 163–80.

[3] Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism* (1977).

[4] H. J. Hanham, *Scottish Nationalism* (1969), 212.

[5] Quoted in Keith Robbins, '"This Grubby Wreck of Old Glories": The United Kingdom and the End of the British Empire', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 15.1 (1980), 83.

[6] Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*, 21.

[7] *Ibid.*, 22.

[8] *Ibid.*, 22, 23, 42.

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for a hugely profitable junior partnership in the New Rome.'[9] It was only with the demise of empire that the Scottish question became relevant to them, and therefore, 'it was the extraordinary external success of the transitional English state that permitted it [i.e. the unitary state] to survive so long'.[10] While the empire persisted, it is understood, the potential leaders of a Scottish nationalist movement were busy elsewhere, harvesting the fruits of imperial success. But with the end of empire, the British state's survival was predicted by Nairn to be shortlived, and, by allusion to other metropoles which had suffered significant loss of power or prestige, he considered it inevitable that Britain would also undergo a 'strong reaction'.[11] Nairn perceived the surge of Scottish nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s to be only preliminary, with much yet to come.

Subsequent accounts have likewise emphasised the empire's role as a vital (though less repressive) device through which UK unity could be maintained, and many historians have argued that Scottish nationalism was always bound to be emboldened by the demise of empire. The key to understanding this is to appreciate the very significant extent of Scottish involvement in the imperial adventure, explored at great length in Linda Colley's 1992 *Britons*. The Scottish made a 'disproportionate contribution to the Great Game [that] persisted throughout the nineteenth century and on until the end of the Empire',[12] and settling in the colonies, Colley argued, gave the Scots an opportunity to 'feel themselves peers of the English in a way still denied them in an island kingdom',[13] profoundly influencing their perception of themselves. It was thus largely the empire that made the Union between Scotland and England real, giving the Scots and the English 'a powerful distraction and cause in common'.[14] To Colley, this deep Scottish involvement in the empire naturally resulted in a profound reaction to its loss. In fact, Colley explicitly links the new lack of commercial opportunities caused by the end of empire to the popular late twentieth-century demand for Scottish independence: 'The Scots . . . who became British in 1707 in part because it paid such enormous commercial and imperial dividends, are now increasingly inclined to see partial or complete independence plus membership in a federal Europe as the most profitable strategy for the future.'[15] But to Colley, it was not merely relevant that the empire's demise changed the economic conditions and opportunities for the British people. An equally

[9] *Ibid.*, 129.
[10] *Ibid.*, 20.
[11] *Ibid.*, 80.
[12] *Ibid.*, 139.
[13] *Ibid.*, 137.
[14] Linda Colley, 'Britishness and Otherness: An Argument', *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1992), 325.
[15] Linda Colley, *Britons* (orig. edn New York, 1992; London, 1996), 395–6.

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if not more important change took place in the minds of Britons, who had long defined themselves against a range of external groups of 'others', including the subject peoples of the empire. The end of empire effectively closed off this key source of 'otherness', rendering the self somehow less cohesive and distinct. Or to use Colley's formulation, when the other 'is no longer available', the result is a 'renewed sensitivity to internal differences'[16] – a process which manifested itself in a revival of regional nationalisms and support for devolution.[17]

These claims often form an integral part of the narrative of the disintegration of the Union that is said to have taken place since the 1960s. Krishan Kumar, for example, sees the empire as having had an absolutely crucial role in the development of national British cohesion, providing 'the integument that . . . tightly meshed the parts of Britain together',[18] and 'containing'[19] regional nationalisms while it existed. Michael Gardiner, in *The Cultural Roots of British Devolution* (2004), similarly views the imperial context as the crucial adhesive, referring repeatedly to Britain as a nation that has 'become unsustainable without empire'.[20] This is often couched in terms of the empire as a common endeavour, which for centuries enabled the English, Scots and others to sink their differences in a shared bounty. Thus, for Andrew Gamble, 'the end of empire meant the disappearance of the project which for so long had defined Britishness and British institutions'.[21] Taken to the extreme, as in David Marquand's account, the very idea of 'Britain' is quite simply not amenable to 'reinvention', having lost its vital ingredient: 'Shorn of empire, "Britain" ha[s] no meaning . . . it is by definition impossible for Britain as such to be post-imperial.'[22] To Marquand, the end of empire is a process which must necessarily have dire consequences for the British state, and one that profoundly influences Britons' view of themselves.

[16] Colley, 'Britishness and Otherness: An Argument', 328. See also Stuart Ward, 'The End of Empire and the Fate of Britishness', in *History, Nationhood and the Question of Britain*, ed. Helen Brocklehurst and Robert Phillips (Houndmills, 2004).

[17] Colley has more recently distanced herself from an overreliance on the importance of the fall of empire in this respect, stating that 'claims that the end of Empire *must* also and desirably result in the disintegration of the UK, are driven at once by selective history and teleology'. See Linda Colley, 'Does Britishness Still Matter in the Twenty-First Century – and How Much and How Well Do the Politicians Care', *Political Quarterly*, 78 (2007), 28.

[18] Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge, 2003), 172.

[19] Krishan Kumar, 'English and British National Identity', *History Compass*, 4 (2006), 434.

[20] Michael Gardiner, *The Cultural Roots of British Devolution* (Edinburgh, 2004), 163.

[21] Andrew Gamble, 'A Union of Historic Compromise', in *Imagined Nation: England after Britain*, ed. Mark Perryman (2008), 38.

[22] David Marquand, 'How United Is the Modern United Kingdom?', in *Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History*, ed. Alexander Grant and Keith J. Stringer (1995), 288.

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Perhaps the best gauge of the pervasive influence of this view is the vehemence of its detractors. Keith Webb launched the first salvo in the counter-offensive in his 1977 *The Growth of Nationalism in Scotland* where he identified three main flaws in what he termed the 'decline of empire thesis'. First, there was precious little evidence to support the idea of Scottish nationalism as a reaction to the loss of long-standing economic benefits of empire; secondly, the new generation of nationalist leaders hardly matched the stereotype of frustrated would-be proconsuls, chafing at the closing-off of an imperial 'outlet'; and thirdly, the idea that Scottish identity had suddenly emerged to supplant the waning appeal of Britishness overlooked the delicate balance that had long existed between the two.[23] Keith Robbins echoed Webb's scepticism, pointing out that the first generation of home rulers in Scotland used the empire as an argument *in favour* of devolved constitutional powers in the late nineteenth century. Thus, to posit empire and devolution as polar opposites was a false dichotomy.[24] More recently, John M. MacKenzie has argued that the imperial experience actually may have reinforced the several nationalities of the United Kingdom, and that it therefore cannot be readily assumed that its demise was inherently conducive to a separatist agenda.[25] And T. M. Devine has found little merit in linking the end of empire to Scottish political nationalism, on the grounds that 'imperial decline failed to produce much political concern in Scotland'. He locates the root causes of devolution in the failure of Westminster to deliver prosperity north of the border, concluding that 'Mrs Thatcher has an infinitely greater claim to be the midwife of Scottish devolution than the factor of imperial decline.'[26]

Yet neither side of the debate has succeeded in closing the argument in their favour, mainly because none of the major protagonists – somewhat remarkably – has ever sought to subject the end of empire thesis to any detailed empirical scrutiny. Nairn's initial foray was almost wholly theory-driven, while Linda Colley's verdict was more concerned with providing some contemporary perspective on an argument about the eighteenth-century origins of Britishness. Nor does T. M. Devine's corrective provide sufficient insight into the local political context of post-imperial Scotland, relying instead on an argument about events in the 1920s and 1950s that 'conspired to corrode Scotland's emotional attachment to empire'.[27] The 1960s remain remarkably untilled ground as far as the lingering presence

[23] Keith Webb, *The Growth of Nationalism in Scotland* (Glasgow, 1977), 87.

