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# Europeanisation, Devolution and Popular Sovereignty: On the Politics of State Transformation in Scottish Nationalism

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## Abstract

This research examines the interacting role of processes of state transformation – namely, devolution and Europeanisation – in the development of Scottish nationalism. It draws on the concept of ‘member statehood’, examining how relationships within nation states have been transformed by the European dynamic. Superficially, Scotland seems to contradict central aspects of this theory: the main citizen mobilising response to Brexit has been in Scotland and aimed precisely at restoring a notional Scottish popular sovereignty by re-joining the EU. However, an analysis of Scottish political development reveals a more complex picture putting state transformation theories in a more sympathetic light. Scottish independence emerges as a complex, contradictory response to post-neoliberalism and the crisis of member-statehood. While Europeanism has proved a useful tool for competing forces in Scotland, it has been refracted through problems of a ‘democratic deficit’ and claims for the ‘restoration’ of sovereignty appealing to disenfranchised voters.

## Keywords

nationalism, sovereignty, Europeanisation, state transformation, neoliberalism, Brexit, Scotland

## Introduction

This research examines the interacting role of processes of state transformation (Bickerton, 2012) – namely, devolution and Europeanisation – in the development of Scottish nationalism. ‘Brexit’, the United Kingdom’s (UK’s) referendum decision to leave the European Union (EU), has generated new interest in the UK’s internal politics and national units. Scotland has been of particular interest, after 68% voters favoured remaining within the EU during the referendum. This fact has

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been highlighted by the Scottish National Party (SNP), the party dominating Scotland's devolved parliament, to emphasise conflict with Westminster, but also to present a more positive narrative of Scotland as a 'European' or 'cosmopolitan' nation. Sociological critics have long criticised these notions (Davidson et al., 2018; Meer, 2015). Psephologists have likewise questioned whether Scottish voters are intrinsically more favourable to the EU (Curtice, 2016; McCrone, 2016), or whether such attitudes are a temporary product of nationalist grievances against London rule. However, these critiques should be balanced against another fact. Regardless of the complexity in underlying voter attitudes, the elite, cross-party consensus in Scotland has been overwhelmingly Europhile. This in itself deserves greater scrutiny. The Europhilia of Scottish politics may be seen as a legitimisation tactic used by rival elites for separate purposes, but this does not even explain how Scotland turned from the most Eurosceptic area of Britain to the most pro-EU (e.g. Torrance, 2013). In that process, there was clearly a dynamic interaction between elite leadership and public attitudes. Contestation over the form of articulating Scottish sovereignty – between unionists, devolutionists and nationalists – appears to reinforce an all-round Europhilia. Whereas elsewhere in the UK, the rights and wrongs of the EU are debated, in Scotland all debate centres on which constitutional arrangement is best suited to securing the EU's benefits.

These peculiarities may offer insights into wider questions about how state transformation interacts with public consciousness. To examine this, I have drawn upon recent research developments centring on the concept of 'member statehood' (Bickerton, 2012), which examine how traditional relationships *within* nation states have been transformed by the European dynamic. Central to this agenda is the notion of popular sovereignty, understood as the claims made by democratic forces on the state (Loughlin, 2013, 2016). Critical scholars have long noted that the era of high neoliberalism (1979–2008) was accompanied by disenchantment, disengagement and demobilisation. Terms such as 'post-democracy' (Crouch, 2004, 2019) and the 'void' (Mair, 2013) were advanced to explain the resulting rise of expert administration. Explanations tended to centre on wider processes of globalisation, consumer individualism and the decline of ideology. The innovation of research into *state transformation* is precisely that it examines the properly political mechanisms of these processes, and advances specific, mid-range theoretical claims about the reduction of democratic efficacy. This suggests that the EU works less as a supranational entity, and more as a mechanism for insulating domestic elites from democratic claims on state power, through legalism and bureaucracy (e.g. Cunliffe, 2020b; Heartfield, 2013). State transformation thus transforms the central bargain between states and subjects, by deferring decisions to the level of transnational administration.

My argument aims to enrich this theory by examining its implications in an unlikely context. Superficially, Scotland seems to contradict central aspects of this theory: the main citizen mobilising response to Brexit has been in Scotland and aimed precisely at restoring a notional Scottish popular sovereignty by re-joining the EU. Indeed, this dynamic has increasingly become the central oppositional force ranged against UK state power. However, an analysis of Scottish political development reveals a more complex picture that puts state transformation theories in a more sympathetic light. Scottish independence emerges as a complex, contradictory response to post-neoliberalism and the crisis of member-statehood. While Europeanism has proved a useful tool for competing forces in Scotland, it has been refracted through problems of a 'democratic deficit' and claims for the 'restoration' of sovereignty appealing to disenfranchised voters. Nonetheless, two additions must be made to account for the Scottish case. First, that popular sovereignty has a complex relationship to its national state container (Giddens, 1985; Tilly, 1992). Scottish national politics, in elite or popular form, has thus always had a negotiated relationship to the UK state. Second, that state transformation transcends the immediate question of the EU. The 'modernisation' of the British state form through devolution involves many parallels in terms of democratic efficacy and

confused accountability, and ultimately worked to empower domestic elites at the expense of popular actors (e.g. McCafferty et al., 2009; Law and Mooney, 2012).

### *Sovereignty and State Transformation*

The link between sovereignty and the modernisation of state forms has been long established (e.g. Loughlin, 2013; Grimm, 2015). The modern notion of sovereignty, the absolute final say over a dominion, was itself a challenge to the multi-layered complexities of medieval politics (Held, 1995). Equally, critics of modernity charged that bureaucratisation would eventually crush all the seeds of sovereignty insofar as this implied the autonomous agency and personhood of the state. Perhaps the most famous early theorisation belongs to Schmitt (2005: 65), who observed that ‘nothing is more modern than the onslaught against the political’. Depoliticisation, with the rise of impersonal rules and bureaucracy, meant the denigration of the personification of the state and thus the prospect of politics.

Such classical perspectives may offer some insight into recent trends, where the corollary of globalisation theory was the belief that sovereignty had become an irrelevance given the retreating role of the nation state (Bickerton et al., 2006; Loughlin, 2016). Theorists including Held (1995) presented a narrative where traditional state-sovereignty had been supplanted by ‘cosmopolitan governance’ and a (as yet open-ended) transition to cosmopolitan democracy (see also Beck and Grande, 2007). The complex, multi-layered nature of global power, according to these perspectives, served to foreclose the foundations of democratic politics in popular sovereignty, and to problematise established notions of authority, legitimacy and consent. A proliferation of academic discussions on the theme of sovereignty has largely been founded on conjugations such as ‘late sovereignty’ or ‘post-sovereignty’ – terms that have been particularly common in scholarship on Scottish politics (Keating, 2001; MacCormick, 1993, 1996). State actors were said to be answerable to an abundance of new agents, rather than a nationally confined, majoritarian electorate.

Nonetheless, perspectives on cosmopolitan order (Delanty, 2005), whether normative or descriptive in nature, have been forced to address the persistence of nationalism (Beck and Levy, 2013). For Bauman (1992), nationalism would persist long after its effective functions of state-making and control had been superseded, as an organiser of identities and as a compensation from alienated global capitalism. Sub-state nationalism has proved a rich field for theorists of the multi-layered order, precisely insofar as they testified not merely to accommodation with its parameters, but also to seeing post-sovereignty as their catalyst of possibility, whether for new modes of regionalism (Harvie, 2005) or for outright independence or for a hybrid mode of governance that transcended such distinctions. Much of the emphasis, for the likes of Guibernau (2013), Keating (1997) and McCrone (2001), was on how nationalists were making nations without making states, framed in terms of a broader disarticulation of nation and state under ‘globalised’ conditions. And, for some time, this formed an accurate description of sub-state nationalist behaviour during the era where neoliberal globalisation dominated the conceptual horizon of politics.

However, such established conceptual framings have been challenged by events following the 2008 crisis of neoliberalism and the fallout for democratic politics issuing from subsequent austerity regimes. While region-nations like Catalonia, Scotland and Northern Irish Nationalists have retained a cosmopolitan and ‘European’ self-image (e.g. Woolard and Frekko, 2013), their claims of sovereignty have often brought them into conflict with the global order. Scotland’s moves towards independence in 2014 were criticised both within European institutions and by Barack Obama’s American administration. The Catalan Parliament’s pursuit of a secessionist referendum brought the independence movement into sharp conflict with European institutions (Bourne, 2014; Portos, 2020; Wagner et al., 2019). In Northern Ireland, the institutions of cosmopolitan governance have

sought to retain a peace process built around power-sharing and devolution, against pressures both from Brexit and from a reinvigorated Sinn Féin. Sub-state nationalisms have thus proved capable not merely of forming a basis for popular mobilisations around identity, but also for asserting sovereignty to the point of threatening to disrupt the established state system. Overall, the forces of cosmopolitan governance have tended to side with state stability wherever possible. Just as importantly, smaller and weaker states that have achieved autonomy, partly under the guidance of the European Commission, have been the principal victims of austerity measures imposed by the 'Troika' alliance of international institutions (Genna et al., 2016; Habermas, 2012). This has served to problematise the relationship between regional-nationalism and cosmopolitan governance.

Such events suggest a re-examination of how sovereign nation states have been transformed by interaction with seemingly 'trans-national' claims of order. A common presumption is that the EU was itself becoming a type of state actor, superseding the sovereign nation state, an idea central to both federalist visions of Europe's future and to Eurosceptic critiques of an emergent 'super-state' menacing the sovereign nation. However, one commonality in the research literature on the EU is that it rejects these theories of change (Bickerton et al., 2015; Moravcsik, 2020; Schimmelfennig, 2021). Most now stress the inter-governmental nature of European power. However, an emerging critical literature has charted how the EU, while not itself constituting a state nor eroding national sovereignty per se, nonetheless transforms the domestic state. States have remained formally, juridically independent. But, internally, the relationship between executive power and popular forces has shifted to the detriment of the latter. Inter-governmental agreements to abide by rules and regulations limit what was called 'popular' or 'democratic' sovereignty, the (putative) answerability of state actors to the population. This new relationship between government and society, a departure from the traditional 'nation state', has been termed 'member-statehood' (Bickerton, 2012). Tuck (2020; 2018) pictures this as a type of 'constitutional order', where governments agree to impose constraints on what domestic legislatures can do. The ultimate effect is to introduce new complexities that strengthen executive power relative to traditional democratic challengers. The EU would thus not be regarded as a new type of state; instead, its function is to transform the domestic state.

The 'member statehood' account of state transformation suggests a new critical slant on how domestic power relations interact with international order. It also suggests a more nuanced account of how claims of sovereignty interact with claims of class. Alongside the liberal-left cosmopolitan critique came the Marxist notion that 'sovereignty' reinforces a methodological nationalism founded in myths, whether national or international (as, for instance, with the 'myth of 1648'; Teschke, 2003). The underlying force of that critique is that a myth of sovereignty serves to license state power or a ruling class. This reflects the running theme in much critical theory of nationalism and national sovereignty, which focuses on its divisive nature and on its incompatibility with the reality of globalisation. For Bauman (2000: 54), 'Throughout the turbulent, and yet unfinished period of national self-production, the national game has been a zero-sum game; sovereignty of the other has been an assault against one's own'. However, the case of Scotland will suggest how nationalist mobilisation has proved compatible both with a post-sovereign vision of order and with cosmopolitan nation-branding. The critical question is thus to detect the inconsistencies and limits of that vision, particularly in the context of the crisis of neoliberal globalisation where it has proved difficult for centre-left parties to regain legitimacy. In Scotland, nationalist ideology has been dominated by myths about the possibilities of globalisation and of Scotland's status within global institutions (e.g. McCrone, 2016; McCafferty et al., 2009).

Considering the above, it is possible to advance an alternative perspective, where a 'myth of globalisation' functions to strengthen ruling groups, precisely by emphasising the powerlessness of the state in an era of 'transnational institutions', 'pooled sovereignty' or 'multilevel governance'.

Far from multiplying resistance, the Foucaultian/Deleuzian stress on dispersed power may paradoxically function to reinforce the executive (Deleuze, 1992; Dreyfus and Rabinow, 2014; Foucault, 2019). Government responses to the crises of 2008 and 2020 have emphasised that nation states can and do exert significant power, even over borders and ‘globalised’ economic forces. As this emphasises, the denigration of the agency of state power may serve to reinforce powerful actors and weaken democratising forces. Loughlin (2013: 37) thus emphasises, ‘If the overall aim is to explain more precisely the phenomenon of political power, its nature, the manner of its exercise, and the means available for holding power-holders to account, then we need a coherent account of this concept’.

An alternative perspective would thus reintroduce the concept of sovereignty, with the following caveats. Firstly, to consider sovereignty a *plastic* social relationship between state and subjects: to see sovereignty as ‘an institutionalised form of political agency – and agency, by its nature, is flexible’ (Cunliffe, 2020a: 38–39). In other words, to the contested roots of ultimate political authority, without reference to an essentialist social subject of ‘the nation’. The latter is perceived simply as the framework or field through which rival actors impose claims on the state. ‘In this formulation, sovereignty rests neither in the ruler, nor in the office of government, nor in the people: sovereignty vests in the relationship itself’ (Loughlin, 2013: 43). In a separate field, both Marxist and Bourdieusian theories of nationalism have been moving towards parallel conclusions (Brubaker, 1996; Davis, 2015). Second, there is a focus on the state as a theatre of social conflicts surrounding the representation of social division. Class division is perhaps the most traditional form, although in the UK rival national claims and jurisdictions also form part of this picture. Finally, those prior concepts inform a historical perspective on the relevance and the ontological substance of the EU. Rather than focus on the EU’s trans-national ontology, this perspective focuses on what it does to these domestic relationships (Bickerton, 2012; Heartfield, 2013). The concept of popular sovereignty thus implies a slant on ‘national’ sovereignty: investment in national self-rule or, alternative, cosmopolitan governance will be unevenly spread across the community. Cosmopolitan professions such as academia, or businesses with international trade links, will be less invested than less mobile, peripheral working-class populations or businesses with domestic markets.