[24] Robbins, '"This Grubby Wreck of Old Glories": The United Kingdom and the End of the British Empire'.

[25] John M. MacKenzie, 'Empire and National Identities: The Case of Scotland', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 8 (1998), 215–31.

[26] Devine, 'The Break-Up of Britain?', 163, 166.

[27] *Ibid.*, 174.

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of empire in Scottish politics and society is concerned. We therefore now turn our attention to the very context that originally inspired the idea of a causal connection between imperial decline and Scottish nationalism – the remarkable electoral successes of the SNP throughout the decade. We begin by surveying the contemporary evidence for a decolonising discourse in the party's early political resurgence, before turning to a detailed analysis of the crowning SNP achievement of the decade: Winifred Ewing's victory at the Hamilton by-election in November 1967.

## Scotland's wind of change?

It is by no means difficult to mount a case in support of the idea that Scottish separatism experienced an unprecedented electoral boost in the 1960s due to the wave of post-colonial independence struggles worldwide. The circumstantial evidence, in itself, is difficult to overlook. In the 1950s, the SNP was a fringe political organisation with no parliamentary presence in Westminster and few obvious prospects to improve their electoral appeal, polling no more than 1.3 per cent of the Scottish vote between 1945 and 1959.[28] Yet the 1960s witnessed a series of electoral milestones, beginning with the Bridgeton by-election in November 1961 when Ayrshire farmer Ian Macdonald polled an impressive 18 per cent. The following year in June, Billy Wolfe secured a surprise second place in the West Lothian by-election, winning nearly a quarter of the vote. Throughout the decade, SNP Party membership increased sixty-fold (from 2,000 members in 1962 to 120,000 in 1968), branch organisations increased from 21 to 472 and the party's share of the popular vote surged to the point where it was able to win its first seat in Westminster in a generation.[29] The party was reorganised along more professional lines, acquiring a full-time party organiser, propaganda unit, research department, communications office and a more efficient fund-raising machine. By the time of the October 1974 general election, it had secured 30.4 per cent of the vote and eleven seats across Scotland.[30] There is a broad consensus that the early breakthroughs of the 1960s heralded the emergence of the SNP as a credible force in British politics, marking the beginnings of 'devolution' as a byword for the slow dissolution of the Union. These developments followed a trajectory that coincided remarkably with the rapid unravelling of the British Empire, from the time of Harold Macmillan's 'Wind of Change' speech in February 1960, culminating in the Wilson government's decision to withdraw from 'East

[28] Robbins, '"This Grubby Wreck of Old Glories": The United Kingdom and the End of the British Empire', 92.

[29] Webb, *The Growth of Nationalism in Scotland*, 204.

[30] Robbins, '"This Grubby Wreck of Old Glories": The United Kingdom and the End of the British Empire', 92.

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of Suez' in January 1968. This final act of imperial retreat had been forced by the devaluation of sterling two months earlier in November 1967 – the very month of the SNP's historic victory at the Hamilton by-election – amid widespread talk of national disorientation and inward decay.[31]

Contemporaries began to notice this conspicuous overlap from the mid-1960s, and drew what seemed to be obvious conclusions. The SNP-aligned weekly, the *Scots Independent*, surveyed the declining fortunes of the 'Empire states' of Europe in 1965, noting the inward strain this inevitably placed on national institutions: 'This is now happening to the Scottish people . . . The wind of change just doesn't blow suddenly as some English politicians would have us believe and then subside.'[32] The following year, these sentiments were echoed in a piece by Kenneth Tucker:

> The fundamental reason for the creation of the British state, world empire is a thing of the past and one cannot see circumstances in which it is ever likely to rise again, so the state apparatus is redundant and has already been discarded as a conception by the Irish, Scots and Welsh.[33]

By 1968, H. J. Hanham could observe that 'it has become fashionable in the press to refer to the sudden surge of nationalism as if it were somehow to be entirely explained by the loss of empire'.[34] The converse of this was to attribute the survival of unionism to a residual 'internal colonialism'.[35] This diagnosis appeared in the rhetoric of leading SNP figures of the day. For example, Billy Wolfe's Party Conference speech of October 1970 dwelt on the theme of Scotland 'stagnating and drifting backwards, held down by the burden of London's continuing imperial paternalism and pretensions'.[36] Indeed, the description of the Anglo-Scottish relationship as a 'colonial one' was not an uncommon motif in Scottish nationalist discourse of the decade. Here, it needs to be borne in mind that imperial and Commonwealth affairs were closely monitored in the Scottish press, and given widespread daily coverage. One might expect, then, that the achievement of independence throughout Asia and Africa would have provided an obvious context for understanding the contemporaneous

[31] David Blaazer, '"Devalued and Dejected Britons": The Pound in Public Discourse in the Mid 1960s', *History Workshop Journal*, 47 (1999), 121–40; Dominic Sandbrook, *White Heat* (2009), ch. 28.

[32] *Scots Independent*, 'Where Are the Empire States?', 20 Febr. 1965.

[33] *Scots Independent*, 'State or Nation?', 29 Oct. 1966; see also *Scots Independent*, 'The British Crisis: Scotland Must Act Herself', 3 Sept. 1966: 'Where can Britain really go? Time is long past when Britain sat smugly on her islands and the world came to her door.'

[34] H. J. Hanham, 'The Scottish Nation Faces the Post-Imperial World', *International Journal*, 23 (1968), 584.

[35] The phrase is Michael Hechter's, although this was not his view of the dynamic between separatism and unionism in the 1960s. See ch. 9 of *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536–1966* (1975).

[36] Quoted in Billy Wolfe, *Scotland Lives* (Edinburgh, 1973), 148.

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stirrings of Scottish political separatism. And occasionally, direct parallels were indeed drawn, such as the *Scotsman*'s 1962 verdict on Nyasaland's demands for succession from the Central African Federation: 'Presumably the answer of the Nyasaland leaders will be that of the Scots long ago. "It is not for glory, riches or honours that we fight: it is for liberty alone."'[37]

Further evidence supporting a link between the end of empire and the changing fortunes of the SNP can be found in the manuscript collections and memoirs of leading party figures. Billy Wolfe recounted his slow path of conversion to political nationalism, joining the SNP as late as 1959. Far from exhibiting a life-long commitment to the nationalist political cause, he was only belatedly 'convinced by the facts of Scotland's decline in the 1950s and by the logic of the double contention that if there is a nation of Scots it is entitled to self-government'.[38] By mid-1962, he had become 'moved to indignation and frustration' because he 'realized anew that the essence of Scotland was being so diluted and destroyed . . . It was a kindly English imperialism that was destroying them.'[39] At the October 1964 general election, Wolfe's first political advertisement read: 'Nyasaland now has independence – what about Scotland – but of course Scotland is a profitable colony. So long as we are a nation of labourers in our own land we will remain England's last satellite.'[40] Another pamphlet produced during the 1964 campaign surveyed 'recent events . . . taking place in the world', proclaiming:

> Proud imperial powers no longer steer their own course regardless of the rest of humanity. Least of all can Great Britain afford to ignore the rights of small nations. Her military policy and strategy have undergone a complete revolution, she is desperately seeking means of redressing her balance of payments, and she is trying to adjust herself to the implications of the European Common Market. Does it not seem odd to you that, despite these tremendous changes in the outside world, no thought is given in London to the need for an equally thorough-going reorganization within the British Isles? . . . Surely, you think, when the British Government can confer full nationhood so freely on former colonial peoples in Africa and Asia, the least that ancient Scotland can expect is federal self-government within a customs union.[41]

By early 1968, with the devaluation of sterling, Winifred Ewing's spectacular win at Hamilton and the winding back of Britain's military presence in the Far East, support for the SNP had reached an all-time high. The verdict of Scotland's leading newspapers was that Britain had reached an impasse. 'Yesterday was a great day for Little England',

[37] *Scotsman*, 'Composite Approach', 1 June 1962.
[38] Wolfe, *Scotland Lives*, 27.
[39] *Ibid.*, 10.
[40] Quoted in *ibid.*, 53.
[41] Neil Douglas, *How London Spends your Money* (Edinburgh), undated, but most likely 1964 judging from its general context and file placement in the Arthur Donaldson Papers, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6038/2, 'Correspondence of and to Arthur Donaldson', Folder 2.

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intoned the *Scotsman* following the East of Suez announcement, while the *Glasgow Herald* declared: 'Two centuries as a world Power, and of a military influence in the Far East that started with Clive in India, have been brought to a shabby end.'[42] The satirical 'Scotsman's log' appealed to readers to 'be calm – and if it's not too big a laugh these days – be British. Grab your life jacket . . . the old ship of state is sinking by the head.'[43] SNP chairman Arthur Donaldson reached for the exact same metaphor: 'We are on a sinking ship. We have left it rather late to take the necessary steps. But Scotland must get a boat of her own.'[44]

These events unfolded in tandem with burgeoning SNP electoral support, forcing the major political parties to pay greater attention to the nationalist agenda. A BBC *Checkpoint* programme in January 1968 surveyed seventy-one Scottish MPs and found that more than half – forty-three – were in favour of some sort of devolved assembly for Scotland. Only sixteen were opposed. The *Glasgow Herald* raised eyebrows at the opportunism behind this sudden conversion, but the fact remained: 'For so many Scottish MPs to make an admission which would have been unthinkable for all except the Liberals a short time ago is something of a landmark.'[45] Within a matter of months, opposition leader Edward Heath was publicly airing the possibility of a devolved Scottish regional assembly, while the Labour government established a Royal Commission to consider the matter. The unexpected windfall by way of increased subscriptions enabled a makeover of the *Scots Independent*, with a revamped design and more professional management. The new-look magazine (sporting the SNP political logo) featured a front-page editorial on its first issue in January 1968:

> From the start England has been determined that Great Britain should be merely a normal pseudonym to cloak her desperate ambitions. The same is even more true today with the Empire gone and world influence rapidly declining. Yet, despite devaluation, continuing economic chaos and a pathetic switch to the right by a Labour Party . . . England is still determined to cannibalize the Scots.[46]

Clearly, the fate of the British Empire had the capacity to shape contemporary perceptions of the growing separatist tendencies in Scottish politics in the 1960s, and even to serve as the root cause in some accounts. Even allowing for the fact that separatism was a minority issue, far from representative of the vast majority of the Scottish population, it remains

[42] *Scotsman*, 'A Paltry Package', 17 Jan. 1968; *Glasgow Herald*, 'Small World', 17 Jan. 1968; see also *Scotsman*, 'Prime Minister's Axe Ends an Era for Britain', 17 Jan. 1968.

[43] *Scotsman*, 'A Scotsman's Log: The Ship in a Terrible State', 18 Jan. 1968.

[44] *Scots Independent*, Arthur Donaldson's Diary 'The True Significance of Devaluation', 25 Nov. 1967.

[45] *Glasgow Herald*, 'Scottish Surprise', 13 Jan. 1968.

[46] *Scots Independent*, 'History's Next Big Date', 13 Jan. 1968.

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possible to identify clear traces of a post-imperial context to the early success story of the SNP during that decade.

But does it necessarily follow that the end of empire was the fundamental cause of these developments? That imperial decline wove its way into the fabric of Scottish political culture, representing a domestic 'impact factor' of events and processes that had their origins in the decolonisation movements in Asia and Africa? It is here that we need to exercise caution, not least because the pursuit of empirical evidence linking the end of empire to the SNP only gets us so far. Bernard Porter has raised methodological objections to the practice of establishing the ever-presence of imperial influence in metropolitan culture through the cumulative piling up of evidence drawn from any number of sources and contexts. These concerns might equally apply to our presentation of the material assembled above. In reexamining the evidence *in situ* (Porter's prescription), we find that its pervasiveness and impact is far from self-evident.[47]

This applies particularly to the day-to-day activities of the SNP in the aftermath of its encouraging result at West Lothian in 1962. Billy Wolfe's startling electoral boost was given extensive coverage in the Scottish press, with any number of underlying causes posited by the pundits of the day. Yet not a single account of the 1962 campaign, before or since, sought to place it in the context of the liberation movements sweeping through colonial Africa.[48] Nor did Wolfe himself see any connection in the memoir he composed a decade later. The records of the SNP and the manuscript collections and correspondence of its leading figures bear witness to a very different – and avowedly local – set of preoccupations and concerns. Here, we find sustained attention to the minutiae of party organisation, campaign strategy, internal political jostling, branch management, finance, publicity and the meticulously recorded minutes of various sub-committees. References to wider issues affecting Britain's place in the world in general, or the empire in particular, are exceedingly rare, suggesting that these considerations were at best remote from the concerns of party activists. Nor did the end of empire feature prominently in campaign material. Despite the occasional examples cited above, the overwhelming and enduring political message of the SNP in the 1960s was Westminster's remoteness from Scotland's material concerns.

Only rarely did this persistent focus on Westminster's dominance draw upon any overseas example or inspiration. A draft constitution for an independent Scotland prepared in May 1963 made no reference

[47] Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford, 2004), xiii; see also Andrew Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back?* (Harlow, 2005).

[48] See for example *Scotsman*, 'By-election Frolics', 18 June 1962; *Glasgow Herald*, 'Protest Vote', 16 June 1962.