### *Applications to Britain*

Brexit, insofar as it explicitly breaks with EU structures, has been the most frequent area for developing this critique of the member state form. However, as Anderson observes, the literature has been weaker in its efforts to capture other dynamics within the British state form:

Essentially, avoidance of any direct comparison between the political structures of Westminster and the complex of institutions centred in Brussels, with its flanks in Luxembourg and Frankfurt, as two patently different systems of representation. . . that a stark contrast exists between them is plain. It can be put most simply like this. In design, Westminster is a pre-modern construction that has survived long past its due date; Brussels is a post-modern fabrication that is determined to outlive every alternative to it. (Anderson, 2021)

Addressing Britain’s distinctive state form may go some way to explaining the puzzle of Brexit, namely that, while it withdrew constraints on democratic sovereignty, it was never paralleled by a re-democratisation process. Instead, the break from the EU re-emphasised conflict over other fractures within the UK state form. In attempting to capture this, Bickerton (2019) notes three dimensions: parliamentary sovereignty; popular sovereignty; and what he calls ‘federal sovereignty’.



Initially, conflict centred on the split between the popular vote of 2016 and the authority that the British constitution bestows on parliament, which was overwhelmingly in favour of remaining in the EU. This dynamic was itself complex and contradictory. The UK state has historically been defined by an exceptional degree of parliamentary power, which, ironically, the most articulate supporters of Brexit have regarded as the central democratic virtue of the British constitution. Parliamentary sovereignty is seen as a relatively unmediated mode for expressing the popular will, compared, say, to written constitutions that require super-majorities to overturn. However, Brexit itself set off many of the contradictions within this model. Plebiscites unglued voters from traditional party-political allegiances, witnessed by the number of Labour-voting constituencies that ignored their party's pleas to vote remain. This new voter agency ignited a crisis of sedimented class-based political representation. That in itself was a major source of internal crisis. It has caused perhaps a permanent party-political realignment, with Labour having lost significant ground in Northern 'heartlands' while gaining new credibility in cities and university towns.

Perhaps more lasting problems come from the UK's multi-national dynamics. The first phase of crisis related to Northern Ireland, where, amid the collapse of devolved power sharing in Stormont, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) had effective veto power inside a fractious coalition with Theresa May's Conservative Government. Questions over Northern Ireland's border arrangements, and the Good Friday Agreement, dominated negotiations over the Brexit process, and were presented (accurately or not) as the EU's main 'sticking point'. This settlement terminated with the 2019 General Election, with a preference for Johnson's promise to 'get Brexit done'. However, this reinforced the contradictory dynamics of the multinational state. Efforts not to intrude on the Irish Peace Process resulted in separate EU trade arrangements for one fraction of the state, which have remained an ongoing topic of antagonism and even violence. Scottish critics charged that this gave Northern Ireland unfair economic advantages. Subsequently, disenchantment with Westminster administration of Brexit and the coronavirus caused further surges in support for Scottish independence, with 22 consecutive opinion polls showing a pro-independence majority. Far from leading to a unified moment of democratic renewal, the superficial impact of Brexit was to reinforce national(ist) antagonisms.

Bickerton (2019) has framed the above fractures as questions of 'federal sovereignty', and relates them to institutional divisions caused by the devolved settlement. Certainly, the administrative and political division of the UK has been a factor in facilitating the rise of nationalism. However, nationalist sentiment caused by disenchantment from Westminster existed prior to devolution: indeed, the latter emerged as a mechanism to channel these grievances, suggesting that the fragmented nature of popular sovereignty pre-exists institutional changes. This article thus aims to demonstrate the deeper roots of claims to Scottish sovereignty, in an autonomous tradition of complex class alliances that preceded devolution and was later transformed by it. This will have three central implications. First, to reinforce the complexity of popular sovereignty as a concept, particularly in its relationship to an assumed nation state 'container' (Giddens, 1985). Second, to draw attention to the effect of state transformation within the UK, independent of the EU. Devolution has had a similar effect to member-statehood, insofar as it creates blurred layers of accountability between the public and state power. Moreover, I will show below that devolution was actively conceived in precisely this guise, as a response to the fragmentation of sovereignty amid processes of globalisation. This, in turn, raises the prospect that member-statehood was only part of a broader post-democratic realignment of politics. Lastly, I want to suggest that these points offer insights into how the Brexit process has evolved.

Tilly (1992, 1996) has observed that challenges to 'national states' (which he distinguishes from nation states) take two forms: on the one hand, from international institutions such as the EU, as observed in the theory of member statehood; on the other hand, from minority nationalisms. One



point to consider, in that context, is that the UK's break with the EU was from a member state to a national state, as opposed to a 'nation state'. Critics may counter that this framing poses the risk of essentialising the role of the 'nation' within the state. And part of what I wish to demonstrate is that Scotland's contemporary national consciousness has effectively modern origins, which, conceivably, could be traced to the 1970s, rather than searching for an essentialist foundation in Medieval sovereignty. However, the upshot is that the UK is broken not just into administrative units (devolution/federal sovereignty), but also into sense national-popular units with their own complex relationships to state power. Popular sovereignty is thus not precisely contiguous with the British 'national' state, reflecting decades of the neoliberal fragmentation of collectivist politics.

Thus, while emphasising the utility of Bickerton's emphasis on sovereignty and state transformation, the impact of Brexit has been uneven not just institutionally but also in terms of popular mobilisation. Overlapping claims of a democratic deficit, particularly centred in peripheral and working-class communities, have been features of the Brexit referendum in England and also the pro-independence movement in Scotland, including, with caveats, its reaction against Brexit. Partly this reflects the institutional politics of devolution. But devolution itself has a complex foundation in claims of Scottish popular sovereignty, claims that have been central both to outright nationalists and to 'unionist' parties like Scottish Labour. This goes some way to explaining why there is little Scottish popular or elite investment in Brexit. Equally, a critical perspective on Scottish nationalism should start with the limits of its claims to sovereignty. Official nationalist discourse paints member-statehood as the foundation and guarantor of Scottish autonomy, and this narrative has significant popular investment, featuring in some of Scotland's largest ever demonstrations. However, this depends on persistent myths of openness and globalisation that seem ill-adapted to the practical circumstances facing Scotland after Brexit.

### *The End of National Corporatism*

Scotland's role within the UK was always mediated by recognition of cultural-national autonomy (Paterson, 1994). The surface level of this originates with the 1707 Act of Union, which recognised Scottish control over religion, education and the legal system, although the 1689 Claim of Right, declaring the sovereignty of the Scottish people, also figures as a regular point of reference, right up until court debates over the prorogation of parliament in 2019 (O'Neill, 2013). Post-Union, Scotland's role in a multinational state was transformed by imperialism, with Scots playing a disproportionate role in a wider British Empire (Finlay, 1997; MacKenzie, 1998; MacKenzie and Devine, 2017). Partly for this reason, Scotland has little tradition of outright national separatism during central moments of European state formation (e.g. Davidson, 2000). In its first incarnation, the SNP was committed to a form of statehood defined by the parameters of the Commonwealth, with many senior members and supporters being pronounced Empire loyalists (Finlay, 1992). Separatist inclinations were largely confined to a small, fragmentary pro-Irish left. Home Rule themes of Scottish sovereignty were nonetheless present across mainstream British politics. The early SNP drew from a confusing tapestry of these class-based sovereignty claims: among its leaders were Robert B. Cunninghame Graham, a founder of the Labour Party, and conservative figures from the Scottish upper class. Crucially, though, even in their leftist incarnations, they likewise envisaged Scottish autonomy within an expanded Empire market order.