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to the many new constitutions that had recently been enacted by new Commonwealth nations throughout Asia, Africa and the Caribbean (although some references to the older constitutions of Australia and Canada appeared).[49] The 1966 Party Manifesto, *Put Scotland First*, was virtually silent on international and Commonwealth issues, referring only to the question of membership of the European Economic Community.[50] And even a context where one might have expected a wider frame of reference – a memorandum sent by the SNP to twenty-seven European governments in May 1967 – confined its grievances to the centralisation of government in London and the deprivation of legislative and fiscal power to the Scots.[51] Indeed, to the extent that the SNP drew on any international role model to illuminate its aspirations, it was not to Ghana, Kenya or Malaysia that it turned, but to the decidedly un-imperial example of Denmark, Norway and Sweden – states with a broadly similar geography, population and resource base – to demonstrate how small nations could bring greater welfare returns to their citizens.[52]

## Hamilton, 1967

In short, the periodic rhetorical flourishes that framed the political breakthrough of Scottish separatism in terms of the world-wide eclipse of empire are not borne out by closer attention to detail. A more thorough examination of the records, papers and activities of the SNP presents a cumulative picture of a highly *provincial* organisation, rather than a major conduit of global currents penetrating deep into Scottish political culture. This can be more vividly illustrated by focusing on Winifred Ewing's landmark victory at the Hamilton by-election of 1967, in which Ewing won 46 per cent of the vote, turning a Labour majority of more than 16,000 into a small SNP majority of 1,779. This event not only provided the SNP with crucial political momentum, but also placed Scottish separatism on the agenda in Westminster in unprecedented ways.

SNP press releases, pamphlets and other material published in connection with the Hamilton by-election, which have been preserved in various collections, indicate that the loss of empire was quite irrelevant to the election campaign. The most significant SNP publication produced during the campaign was the pamphlet *Hamilton Herald*,

[49] Arthur Donaldson Papers, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6038/2, 'Correspondence of and to Arthur Donaldson', Folder 1, 'Sixth Revised Draft of Proposed Articles of a Provisional Constitution for Scotland', 16 May 1963.

[50] National Archives of Scotland, SOE 12/239, 'Putting Scotland First', 130–41.

[51] Arthur Donaldson Papers, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6038/6, Folder 1, 'Memorandum to European Governments', 31 May 1967.

[52] E.g. National Library of Scotland, Acc. 11987/110, 'SNP Research Department Interim Report', 14 Mar. 1969.

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which imitated a newspaper complete with vox pops and an election-related horoscope.[53] The one theme that pervaded the publication was the London government's failure to address the issues of particular importance to Scotland. Recent Labour and Tory governments were described as a 'proven disaster', to whom Scotland had been nothing but a 'region': 'a troublesome region occasionally but of no real importance'. This treatment was seen as a predictable result of the uneven geographical distribution of the British population: 'More than half of the people who live in the United Kingdom stay and work within 125 miles of London', an affluent region 'viciously protected by its M.P.s and the country's top civil servants'. The 'big unit' of the UK, rather than offering any benefits of large-scale operations, was perceived to have led to a neglect of Scotland, and the lack of necessary decentralisation threatened to turn Scotland into 'the 47th English county'. This consistent neglect of Scotland had, according to the *Hamilton Herald*, had disastrous consequences for the country, which at the time of the by-election experienced its highest unemployment rate since 1940, a stalling productivity and a downright 'brain drain' in the form of emigration because of a lack of opportunities at home. All of these issues figured prominently, as did the generally regrettable living conditions of the Scottish people, whose most basic requirements, such as housing and full-time education for children, were not seen to be adequately met. In the face of these exigencies, the SNP was said to offer the only viable alternative to the Conservatives and Labour, parties whose front figures were portrayed as 'virtually indistinguishable' from each other.[54] The SNP had an advantage over the two UK parties in that its policies were 'based on knowledge of the facts of the Scottish situation as they now are', and in her column in the *Hamilton Herald*, Winifred Ewing predicted that the 'first shackle of London-based control is going to be broken right here in Hamilton'.[55]

This summarises the general line in SNP material released in connection with the by-election, and it demonstrates that the specific British post-imperial context was not given any prominence. However, international developments in general were. The *Hamilton Herald* shows clearly that the SNP did invoke other nationalist movements in its struggle for an independent Scotland. Reference was made to the 'more than 60 nations – many smaller and most poorer than Scotland – [which] have gained freedom and a seat at the United Nations'[56] since the end of the Second World War. One SNP voter, participating in what was set up to look like a vox pop, contended that 'commonwealth countries have

[53] National Library of Scotland, P.1a.7030, *Hamilton Herald*.
[54] *Ibid.*
[55] *Ibid.*
[56] *Ibid.*

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flourished on becoming independent of Westminster rule'. And the back page of the *Hamilton Herald* included a section giving details of recent Plaid Cymru electoral successes at Carmarthen and Rhondda. A reference was also made to the 1967 referendum in Gibraltar, in which a large majority of Gibraltarians voted to remain under British, rather than Spanish, sovereignty – intriguingly, this lone reference to a Commonwealth case was to one which did *not* further diminish Britain's role in the world.

When reference was made to nationalist activities elsewhere, no specific analogy was drawn between the case of Scotland and that of other countries. Most crucially, no reference at all was made to Britain's new role in a post-imperial world, or to imperial developments in general. The remnants of empire seem conspicuously absent from this as well as other publications prepared by the SNP for the by-election, among which we have been unable to locate a single comment linking Scottish nationalism to imperial decline. There is also a remarkable shortage of references to foreign policy more generally, except from a considerable number of statements concerning the feasibility of entry into the European Economic Community.

The fact that the eclipse of the British Empire was apparently not crucial to the SNP at the time of the by-election does not necessarily mean that it was insignificant to the Hamilton electorate. Newspaper coverage of the election may give an impression of why the SNP polled as well as it did, and in the following we turn our attention to newspaper articles, editorials and letters to the editor written in connection with the Hamilton by-election. We begin at the local level in the pages of the weekly *Hamilton Advertiser,* before moving to the Scottish focus of the *Glasgow Herald* and the *Scotsman*, and then, finally, the British perspective through the lens of articles and editorials appearing in the *Guardian* and the *Times*.

The local weekly newspaper the *Hamilton Advertiser* included extensive coverage of the by-election, but failed to predict an SNP win. As late as a week before the election, the *Advertiser* contended that 'it is hard to believe there can be other than a Labour victory'.[57] Not surprisingly, the paper had an avowedly local focus and was concerned with very concrete political issues of relevance to its readers. However, in an editorial describing the political climate surrounding the by-election published a week before the event, the perceived general 'apathy' of the Hamilton electorate was explained by reference to structural, non-local conditions:

> There are no fiercely-held convictions to be debated, no furiously fought engagement in which to strike blows for great causes . . . It is this loss of the sense of reality which has taken the heart out of our political life. Britain has lost its vocation, its sense of destiny as a nation. Having handed over an empire, we are left without a role – our

[57] *Hamilton Advertiser*, 'Which?', 27 Oct. 1967.

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> occupation is gone . . . we cannot make our national will felt over a quarter of a million white Rhodesians; and we have forfeited the respect of peoples whom once we proudly ruled.[58]

Here we find a direct commentary on the fall from imperial grandeur and the suggestion that this had fundamentally influenced the way Britons perceived themselves at the local level. Yet for all the underlying sense of impotence and disorientation, the source does not link imperial decline directly to the electoral success of the SNP, or in any way view Celtic nationalisms as the answer to Britain's or indeed Scotland's predicament. On the contrary, the SNP is said to represent 'small-minded provincialism'. Nationalism, then, is neither seen as a natural response to – nor a logical consequence of – imperial decline. Crucially, the *Hamilton Advertiser* never returned to this theme in order to explain Ewing's success in the aftermath of the election. This is perhaps surprising, given this pre-election diagnosis; yet the connection was not made, even with the benefit of hindsight.