The end of Empire coincided with a movement towards a national-corporate model of state transformation (Glass, 2014). As a counterpart to Keynesian demand management, regional policies emerged to manage regional black spots of unemployment in areas dominated by heavy industry and suffering disproportionately from the collapse of the Empire, with Scotland being a particular victim (Halkier, 2006; McCrone, 2017a,b). These policy institutions have been called

'spatial Keynesianism' (e.g. Brenner, 2004). Politically, a set of Unionist institutions emerged to manage Scotland's national interests within an emerging corporatist nation state built around capital-labour bargaining. These initially took the form of voluntary business coalitions, who took it upon themselves to modernise Scotland's ageing heavy industrial structures and solve problems of regional unemployment, partly through luring inward investment. Such semi-voluntary coalitions would play a more explicit role in state-led development after the War, with a greater admixture of working-class representation. Institutions such as the Scottish Council (Development and Industry) and the New Town collaboratives were effectively tasked with these aims. Much of the role also fell to the bargaining efforts of the Scottish Office, Scottish Secretaries and local MPs. Scotland's role within the post-War corporatist state was thus secured by a confusing patchwork of institutional representatives. Efforts were dedicated to managing the social contradiction of Scottish unemployment through bargaining with American firms. It is crucial to remember that, while Scottish workers were 'bought in' to the British state, principally through welfare-Labourism, they did so in a mode of passivity, rather than through an explicit sense of popular sovereignty. Earlier enthusiasm for Britishness was largely framed through the mode of Empire cosmopolitanism, which was beating a rapid retreat.

The foundations of contemporary Scottish nationalism can thus be traced to specific features of state development. Scotland's legacy as a lead part of a multinational state running a global Empire leaves traces in a preference for 'openness' and cosmopolitanism. Conversely, Britain's transition to a relatively closed Keynesian state, centred on national management of full employment, shaped Scottish consciousness and leaves traces of a 'moral economy' (Hearn, 1998; Thompson, 1971). Throughout the post-war era, Scotland was a recipient of British collectivism: for instance, it had one of the highest rates of social housing outside of the Eastern Bloc. Relatedly, collectivist themes of 'solidarity' continues to shape campaigns for and against independence. Davidson (2014) has thus argued that the pro-independence movement of 2014 was based in a paradoxical defence of 'Britishness' in its post-1945 mode.

Party-political Scottish nationalism emerged as a serious force in the late 1960s against the backdrop of a national-corporatist British order already in a state of disorder. This coincided with specific features of Scotland's development, namely the decline of an indigenous bourgeoisie, the collapse of regional policy (with Heath's 'Selsdon Man' agenda) and the concurrent discovery of North Sea oil. The latter served to transform the established problematisation of Scottish underdevelopment. Its political corollary was a sudden eruption of support for the SNP. Their vote surged to 30% under the slogan, 'It's Scotland's Oil', and the party secured 11 Westminster seats. These themes also transcended explicit party-political nationalism. They may be detected at the cultural level, in John McGrath's (anti-nationalist) *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*, perhaps the most famous theatrical production in twentieth century Scotland, which directly linked the entry of American oil corporations into Scotland to the legacy of the Highland Clearances. Even future UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown (1975) used his introduction to the *Red Paper on Scotland* to compare Scotland's experience to that of colonisation and to complain of the influence of multinational corporations. In economics, arguably the most influential figure was Firn (1975), whose research pitted Scotland against rising forces of 'external control' with the rise of absentee owners.

The ambivalence of North Sea oil should be placed in this context. On the one hand, oil reinforced the notion of a Scotland colonised by alienating, external forces. On the other hand, its economic impact was to empower democratic forces within Scotland. As Brown (1975: 8) put it, 'For the first time since the Union, oil and the political response to it has swung the balance of influence within Great Britain in favour of Scotland, giving the Scottish Labour Movement in particular a new bargaining power'. For Nairn (1975: 22), the oil industry, 'the largest, richest,

most aggressive, and most international form of capitalism in the world', would achieve what Scotland's earlier literary renaissance had failed to do, namely, to create a national-popular Scottish resistance. Nonetheless, nationalism remained polarising in a political climate still shaped by UK-wide notions of solidarity. The first referendum on a devolved system of government in 1979 thus failed to gain sufficient support. Oil revenues would peak under Margaret Thatcher's reign in the early 1980s, during an era of mass unemployment that particularly afflicted regions historically marked by heavy industry. The result grievances would be abiding themes of Scottish culture and politics.

### *Thatcher and Popular Sovereignty*

Themes of Scottish popular sovereignty had begun to re-emerge prior to Thatcher, framed around the simultaneous collapse of Scottish ownership of industry and the discovery of North Sea oil, prompting anxieties about 'external control'. But Thatcherism's decisive response to Britain's post-colonial economic failure served to inspire a national-popular current and a cross-class alliance based on themes of 'Scottish control'. Notable closures took place in traditional Scottish heavy industries, but also in light manufacturing factories that reflected earlier modes of regional development through inward investment. Unemployment reached historically unprecedented levels. Scotland, especially its worst affected areas, continued to largely elect Labour representatives, but the latter adopted an increasingly militant language of national resistance, speaking of Conservatives in Scotland as 'viceroys', 'invaders' and 'governor generals' (e.g. Torrance, 2009; Hassan, 2012). Conversely, an emergent alliance, dubbed the 'Scottish lobby', sought to restore the national corporatist alliance, but with limited success due to their lack of purchase in Westminster. As such, there emerged, centring on the Scottish Labour Party, a national-corporate coalition for devolution.

This lobbying coalition nonetheless drew from mass movements (e.g. against factory closures) and from themes of popular sovereignty. The 1989 Claim of Right for Scotland thus asserted, 'the sovereign right of the Scottish people to determine the form of Government best suited to their needs'. Far from being outright nationalist documents, these claims instead reflected a tapestry of inter-connected political moderates, grouped around the Labour Party, liberal civil society and the trade union bureaucracy. Kellas (1992) emphasised, conversely, that the themes in the Claim of Right were inherently federalist rather than devolutionist: that is to say, emphasising the bottom-up consent of the people rather than the top-down delegation of the state. However, the themes have never been regarded as subversive, and prior to the 2014 referendum the above principle was reaffirmed by all parties in the Scottish Parliament excluding the Conservatives.

Indeed, the key split within the coalition did not emerge over the constitution, but rather over social questions. Popular opposition to Thatcherism coalesced into the anti-Poll Tax movement, which, perhaps misleadingly, was presented as a social experiment imposed by London on an unwilling Scotland (alternatively, it may be an opportunistic effort by Scottish Conservatives to win back disgruntled Edinburgh rates payers) (Torrance, 2009). Alongside UCS, this would be remembered (correctly or not) as one of two post-war, pre-2014 moments where working-class identity and Scottish patriotism formed an effective compound in resisting a Westminster policy. That campaign demonstrated the potential disjuncture between an authentically popular movement and the Labour-controlled electoral lobbying operation. The old representatives of social democracy in Scotland, Scottish Labour and the STUC, opposed the tactic of civil disobedience over the Poll Tax. Some portrayed it as dividing the working class, and preferred official tactics focused on elections. However, the concerns were not simply for working class unity: they were equally worried that civil disobedience would divide the respectable coalition of interests behind an alternative

development strategy. Protest would endanger the ‘proactive consensus building’ (Booth and Moore, 1989) behind the long march to devolution. Crucially, Labour’s misreading of the Poll Tax would reopen avenues for outright Scottish nationalist themes to converge with popular consciousness. The short-term impacts included the shock elections of SNP MPs in Glasgow seats. Longer term, it informed a new imagination of working-class agency in Scotland that would influence devolved politics through the Sheridan-led SSP and would later strongly influence the Yes campaign in the 2014 referendum.