Instead, the paper made much of Ewing's personal appeal. Her candidacy was described as a 'kiss of life to a public that was suffocating from lack of interest'.[59] Furthermore, the SNP had, according to the newspaper, the distinct advantage that 'the election came for them at a moment when the major parties were in a state of disarray'.[60] Faced with a weak Labour electoral campaign, 'a classic instance of masterly inactivity',[61] the SNP emerged as the only alternative to Labour, which had held the constituency for the previous fifty years. The campaign was won at the local level, and lost in London by a party that 'suffered locally from the well-earned unpopularity of the Government at Westminster'.[62] In summary, the paper's coverage gives the impression that, while Ewing had a strong appeal to many voters, her success could more plausibly be interpreted as a vote against the current political establishment.

The theme of the protest vote, prominent in the *Advertiser*, was also taken up by the Scotland-wide newspaper the *Scotsman*, which interpreted the Hamilton result as 'a blow at the whole Labour Government, their policies and performance. It was an indication of resentment against Whitehall and Downing Street.'[63] Although the election was largely interpreted as a reaction *against* the government, the *Scotsman* emphasised that the Hamilton outcome could not be understood as 'a freak result'.[64]

[58] *Ibid.*
[59] *Hamilton Advertiser*, '"Scots wha hinnae" won for Winnie', 10 Nov. 1967.
[60] *Hamilton Advertiser,* 'After the Ball', 10 Nov. 1967.
[61] *Ibid.*
[62] *Ibid.*
[63] *Scotsman,* 'Vote Rebuff Turns Spotlight on Mr Ross', 4 Nov. 1967.
[64] *Scotsman,* 'By-election Aftermath', 4 Nov. 1967.

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An editorial published on 4 November explicitly linked the by-election result to a perceived rise in *cultural* nationalism and warned the political establishment against underestimating 'the intellectual strength of the self-government movement'.[65] This is interesting, because the other newspapers analysed here did not make much of the relevance of Scottish cultural nationalism to the election result. That the *Scotsman* should choose to comment on the issue, however, suggests a deeper rift in a shared British cultural identity than the 'protest vote' argument would indicate.

In its first editorial commenting on the election, the *Glasgow Herald* identified as the most important reason for SNP success 'the widespread disillusionment with the Government's handling of Scottish affairs'.[66] This analysis was further developed in an editorial published a few days later, in which the sentiment of discontent in Scotland was related to a perceived UK-wide feeling of frustration with a government that was seen as running the country from a distant centre: 'A widespread feeling of remoteness from government is not confined to Scotland and Wales. It is a nationwide problem associated with the increasing power exercised by the central government, not least in local authority matters.'[67] This interpretation assumes the election result to be a consequence not of a crisis of national identity, but as a direct result of very concrete political decisions that had resulted in further concentration of political power in London. But it was after the fact, in what can reasonably be characterised as a U-turn, that both the *Scotsman* and the *Glasgow Herald* decided to interpret the SNP victory as a natural response to a distant London government whose political agenda insufficiently acknowledged Scotland's exigencies. And even with the benefit of hindsight, the two papers failed to identify the post-imperial dimension as having any immediate relevance.

Turning to the UK-wide press, the coverage in the *Times* clearly invoked a sense of national crisis, although, perhaps surprisingly, the SNP victory was described as an outcome which could alleviate rather than exacerbate the prevailing tensions. An editorial published the day following the election referred to the outcome as 'an excellent result, better in the jolt it will give Scotland's political future than either a Labour or a Conservative victory would have been'.[68] Ewing's triumph was declared a much-needed wake-up call to the other parties, which had for too long neglected Scotland's needs: 'The merit of Mrs Ewing's victory is that it forces British political parties to think in a fundamentally new

[65] *Ibid.*
[66] *Glasgow Herald*, 'Aftermath', 4 Nov. 1967.
[67] *Glasgow Herald*, 'Back Home', 6 Nov. 1967.
[68] *Times*, 'A Scottish Victory', 4 Nov. 1967.

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way about Celtic nationalisms before it is too late.'[69] In other words, the Scots were seen to be choosing the only option available to them in the face of a government which had proven unable to deliver, and two major parties 'refusing over the years to apply more than palliative measures to the national claims of Scotland and Wales'.[70] The paper also saw the resentment in Scotland as based upon very real material issues, such as the 'comparative poverty'[71] of the country in comparison with England, and 'unemployment rates which are consistently higher and earnings which are lower than the English'.[72] In line with the Scottish newspapers, the *Times* refused to write off the Hamilton result as a mere aberration, emphasising that if this Labour stronghold could fall, so could many others.[73] The paper considered the vote of no confidence which the Hamilton election constituted to be based on purely economic factors.[74] In this newspaper, too, the imperial aspect was conspicuously absent from the election coverage, and cultural and historical factors were not considered particularly important to explaining the result.

The *Guardian*'s coverage differed significantly in that it placed considerable emphasis on the emotional and cultural aspect of the SNP's appeal to voters. To the *Guardian*, the Hamilton result and the Plaid Cymru victory at Carmarthen the previous year constituted a warning to the London-based parties that Scotland and Wales were 'increasingly impatient about Westminster's total failure to solve their special problems'.[75] Celtic periphery voters' dissatisfaction with the present state of affairs was specifically linked to Britain's new, less significant, world role:

> Large groups of voters are in a highly emotional mood, which has been caused by the shock of discovering Britain's reduced status in the world, and the pain of economic adjustments. Could not the Welsh or the Scots manage their own affairs better? The economic prod seems to be the sharpest goad towards nationalism, but once the question is asked in economic terms, cultural and historical prods are driven in.[76]

Nationalism, according to the *Guardian*, had achieved its present popularity not least because it was an 'untried means of escape from what seems to be a stagnation that has persisted';[77] it provided a 'third way', giving parties with a nationalist agenda a special appeal to voters: 'At present the Nationalists, alone among political parties, have a magic

[69] *Ibid.*
[70] *Ibid.*
[71] *Ibid.*
[72] *Ibid.*
[73] *Ibid.*
[74] *Ibid.*
[75] *Guardian,* '"History Made" in Scotland', 3 Nov. 1967.
[76] *Guardian,* 'Don't Laugh at the Threat, it Has Promise', 17 Nov. 1967.
[77] *Ibid.*

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about them – can **generate** an emotional appeal before which logical calculations tend to crumble.'[78] Thus, the nationalist movement, far from being a movement with only a temporary appeal, was seen as having a deeper *raison d'être*, being based on more than just the major parties' inadequacies. The *Guardian* was the only newspaper to comment explicitly on the state of 'Britishness', portraying the election result as a symptom of a profounder rift between the Scottish and the English: 'There is also the English ascendancy, the vague but consistent English indifference to Scottish existence that has suddenly been seen in Scotland as part of the problem of being British. The Scots are expected to be British while the British remain English.'[79]

This 'sudden' realisation that the Anglo-Scottish relationship was a fundamentally unequal one may be suggestive of the kind of renewed sensitivity to internal differences which some historians have described as a predictable outcome of the disappearance of the imperial 'cement' of Union. But we are reading between the lines here. While the sources indicate that reasons for SNP success at Hamilton were many and profound – with well-grounded resentment towards successive Westminster governments and the 'relative deprivation' of Scotland within the UK being the primary ones – the end of empire was at best a remote context in the landmark events of October–November 1967. Our extensive trawl through SNP internal correspondence, campaign material and speeches bears little evidence of a sustained preoccupation with (or even awareness of) the electoral opportunities presented by Britain's declining fortunes abroad. A wider survey of press coverage reveals some residual commentary on the global situation, but this is far outweighed by local material grievances and public disaffection with the two major parties. The most that might be said is that the cumulative successes of the SNP played into a more general crisis of national purpose and cohesion, with the political situation in Hamilton repeatedly described as one of 'apathy', 'stagnation' and 'remoteness from government'. Conversely, Ewing's victory in 1967 brought scenes of hope, even euphoria, in nationalist circles that might seem vaguely analogous to the independence celebrations that characterised the decade the world over. But remarkably few contemporary sources made that connection explicitly.

## A hypothesis too good to be false?

It seems tempting to conclude that H. J. Hanham's 'cramped and restricted' verdict about the post-imperial provenance of 1960s Scottish

[78] *Guardian*, 'Seeds of Defeat?', 5 Dec. 1967, emphasis in original.
[79] *Guardian*, 'After Hamilton, what now for Nationalists?', 4 Nov. 1967.

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separatism is simply false; a classic case of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, mistaking an alluring historical coincidence for a fundamental causal relationship. To the extent that we can find evidence of contemporaries drawing such connections, these too could be dismissed as the mistaken diagnosis of journalists and intellectuals, scrambling for plausible explanations for unprecedented political developments that eluded their grasp. Post-colonial nationalism only rarely presented any serviceable framework for packaging and pedalling the political message of the SNP. To the extent that the wind of change blew through Scotland, it was arguably a northerly, with little or no relationship to the southern gusts that swept aside the last remnants of empire in Africa.

Yet this somehow fails to capture the full complexity of the issue, and it is therefore worth considering whether there are alternative readings or perspectives that might help to make sense of the recurring shards of evidence that do place Scottish separatism in a wider, global context. As we have already noted, the circumstantial evidence tying Scottish separatism into contemporaneous liberationist discourses in other parts of the globe seems difficult to dismiss as a mere coincidence. Whether we consider the rapid pace of African decolonisation, the civil rights movement in the US, the 'Quiet Revolution' in Quebec, the indigenous rights movement in Australia and New Zealand, the eruption of the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland or even the secession of Jamaica from the West Indian Federation in 1962, powerful philosophical currents in the 1960s fostered a favourable climate for national separatism and self-determination. Can we reasonably conclude that Scotland was *sui generis*, peculiarly impervious to the outside world?

Here, we need to bear in mind that there were two very good reasons why the SNP might have actively distanced itself from any philosophical alignment with post-colonial struggles elsewhere. The first goes to the very heart of nationalism as an organising principle, namely that while the nation is an inherently modern phenomenon (at least, in its overt political claims), a principal component of its social appeal relies on establishing its pre-modern or even primordial credentials.[80] Thus, it hardly served the philosophical inclinations or political purposes of Scottish nationalists in the 1960s to present the SNP's successes as a sudden windfall, drawing opportunistically on contingencies external to Scotland. It was emotionally more satisfying to claim a deeper mantle, with the SNP reaping the rewards of generations of nationalist endeavour. This explains, for example, the time and energy invested by the SNP in refurbishing Bannockburn Day as a more visible, popularly observed

[80]This is the standard modernist interpretation, as articulated in e.g. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (1983); Ruth Wodak *et al.*, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity* (Edinburgh, 2009).

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totem of nationalist teleology.[81] At Winifred Ewing's first Bannockburn rally following her 1967 victory, she openly challenged the 'propagandists' and 'political myth-makers' who would explain away the political advances made by her and her party. In her speech, she highlighted specifically (among other fallacies) 'The legend of our rise is due to the British Empire's fall'; a rare SNP invocation of the imperial decline thesis, yet deployed here for the purposes of refuting its explanatory power.[82] It is hard to imagine a more explicit disavowal of the central premise we have set out to test, yet we need to be wary of its implications. It obviously and emphatically did not suit the needs of the SNP to depict Scottish separatism as a belated reaction to the sudden disappearance of the fringe benefits of being British.

The other reason why the SNP might have sought to distance itself – consciously or otherwise – from post-colonial nationalism elsewhere is related to the key challenge the party faced into the 1970s: to convince the electorate that Scotland could encompass the material, natural and human resources to constitute a viable nation-state. The idea that Scotland was either too small, too poor or too isolated to make its way in the world as an independent nation was (and remains) the constant companion of SNP candidates, and the task of refuting it was its number one imperative. To this end, aligning Scotland's cause with ailing states such as Nigeria, Ghana or the Congo, all of which had experienced political violence, civil disorder and economic mismanagement, was hardly going to sway the argument. This also explains why the relatively sedate cities of Oslo, Copenhagen and Stockholm appear more readily in the SNP records and public rhetoric than Salisbury, Nairobi or Lusaka. The immediate purposes of garnering electoral support militated against any direct, self-conscious alignment of the SNP cause with a global liberationist ethos.

Therefore, the relative absence of any direct, self-conscious anchoring of Scottish separatist discourse in the global eclipse of empire does not necessarily decide the matter. But it does allow us to rule out certain variants of the imperial decline thesis. First, the notion that the momentum for Scottish independence somehow had its material or spiritual origins in the colonial world, only belatedly making its presence felt in the metropole once the empire had been rent asunder, can be safely discarded. There can be no simple recourse to a decolonising 'impact factor', with events on the colonial periphery rebounding inwards on the

[81] National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6038/6, Folder 4, Memorandum by Dr Andrew W. Lees on Bannockburn Day, 7 Jan. 1968. See also papers relating to the enhanced status of Bannockburn Day in *ibid.*, Folder 8.

[82] *Ibid.*

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imperial state.[83] Secondly, there is every reason to doubt the economic argument, eloquently summarised by Michael Fry, 'that Scots exchanged national independence for imperial profit 300 years ago and now, seeing no more profit in prospect, promptly reverse their loyalties'.[84] Although material imperatives were at the forefront of the SNP agenda, these were never framed in terms of lost earnings from imperial adventures. Nor is there any obvious correlation between the SNP's uneven electoral appeal and specific regions economically affected by imperial retreat.[85] The 'cramped and restricted' metaphor is not at all borne out by emigration figures, which held firm throughout the decades of decolonisation – there was no simple 'closing off' of opportunities in this sphere as a consequence of imperial decline.[86] And, finally, the more generalised notion that the collapse of empire removed from the equation an entire spectrum of 'others', which had hitherto lent meaning and purpose to a common Britishness, makes little sense in empirical terms. If anything, the 'othering' of Commonwealth British subjects was at its most intense in the 1960s, with a series of highly public debates about curbing Commonwealth immigration, the plight of Kenyan/Ugandan Asians, and impending 'rivers of blood'.[87]

There remains, however, one potential framework that might encompass the post-imperial dimensions of Scotland's separatist surge in the 1960s – one that has never been seriously invoked despite decades of historical debate. But it is not to be found in the 'grubby wreck of old glories' in Asia and Africa. Rather, the fate of imperial civic culture in the once self-styled 'British' Dominions offers some compelling parallels that deserve closer attention. In 2008, A. G. Hopkins called for a root

[83] On the 'impact' paradigm, see Stuart Ward, 'The MacKenzieian Moment in Retrospect', in Andrew Thompson, *Writing Imperial Histories* (Manchester, 2013).