There were two interwoven strands of anti-Thatcherism, each bearing a claim to represent authentic Scottish popular sovereignty and to be restoring self-rule against an outside oppressor. One was an establishment effort, with a lobbying coalition grouped around the Labour Party. The other was the ancestor of the contemporary Yes coalition, drawing its sense of authenticity and – notably – respectability from claims to represent the unemployed and political outsiders. It is crucial to regard these developments within the *longue duree* of British state development. Efforts to incorporate Scotland’s classes into the state form had reached barriers related to the end of Empire, the decline of an indigenous bourgeoisie and the determination of a part of the UK ruling class to use globalisation to impose market discipline on the state, against the democratising demands of workers and regional interest blocs.

### *Scotland and Europe*

It was during this phase that ‘Europe’ began to play a central function in Scottish national projects and self-identity. The historical link between Scottish popular sentiment and Europe is surprisingly recent in origin, and there are obvious overlaps with the influence on Scotland of wider transformations in the British state, from the national corporatist to Thatcher’s vanguard neoliberalism. Europhilia in Scotland can thus be dated quite specifically to the 1980s. Previously, when Edward Heath proposed European membership as part of a package of liberalising reforms, it was opposed by Scottish MPs loyal to the earlier mode of national-corporatist development. In 1975, when the issue reappeared, Scotland’s representatives including all eleven nationalists were in favour of withdrawal from the EC. These views reflected strong strands of popular consciousness. Scots were unambiguously more ‘Euro sceptic’ than the rest of Britain: 41.6% of Scots opposed entry, far greater than the RUK figure (32.8%; Torrance, 2013: 8). In other words, undoubtedly in the late 1970s, and probably well into the 1980s, Scottish voters and politicians were more hostile to the European project than their English counterparts. Such ‘animosities’ were widely noted:

Scotland’s attitude to the EEC is both ambivalent and (historically) entirely rational. The apparent animosity to the EEC is to some extent an extension of the 275 year old feud with “remote” London Governments. Scotland of all the regions of the UK was the least enthusiastic for the EEC in the 1975 referendum. . . . Since then a majority of Scots have consistently told opinion pollsters that they would like to be out [of the EEC]. (Commission of the European Communities, 1982: 2)

Scotland’s Europhilia, which has been the central feature of mainstream Scottish political discourse, thus originates with Thatcher’s transformations in the British state. More specifically, it may be linked to the failure of industrial resistance and its national-corporate offshoots (the ‘Scottish lobby’) to exert sufficient influence over a Thatcher-dominated state. Thatcherism marked the symbolic end of a perceived social contract with Scottish workers, where the British state would guarantee jobs not just in general, but specifically to appease Scottish sentiment. Scotland’s various centre-left forces thus began moving towards the EU as a mechanism for breaking with dependence on Westminster, which had transformed, under Thatcher, from a source of Scottish

livelihood to a drain on Scottish resources, given the importance of North Sea revenues to Thatcher's wider project. The central theme of Scotland's Thatcherite experience was the 'democratic deficit'. The cross-party Scottish Constitutional Convention linked this democratic deficit to the new opportunities of Europe. Here, the openness of Europe to small national voices is contrasted to Scotland's experience under the Conservatives:

This is a democratic deficit which runs contrary to Scotland's distinct political identity and system. It is affecting relations with the rest of a United Kingdom in which most Scots wish to remain, and hampering Scotland's ability to make its voice heard in the world, particularly within a fast-developing European Union well attuned to such voices. (Scottish Constitutional Convention, 1995: 3)

There are also clear overlaps with wider transformations in centre-left leadership. A crucial turning point was Jacques Delors' appeal to the Trades Union Congress in 1988, where, after a succession of defeats culminating in the Miners' Strike, he told them 'Social Europe' was the 'only game in town' (Mitchell, 2012; van der Maas, 2007). Delors' successful appeal precipitated Thatcher's Eurosceptic turn, with her infamous Bruges speech occurring soon after (Daddow, 2013; Daddow et al., 2019). The upshot was that British leftism had conceded defeat on its earlier efforts to manage unemployment and impose social and regional equality through the compulsion of a sovereign parliament. Instead, the focus turned to state transformation: workers' rights imposed from above; regional inequality solved from below, via an entrepreneurial local state and the devolution project. The architecture of contemporary Scotland was conceived within this historical framing.

### *Devolution: British State Transformation*

Devolution was framed as a restoration of a Scottish popular sovereignty that had failed to find full expression inside the structures of UK parliamentary sovereignty. Scottish Labour leader Donald Dewar thus opened the Parliament with references to Medieval sovereignty: 'the wild cry of the Great Pipes. . .back to the distant cries of the battles of Bruce and Wallace' (quoted in McCrone, 2017a,b). Devolution had the accoutrements of the representation of a popular movement, encompassing civic Scotland institutions, trade union bureaucracies and leaders of political parties. Yet it was also marked by the processes of state transformation associated with wider processes of liberal globalisation. Brown and Alexander stated explicitly:

the legislation for the Parliament's powers set out to advance the wellbeing of Scottish people, not in the sheltered economies which gave rise to the old nation states of the past, but in the new global economy with its multilayered institutions. (1999: 11–12)

This rhetoric suggests the resemblance between EU membership and devolution, as two processes, linked by globalisation, accompanying the decline of traditionally conceived national sovereignty. As nation states were being crisscrossed by complex forces, old modes of management lose their efficacy. However, optimists held that this would allow new types of (entrepreneurial) citizen agency to thrive.

Devolution was thus accompanied by the explicit depoliticisation of the national economy, at least insofar as political control had been conceived in the era of national corporatism: 'The take over of Scottish enterprises is a natural process of corporate governance that is outwith the control of Government' (Scottish Executive, 2000: 7). This suggests the central paradox of how popular sovereignty interacted with processes of state transformation. The movement for a Scottish Parliament grew out of discontent with mass unemployment, and a desire to restore the national-corporate



contract with the state, in which government owed a specific responsibility to distribute employment to Scotland. Grievances from the Thatcher era had inspired a sense of Scottish separateness. Yet the institutional embodiment of these forces enshrined the essential post-Thatcherite consensus, which said nation states were powerless to shape demand or to manage the affairs of the private economy. What had initially been conceived as a means to an end (Scottish control to save Scottish industry) became an end in itself.

The wider effect of devolution, as Brown and Alexander suggested, was to distribute accountability and responsibility into a 'multi-layered' hierarchy. Critics in both the Marxist and Weberian sociological traditions charged that, for this reason, the Scottish Parliament proved particularly vulnerable to institutional capture by elites of the 'transnational capitalist class' (McCafferty et al., 2009). Devolution, they argued, was the corollary of wider processes of neoliberalisation. In retrospect, it can certainly be concluded that devolution did little to stop rising inequality and the financialisation of the Scottish economy: indeed, the settlement was premised on the inability of nation states to make serious impacts in regulating economic activity. However, the Scottish settlement has also proved amenable to certain demands from the left. Lobbying efforts secured influence for corporate interests and ensured that the Parliament never compromised the post-Thatcherite settlement of wealth and income distribution. Equally, it opened the potential for professional lobbies to achieve progressive reforms, such as elderly care, free prescriptions and lower university fees.