[84] Fry himself dismissed this as a 'cynical view' in *The Scottish Empire* (Edinburgh, 2001), 498.

[85] Economic historians have in fact emphasised the surprising resilience of the British economy during the decades of decolonisation, which saw unprecedented levels of sustained growth. See for example Charles H. Feinstein, 'The End of Empire and the Golden Age', in *Understanding Decline: Perceptions and Realities of British Economic Performance*, ed. Peter Clarke and Clive Trebilcock (Cambridge, 1997); Jim Tomlinson, 'The Decline of the Empire and the Economic "Decline" of Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, 14.3 (2003), 201–21. Although some of the SNP's early successes were in areas particularly affected by industrial decline (Hamilton 1967, Glasgow-Govan 1973), this was not the case with Donald Stewart's win in the Western Isles at the 1970 general election.

[86] Scottish emigration to Australia in the three decades after 1945, for example, was nearly three times the level of the preceding three decades. See Malcolm Prentis, *The Scots in Australia* (Sydney, 2008), 77.

[87] Although the major studies pay virtually no attention to Scotland; see for example Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Post-War Era* (Ithaca, 1997); Randall Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Post-War Britain: The Institutional Origins of a Multicultural Nation* (Oxford, 2000).

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and branch 'rethink' of decolonisation, widening the concept to include the profound changes to settler colonial societies wrought by the end of the British Empire, and the corresponding corrosion of the idea of a 'British world'.[88] Although these communities – with the exception of the rebel regime in Rhodesia – did not actively struggle for liberation from imperial rule (having secured self-government generations earlier), they nonetheless exhibited profound nationalist tendencies that would transform their civic landscapes, erasing many of the older British rites, rituals and public symbols, and substituting them with local, home-grown alternatives.

In Canada, this was dubbed the 'nouvelle nationalisme' in 1964 by the editor of *Le Devoir*, Claude Ryan (referring explicitly to English Canada, not Quebec).[89] The same term was to appear four years later in Donald Horne's assessment of the 'new nationalism' in Australia, which he defined as an impulse to dispense with the language of loyalty and instigate a wholesale renovation of the national civic fabric.[90] Heated debates about the designs of new flags stripped of their Union Jacks, new national anthems in place of 'God Save the Queen', new oaths of allegiance, new national holidays, new royal styles and titles, and even new official names for the nation itself, became the order of the day. Progress was uneven, and in some instances remains incomplete – witness the ongoing flag debates in Australia and New Zealand – but the changes in attitudes and allegiances were nevertheless profound. And these inevitably found their political champions who to this day remain symbols of the new nationalism in their respective communities: Pearson and Trudeau in Canada, Gough Whitlam in Australia, Norman Kirk in New Zealand and, for a time, Southern Rhodesia's Ian Smith. Although representing widely differing political inclinations, they each proved adept at harnessing the mood for national renewal, drawing political momentum from their capacity to move the idea of the nation beyond the bounds of Britishness. New Zealand's Keith Sinclair captured the prevailing mood in 1963: 'For us to want to be British is a poor objective, like wanting to be an understudy or a caretaker – or an undertaker.' He spoke of the 'very many changes in New Zealand, of a kind which make me believe that a New Zealand civilization is not impossible'.[91]

[88] A. G. Hopkins, 'Rethinking Decolonization', *Past and Present*, 200.1 (2008), 211–47.

[89] 'Le dilemme du drapeau', *Le Devoir*, 15 Aug. 1964. Jack L. Granatstein saw fit to use a rhetorical question mark in his chapter: 'The New Nationalism? Symbol vs. Reality', in *Canada, 1957–1967: The Years of Uncertainty and Innovation* (Toronto, 1986).

[90] Donald Horne, 'The New Nationalism?', *Bulletin*, 5 Oct. 1968.

[91] Keith Sinclair, 'The Historian as Prophet', in *The Future of New Zealand*, ed. M. F. Lloyd Pritchard (Christchurch, 1964).

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There now exist sufficient studies of the new nationalism to allow identification of its key characteristics.[92] First, it is clear that the common denominator was the dwindling purchase of a universal Britishness as a unifying principle. New nationalist rhetoric was invariably predicated on the substitution of older, more remote attachments and loyalties with something more immediate, and self-validating. Secondly, these new sensibilities emerged virtually in lockstep with the dwindling moral force of the British Empire as a credible framework to sustain the idea of a British world. Although the specific issues that animated public awareness varied widely from one context to the next, a broader chronology beginning around the time of the Suez crisis and culminating in British entry into the EEC in 1973 is now well established. Thirdly, the driving impulses behind these developments were, more often than not, material and political grievances associated with Britain's inability to provide the economic, military or moral leadership of an imperial metropole – far more so than innate cultural forces, welling up to overwhelm the popular resonances of Britishness. Fourthly, this meant, in turn, that the new nationalism proved to be neither uniform nor universal in its appeal, and struck deep pockets of popular resistance to relinquishing the British ties. Thus, the refitting of the national firmament was invariably characterised by often bitter public quarrels, rooted in an absence of popular consensus over the appropriate scope and emphasis of the new-look nation. The Canadian flag debate of 1964 and the Australian national anthem contest in 1973 were among the most visible of these protracted controversies.[93] And lastly, and perhaps most intriguingly in relation to the Scottish dilemma, in only rare instances did the new nationalism register any awareness of the global currents that had lent it shape and conviction. Australians might cast an occasional envious glance at Canada's Maple Leaf Flag, but by and large no attention was paid to parallel developments elsewhere. The new nationalists were content to view their project as the long-delayed arrival of subterranean rumblings in the native soil. Indeed, finding a self-sufficient, home-grown sense of the people was the very object of the exercise.

[92] See Stuart Ward, 'The "New Nationalism" in Australia, Canada and New Zealand: Civic Culture in the Wake of the British World', in *Britishness Abroad: Transnational Movements and Imperial Cultures*, ed. Kate Darian-Smith, Stuart MacIntyre and Patricia Grimshaw (Melbourne, 2007), 231–63. On Canada, see José Eduardo Igartua, *The Other Quiet Revolution: National Identities in English Canada, 1945–71* (Vancouver, 2006); C. P. Champion, *The Strange Demise of British Canada: The Liberals and Canadian Nationalism, 1964–68* (Montreal, 2010); for Australia, James Curran and Stuart Ward, *The Unknown Nation: Australia after Empire* (Melbourne, 2010); on Rhodesia, Peter Godwin and Ian Hancock, *Rhodesians Never Die: The Impact of War and Political Change on White Rhodesia 1970–1980* (Oxford, 1993).

[93] See Ward in Thompson, *Writing Imperial Histories*.

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What has all this to do with political nationalism in Scotland? Here we need to be clear about two things. Scotland was no Dominion, and despite an older tradition of Home Rulers in Scotland and Ireland aspiring to something akin to Dominion status, there is no mistaking the very peculiar constitutional context that gave rise to new nationalist currents in the old Commonwealth. And there can be no suggestion that these currents somehow provided the underlying inspiration or impulse behind separatist politics in Scotland. Australasia and Canada (still less southern Africa) were self-evidently not the fundamental cause of devolutionary pressures in the UK. But their example does provide an entirely new way of understanding the momentum behind Scottish separatism in a post-imperial context. Virtually all of the five characteristics outlined above – the diminished resonance of Britishness, the chronological overlap with imperial decline, the importance of material and political divergence from the metropole, the lack of popular consensus and the blinkered national optics – can be identified to a greater or lesser extent in the SNP's electoral progress through the 1960s and into the 1970s.

A further comment is warranted here about the decisive role of material grievances. Keith Webb pointed out in the 1970s that the dilemma in accounting for the SNP's sudden emergence into the political spotlight lies not in explaining the existence of national feeling, which had long been 'a permanent feature of Scottish culture'. 'What is needed', he argued, 'is an explanation for why nationalist feelings already held by many Scots became politicised when they did.'[94] The Hamilton sources clearly demonstrate that the breakdown of an Anglo-Scottish community of culture was rather less important than the collapse of a shared community of interest; the economic disparities between north and south weighed far more heavily than issues relating to cultural self-determination. The chief adversary was invariably Westminster and the governing elite, not the English people framed in terms of a cultural 'other'.[95] Webb and others tended to view this as conclusive proof of the absence of any significant interface with the demise of empire, but this is based on a narrow reading of the handover of constitutional power in Asia and Africa. The striking parallels with the diverging material interests that underpinned the 'new nationalism' in the old Commonwealth have never been seriously considered. Winifred Ewing's February 1968 lament that 'this Government cares more about dead birds on English beaches than about living men in Glasgow' had echoes throughout the British world

[94] Webb, *The Growth of Nationalism in Scotland*, 74.

[95] This reluctance to campaign on Scotland's cultural distinctiveness was remarked upon as early as the mid-1970s, with Michael Hechter going so far as to conclude that 'the SNP tacitly admits the cultural indistinguishability of Scotland from England by resorting to [the economic] justification for national independence'. In *Internal Colonialism*, 308.

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in the years of decolonisation.[96] Indeed, only a month prior to this statement, the New Zealand *Dominion* editorialised against the Wilson government's defence cuts, urging: 'Can we trust Britain again? The British Government's duplicity compels us to ask the question. How much reliance can we put on Britain's word?'[97] Little wonder that Rhodesia's rebel regime blithely assumed that it would find a kindred spirit in Mrs Ewing. The government's minister for agriculture, Lord Graham of Montrose (himself a Scot), wrote to her in the most affectionate terms, recording his conviction 'that the battle for Scottish independence is against the same enemy as we are battling'.[98]

This confluence of opinion about London's inability (or unwillingness) to sacrifice its own interests for the greater British good was invariably coupled with talk of Britain as a spent force in the world – a perception that was directly informed by the political and material realities of imperial decline. In 1973, J. G. A. Pocock reflected on the deeper currents that had produced these centrifugal pressures towards greater civic autonomy throughout the British world. Speaking from his native Christchurch, he concluded:

> The British cultural star-cluster is at present in a highly dispersed condition, various parts of it feeling the attraction of adjacent galaxies; the central giant has cooled, shrunk and moved away, and the inhabitants of its crust seem more than ever disposed to deny that the rest of us ever existed. Since it no longer emits those radiations we felt bound to convert into paradigms, we are free and indeed necessitated to construct cosmologies of our own.[99]

In much the same way, the 'shrinking' and 'cooling' of Britain's imperial reach occasionally registered in Scottish separatist discourse, but not as a direct, self-conscious guide to action, emulating the independence upheavals in Asia and Africa. Rather, it provided a key formative context, subtly linking Britain's declining fortunes in the world with the weakening capacity of the metropole to serve the interests of the periphery – and hence the imperative of taking independent action to find a new way forward.

In the light of this deeper subtext, it seems less surprising that the end of empire did not feature prominently and regularly in the internal workings of the SNP, or the daily grind of the Hamilton by-election – or that it only broke the surface of public awareness occasionally, and only in certain contexts. It is not necessary to locate copious references

[96] Quoted in the *Observer*, 'Celtic Threat', 18 Feb. 1968.

[97] *Dominion*, 'The Day Britain Let Us Down', 18 Jan. 1968.

[98] National Library of Scotland, Acc. 10090/113, Montrose to Ewing, 8 Dec. 1967. Ewing's side of the correspondence is not preserved in the archive, but there are clear indications in Lord Montrose's letter that her replies were decidedly cooler in tone.

[99] J. G. A. Pocock, 'British History: A Plea for a New Subject', *Journal of Modern History*, 47 (1975), 21.

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to Canada, Australasia or other settler societies in Scottish sources to see these wider commonalities at work. It is far more profitable to observe how these ideas circulated, chiming in with a transnational perception of an empire that was no longer able to deliver, but a perception that resonated in highly specific, localised ways in the many contexts where it mattered. In Scotland, it was not until the second half of the 1960s that it made its presence felt, in the wake of the Rhodesian crisis, the defence cuts of 1967/8, the devaluation of sterling and the perception that the Commonwealth had run its course as a vehicle of British influence (derided by the *Scots Independent* in 1966 as 'no more than an integrated club whose black members even talk of throwing Britain out').[100] These ingredients were by no means a constant presence, but they did tend to appear at times of deeper reflection about the changes affecting Scotland's place in the Union. One final, telling example is Ludovic Kennedy's meditation on 'the Disunited Kingdom', broadcast on the BBC in June 1968:

> Now, there can be no denying that this union brought to Scotland a stability in her affairs which she had never before had. And there can be equally no denying that we on our part greatly helped you, first by force of arms, to establish and then to administer, the biggest and richest empire there has ever been. Well, that empire is now dead. It didn't, as empire's [*sic*] go, last long . . . And it may seem to you – as it does to many of us – that it was the empire above all, that made and kept us British. Today it is mainly you – the English – who think of yourselves as British. Most of us up here think of ourselves as Scots.[101]

The point is not that Kennedy accurately conveyed the views of 'most of us up here', or indeed that he got the imperial dynamics of Scotland's deliverance from Britishness right. The significance lies in how the cold facts of an empire 'now dead' lent shape and meaning to the contemporary relevance and utility of being British – a process that was duplicated in myriad ways throughout the British world.

A. G. Hopkins has termed these subtle interconnections 'post-colonial globalization' – connections that were by no means confined to the new nationalisms of the settler-colonial world.[102] But these parallels are particularly useful as they offer a coherent, empirically verifiable and hitherto unexplored way of understanding the inner workings of imperial decline in the emergence of the new political nationalisms of the 1960s, not least in Scotland. At the very least, they offer a more productive way forward than to dismiss the imperial context out of hand as a complete irrelevance. To be sure, more work is needed to establish and elaborate the

[100] *Scots Independent*, 'The British Crisis: Scotland Must Act Herself', 3 Sept. 1966.
[101] National Library of Scotland, Acc. 10090/113. Ludovic Kennedy, 'The Disunited Kingdom', transcript of BBC broadcast, 12 June 1968.
[102] Hopkins, 'Rethinking Decolonization', 246–7.

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interconnections between the new nationalisms of the former Dominions and the contemporaneous surge in national separatism in Scotland – not to mention Wales and England – in the 1960s and 1970s. But we would do well to recall the rarely cited subtitle of Tom Nairn's 1977 classic that triggered so much debate: 'Crisis and *Neo-Nationalism*'.

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