Still, the relationship of this phenomenon to popular sovereignty is complicated. Devolution was accompanied by declining political mobilisation, including at the ballot box. Trade union membership and other measures of collectivism, such as social housing, continued to decline (e.g. McCrone, 2017a,b; Hassan, 2012), despite a Parliament with sweeping domestic powers under the full command of the centre-left. Parliament framed its function as national restoration by greater competitive adaptation to globalisation. New modes of citizenship and integration were devised, centred on the figure of the enterprising citizen. Accompanying this was a technocratic, state-led national self-critique, which suggested that Scotland's national spirit had weakened due to a hostility to enterprise. The solution was presented not so much as the radical reduction of state spending, as in classical neoliberalism, but rather as a new ethic within the state elite, that would facilitate grassroots enterprise formation. The activities of private companies, including takeovers of what might be seen as nationally sensitive businesses, were now, in the government's own terms, 'natural processes'. However, supply side intervention in areas outside 'the economy' as previously conceived – education and culture – could help boost economic growth, which in turn would contribute to social objectives. National culture and institutions were thus refashioned to fit the needs of a globalising consensus. They become open to critical oversight where their activities are failing to boost entrepreneurship and growth in the economy, and they can be measured and improved on these grounds.

### *Nationalism, Europe and Globalisation*

Political opposition to the devolved consensus manifested largely through the SNP's Scottish nationalism. Their principle philosophical objection to devolution was framed precisely around the relevance of economic sovereignty, the latter being what Labour now claimed was redundant. Under Alex Salmond's leadership, the SNP emphasised that states did have the power to shape economics and to vastly increase their growth rates. However, this was based on premises that reinforced the consensus around neoliberal globalisation. The Irish model, so-called 'Celtic Tiger economics', suggested that small units in wider economic spaces could achieve economic 'take-off' through corporation tax cuts and deregulation. Salmond's framing of the relevance of sovereignty to globalisation is framed as a version of the 'Laffer curve', as shown below:

Ireland has only one striking difference from Scotland: it is no longer ruled from London. With the advantage of full independent membership of the European Union it has used that membership to attract resources and invest in the future. And it has used its sovereignty to develop and apply policies that first of all benefit its own people and its own country. Most of all it has been able to control its own taxation policies, matching them to the international demands of business and adjusting them as circumstances demand. (Salmond, 1996)

The foundations of this framing deserve consideration. First, 'independence in Europe' was not fully incorporated into the SNP's programme until the late eighties. Opposition emerged from traditional SNP supporters in fishing communities and from elements of the party's left-wing, who remained committed to a vision of popular sovereignty. Former party leader Billy Wolfe had thus presented the European Community 'as founded on fear, on authoritarianism and on greed' (Wolfe, 1973: 165). Second, the initial reasoning was founded in pragmatism, and specifically in efforts to reach the *English* (and rest of UK) market. As framed by Sillars, the purpose was to meet voters' unionist objections, which were based on the economic and emotional importance of free trade and open borders inside Britain: 'the essence of the independence issue lies in the customs union with England. . . the assertion of the customs union and our ability to place it cogently in the context of the wider European Community is the key to gaining independence' (Sillars, 1986: 183–184). Finally, the subsequent evolution of Scottish nationalist Europhilia reflected a particular discourse of national power. Lindsay (1991: 87), a key academic supporter of the SNP and a critic of the European project, suggested, 'the prospect of the independent membership of an increasingly powerful EC is seen as being part of [the] process of modernisation, of being associated with the important and powerful, of having seats at top tables'. Europe was thus seen to enhance Scottish sovereignty and political agency. What was not analysed, given our own conception of state transformation, was how Europe might reshape relationships between society and politics.

The contradiction in Scottish nationalism was rather similar to their Labour counterparts. Both inherited the legitimacy of having emerged from (what was framed as) an anti-Thatcherite national-popular resistance. There was little question, even from Scottish nationalists, that the devolved parliament was the legitimate institutional consequence of these movements. Equally, while Thatcherism was portrayed as a deliberate assault on Scottish economic integrity, the twin national projects emerging from the millennial consensus were committed to further entrenching the market's role in everyday life and its role in shaping the state. Both sides framed the Irish Tiger model as the exemplar of the Scottish future. And both parsed the Thatcher contradiction in similar terms. For Alexander and Brown (1999: 7), 'What [Scots] found unacceptable about Thatcherite Britain was not its commitment to enterprise – that would indeed have been strange from the country of James Watt and Andrew Carnegie – but its lack of commitment to social justice'. For Salmond, 'We [Scotland] didn't mind the economic side [of Thatcherism] so much. But we didn't like the social side at all' (Dale, 2008).

### *2014–2015: The Collapse of Unionist Hegemony*

In retrospect, Scotland's incorporation in the UK reflected a peculiar party-political alignment. This may be broadly related to phases of British state development: during the phase of Empire, Liberal Unionists and Conservatives dominated Scotland; during the national-corporate phase, and the Thatcherite aftermath, Labour dominated. Their perceived role in resistance to Thatcherism, via the corporate alliance for devolution, gave them an ongoing legitimacy as the party of Scottish nationhood. However, their culminating project had dual and contradictory functions. On the one hand, they presented devolution as a restoration of Scottish popular sovereignty, ending the



possibility of a democratic deficit and allowing for 'Scottish solutions to Scottish problems'. On the other hand, they emphasised the passivity of the nation state faced with the forces of globalisation. Devolution was thus a hybrid of 'restoring' popular sovereignty and accepting the impossibility of popular political control in the face of economic forces.

This settlement, and its party-political foundation, came apart during the referendum of 2014 and its aftermath. Labour gathered around itself all the forces of the Westminster and much of the Scottish establishment. This formed the basis of the Better Together coalition, which was led by New Labour officials, but formed into an official united front with Conservatives and Liberals. Its vision of Scotland's role within Britain (which was subsequently heavily criticised) focused almost exclusively on economic instrumentalism. Based on comments from a campaign official, the strategy was dubbed 'project fear': Scotland's reason for remaining in the UK was effectively reduced to the apocalyptic scenario of independence. Critics, including then Prime Minister David Cameron and previous Prime Minister Gordon Brown, charged this with being cold and unemotional, given the three centuries of history uniting the British people. However, this testifies to genuine difficulties in articulating a positive vision of 'solidarity'. Empire loyalty and its symbolic aftermath, the Union Flag and the Royal Family, was thought backward-looking, perhaps xenophobic and maybe even anti-Scottish. The national-corporate legacy of post-war solidarity proved equally problematic. The Con-Dem coalition was undertaking a wrenching transformation of welfare systems and public spending as part of its austerity programme. Labour's opposition was meek. In this context, as Davidson (2014) argued, Scottish independence supporters effectively captured the solidarity legacy of the post-war British state for themselves. The Yes campaign promised that an independent Scotland would restore public ownership of characteristically British institutions such as the Royal Mail. There were thus no secure moorings for a positive vision of Scottish-British identity.

This background is necessary to appreciate why the referendum proved so difficult for unionist forces in Scotland. Formally speaking, their margin was clear cut, despite last-minute panic after opinion polls suggested an impending Yes victory. Yet the result proved a decisive moral blow, precisely because a coalition of perceived outsiders, mobilising the legacy of the Poll Tax and other national-popular campaigns, had a spirit of anti-establishment revolt. Added to this was the underlying political sociology. In the bottom quartile of income, 56.4% voted for independence. Crucially, the energy here tended to relate to housing status: nearly 62% of social renters voted 'Yes', while nearly 65% of owner-occupiers voted 'No'. Another clear pattern here is a legacy of social deprivation and voting Labour. The referendum saw a significant realignment of voting in so-called 'Labour heartlands'. Dundee arguably had a longstanding tradition of outright nationalism, but Glasgow, West Dunbartonshire and North Lanarkshire were the also among the highest 'Yes' voters, and all had been unambiguously Labour voting areas. As Curtice (2014) notes:

Between them these four areas are amongst the top six in terms of the unemployment claimant count and the proportion living in an area of multiple deprivation, and amongst the bottom six in their proportions of people in professional and managerial occupations.

By contrast, rural Scotland, often renowned since the 1970s for its 'Tartan Tory' Scottish nationalism, mostly voted against independence. The effect was to disrupt a class-based imaginary of British popular unionism.

### *Brexit and Scotland*

The social basis and the political consequences of Brexit have been extensively reviewed (e.g. Virdee and McGeever, 2018; Goodwin and Heath, 2016). Therefore, this section will concentrate

on the implications that specifically apply to projects of state transformation in Scotland. To begin with, it is worth emphasising that support for Brexit was higher in Scotland than the more ideological presentations would suggest. Leave attracted 1 million votes from a total of 2.7 million. In many rural regions of Scotland, support rose to nearly 50%. Uncomfortably for most nationalist narratives, Brexit also attracted a not inconsiderable chunk of 2014 Yes voters. In summary, Scottish public opposition to Brexit was decisive, but not totalising. Conversely, Scottish elites, regardless of party preference, were nearly unanimous in adopting a pro-EU stance. This disjuncture between elite narratives and actual public behaviour is worth observing. It is equally worth noting that opposition to Brexit was likely shaped by the influence of a rival sovereigntist, national-popular campaign in the shape of the Yes movement and its SNP expression. Estimates of Euroscepticism prior to 2016 showed only marginal differences between Scottish and English attitudes, suggesting that political leadership and Scotland's own national question were important influences on the outcome.

Nonetheless, the effect of Brexit was to transform Scottish nationalist self-identity and wider elite perceptions of what the SNP represented. During the 2014 campaign, the Yes movement was often presented as dangerous, demagogic or nationalist. For one leading researcher, 'The existence of the United Kingdom symbolises the possibility of multiple identities. . . The rise of nationalism in Scotland, England and throughout Europe is a scourge on this tolerance' (Van Reenen, 2014). A common theme was that sovereignty was redundant and irrelevant in a globalised world. One of Scotland's leading authors thus claimed:

Independence is a conceptual mistake. We live in a global environment. The nation state is an irrelevant 17th century construct, and the autonomous nation state is even more fantastical. All countries are bound by a web of international and supranational obligations. (Mina, 2014)

The effect of Brexit was that such liberal critiques were reversed. English voters and Westminster leaders alike were subjected to claims of backwardness. The campaign slogan of 'take back control' was particularly singled out for representing an inherently reactionary worldview. Some broadsheet columnists used vitriolic statements that paralleled earlier responses to the Scottish independence referendum, with talk of the 'frightened, parochial lizard-brain' (Penny, 2016). Conversely, attitudes to the SNP shifted, as the party discovered newfound respectability to reflect their role in opposing Brexit. Journals of elite opinion that previously condemned Scottish independence moved towards sympathy, at least for the nationalist Scottish Government and its leader Nicola Sturgeon.

The demographics of the votes show both similarities and differences. Before discussing the similarities, one notable difference was age demographics: the Scottish independence movement was primarily a youth-oriented vote, and voters below pension age showed an overall Yes majority; the Brexit vote leaned in entirely the opposite direction. Such differences may be significant insofar as age is frequently seen as a marker of cultural politics, and notably the Yes campaign was cosmopolitan and pro-migration in character. However, this should not disguise the crucial point of commonality. Both votes exhibited significant anti-establishment swings in what were traditionally 'Labour heartlands'. Both won 'working class' majorities and won among deprived voters. Both emphasised themes of 'control' and pitched themselves in cultural and economic opposition to the Cameron-Clegg cosmopolitan austerity politics. And, therefore, both have 'elective affinities' insofar as they represent the breakdown of established grooves of the representation of social interests in politics.

There is thus some significance to the plebiscitical character of Britain's political crisis (2014–2020). Despite the 'centrist' style of politics, and the disavowal of ideology, British politics retained

a fairly traditional electoral map through the neoliberal era. Interconnected divisions of social class and culture were reflected in the North–South divide. However, this had been marked by significant declines in voting and mobilisation, particularly concentrated in ‘taken for granted’ Labour constituencies, as electoral competition centred on the demographically and economically preponderant South. Referendums (of which there were four during Cameron’s time) serve the function of disrupting a certain idea of political space. They equalise political agency across the whole national container, regardless of divisions into electoral constituency. For all the narrowness of referendum divisions, they thus allowed new prospects for expressing political discontent which were suppressed within the electoral system.

However, for all these commonalities, Scottish nationalist leaders styled themselves as the most stubborn and unyielding opponents of the authority of the Brexit vote. In terms of Bickerton’s opposition between popular and parliamentary sovereignty, they sided with the latter, albeit tactically, as a gambit on behalf of the preferences of the ‘Scottish people’. Equally, Theresa May’s government, given the task of implementing the popular will, developed an inconsistent approach to devolved authority, preferencing the DUP and side-lining the SNP as well as representatives of the Irish nationalist community. The failure to address the varying modes of popular investment in nationalism accounts for many of the UK state’s problems in administering the Brexit vote. Equally, it goes some way towards explaining why the break from the EU has not been matched by national-popular demands for democratisation of state power; or rather, why the latter has been filtered through the lens of minority nationalism.

### *Contradictions of Independence and Sovereignty*

Claims of Scottish sovereignty remain intrinsic to the appeal of Scottish nationalist government. Their narratives around independence depend on themes of power and control. *Scotland’s Future* thus declares that ‘[w]ith independence Scotland will control 100 per cent of our resources’ (Scottish Government, 2013: 5). Since the 1990s, this theme has formed the centrepiece of nationalist claims of dissatisfaction with the dominance of Westminster; a political awakening is thus seen as central to restoring economic control and thus prosperity through competitive imitation of small country success. The purpose of independence, on the surface, thus appeared to reinforce the neoliberal narrative of growth: corporation tax cuts are the mechanism cited as restoring Scotland to economic health, on the Irish Tiger model. Nonetheless, the rhetoric clearly asserts that economic decisions should be made *politicised*; the suggestion is of popular, sovereign control over economic matters: ‘we will control our own resources and make our own decisions about our economy’ (Scottish Government, 2013: 3). Economic populism, both neoliberal and collective, was thus central to the SNP’s rhetoric.

However, subsequent SNP thinking has moved in a markedly different direction. In the *Sustainable Growth Commission*, commissioned by Nicola Sturgeon to reorient the nationalist economic message, the theme of ‘control’ takes on a different meaning (The Sustainable Growth Commission, 2018). There are references to ‘spending control’, ‘fiscal control and discipline’, ‘get the debt position under control’, and an assertion that ‘the key issue is that the public finances remain in fiscal balance (other than borrowing for investment) over the economic cycle with debt and deficit policies controlled and credible’ (The Sustainable Growth Commission, 2018: 29). Control is thus not something possessed by the population, as in the White Paper’s rhetoric, but instead a self-limited prudence that government would apply, essentially as a form of austerity, to build up credibility with international agencies and investors. The goal is thus not to enhance popular control, but to keep sovereignty bounded within controllable limits. The paper approvingly references the controls imposed by international institutions, such as the IMF Fiscal Rules and the

EU's Stability and Growth Pact. 'The international experience is that countries that have such fiscal rules and guidelines tend to generate stronger fiscal outcomes than those without. . . Once that happens, financing for future developments tends to flow' (The Sustainable Growth Commission, 2018: 62).

Philosophically, the document reflects theses that directly reflect the themes addressed in the literature on member statehood. It thus suggests that smaller countries in wider economic spaces are more easily disciplined to capitalist forces: 'smaller countries, partly because of their greater need to respond to global challenges, produce better governance, policy and therefore living standards' (The Sustainable Growth Commission, 2018: 10). Themes of 'orderliness' and 'stability' predominate, equating discipline to external market processes with effective governance.

The most radical proposal for depoliticised, external control was to adopt 'Sterlingisation', which constitutes a radical move even compared to the monetary system of Europe's member states. Under the proposals, Scotland would unilaterally elect to use the UK's pound sterling currency 'for an extended transition period', effectively relinquishing monetary policy and key elements of financial governance to the successor UK state. This would separate a key, old-fashioned Keynesian economic levers from even notional public accountability, with Scotland subject to decisions made externally by the Bank of England. Sterlingisation is an extreme case, even compared to other ambiguities around Scottish sovereignty, insofar as the independent state would seemingly have less control post-independence than it does under a unionist settlement. The broader narrative of 'pooled sovereignty' and having a 'seat at the table' would be less applicable in this instance.

Such examples could be extended to other areas, such as the military, where the SNP has determined that Scotland should join NATO. The broader point is not simply that asserting Scottish sovereignty inherently involves concessions to the complexity of globalised governance. A deeper critique is that such decisions, set in advance of independence, already pre-judge the sovereign relationship of the emergent state with its underlying popular base. The gain, the 'seat at the table' of international institutions, is for the state executive; concessions, by contrast, are made on behalf of the scope of the popular will, the result of which likewise strengthens powerful actors, insofar as it insulates them from the type of demands that led states to a 'crisis of governance' in the 1970s. In other words, it locks in the type of sovereignty that has prevailed in the so-called 'post-democratic' era, Mair's (2013) 'void' separating public and power.

In terms of political sociology, Scottish nationalism has presented an increasingly attractive prospectus for Scotland's liberal middle class, offering both moral distance from Westminster and a vision of stability, without the disruptions posed by Brexit. The 2016–2020 interregnum in UK politics opened a window where the 'breakup of Britain' could paradoxically appear as the path of continuity. New post-Brexit realities may serve to disrupt this integration of nationalist mobilisation and professional administration. Equally, the SNP's status as Scotland's party of government, with power over many levers of professional patronage, enhances the likelihood of this integration persisting, even if the challenges facing independence itself have mounted. Moreover, the marketing of Scottish governance as inclusive, Europeanised and cosmopolitan has been a specifically moral attraction to this layer of voters and cadres, even if academic researchers have remained sceptical of these claims. However, the counterpart to the above has been a backlash from within the pro-Yes nationalist movement, often centring upon the impact of the impact of professionalisation on nationalist politics. Disruptive, class-tinged appeals to the 'left behind' and 'Labour heartlands', which characterised Yes mobilisation in 2014, have been supplanted by a rhetoric appealing to stability, order and national unity based on modest governance practices not dissimilar to Scottish Labour, the SNP's predecessors as Scotland's ruling party. Grievances against this emergent order are sufficiently acknowledged to feature regularly in the *National*, Scotland's pro-independence newspaper:

In every sector of SNP governance, the influence of big business and global corporations is clear. From its agricultural and fisheries policies to its failure to unstitch the feudal patterns of land ownership it's easy to detect the influence of multi-nationals. Those investments in lobbying fees and a willingness to meet the astronomical asking price for a berth at SNP conferences has paid off handsomely. Yet, while eager to protect the interests of a powerful few they are happy to abandon working-class communities on the pretext that their hands are tied by EU state aid rules. The real reason of course is that the leadership has an obsession with cosyng up to Brussels even though there is virtually no chance of an early entry into the EU. (McKenna, 2020)

The critical perspective developed in this paper may thus apply to both aspects of the SNP prospectus. On the one hand, their vision of independence develops themes that recall the neoliberal era of globalisation, including, for example, radical proposals for depoliticising monetary control which would be institutionally insulated from politics (popular or otherwise). On the other hand, the SNP combines formal commitment to the independence project with status as the stable governing party of devolution, which insulates the party from the forms of critique that would apply to governments of sovereign states.

### *Concluding Observations*

The nature of the UK state affected both the likelihood of leaving the EU and the qualitative impact of Brexit on democratising forces. On the one hand, the UK had retained some crucial aspects of sovereignty (especially over its money) that gave it far more leeway to 'exit' than other cases of Eurosceptic grievance, such as Greece, Spain and Italy. On the other hand, the UK's multinational nature, which had previously been buried within Empire loyalty or within the national-corporate state, reasserted itself in response to the decline of class-based representation. The 'populist' reaction, visible elsewhere, thus asserted itself in hybrid forms. Popular investment in national projects reflected generations of the depoliticisation of economic interests, and the associated erosion of social supports that ensured the reproduction of patterns of parliamentary representation. The way in which parliamentary sovereignty clashed with popular sovereignty reflected the underlying divisions of national consciousness within the British electorate. In England (and to a lesser extent Wales), the Brexit plebiscite allowed for an expression of popular sovereignty that broke through the established grooves of parliamentary politics. In Scotland, a pre-existing national-populist movement from 2014 collided with Brexit and reacted against what was perceived as a Westminster power grab at Scotland's expense. This reinforces the need to address how claims of popular sovereignty relate to a national container.

The UK's devolution process presents parallels with the most advanced critiques of the EU's impact on democracy. What emerges is a process of state transformation that imposes a dispersed, multi-layered structure of accountability, eroding the principal relationship between constituents and representatives. It appears to precipitate a parallel process of ungluing the traditional models of political representation, above-all of social class, in this sense adding to the 'void'. And there has been a parallel national-populist backlash, with appeals to an essentially empty notion of the national people in place of appeals to rival economic interests. The affinities between devolution and member-statehood, as two modes of state transformation, require further investigation.

However, the above does help to explain the complex effects of Brexit on democratic and popular mobilisation. Scotland remains the one area where an ongoing movement to continue the post-Brexit moment towards addressing democratic deficits. This movement is animated by a sense of sovereignty, issuing partly from a mythologised Medievalism but mostly from the past five decades of Scottish popular resistance; equally, these popular tropes are framed in opposition to Brexit,



a project itself designed to restore national autonomy. The result has been a programme that is founded on contradictions that have only accelerated with the Brexit process. For Scottish nationalists, the European project was initially meant as a route to achieve the popular goal of reconciling an all-UK market with formal political independence. After Brexit, EU membership may be among the biggest barriers to that goal. However, nationalistic resistance to Conservative Westminster has generated a national bloc built on a myth of cosmopolitan identity. That force could prove more powerful than any pragmatic objections.


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