

BEN JACKSON. *The Case for Scottish Independence: A History of Nationalist Political Thought in Modern Scotland*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. 210. \$28.99 (paper).

In *The Case for Scottish Independence: A History of Nationalist Political Thought*, Ben Jackson offers a very welcome addition to the burgeoning field of texts ruminating on the nature of contemporary Scottish political nationalism in the post-referendum era following the 2014 plebiscite, skillfully balancing both academic rigor and accessibility throughout the text to appeal to academics and the broader public alike.

With its broad-ranging discussion of key historical developments and influential political actors within the development of modern Scottish political nationalism, the text offers the reader an engaging account of the contrasting strands that both coalesced and clashed within the post-war period of Scottish nationalist politics. Furthermore, the text demonstrates an ability to combine mapping the broader sweep of ideology within Scottish nationalist politics both across and within politics, with more detailed, forensic analysis of the specific ideological and political contributions of key protagonists with the pro-independence movement. Jackson's writing therefore caters for readers with contrasting interests or entry points to the debate, whether well-versed in Scottish nationalist politics or more broadly in nationalist theory in a purer academic sense.

As Jackson stresses in the introductory pages of the book, his analytical emphasis predominantly focuses on the “influential separatist Scottish nationalism [which] began to take shape only in the 1960s and 1970s, and achieved its present ideological maturity in the course of the 1980s and 1990s” (2). Jackson's work is thus predominantly orientated towards exploring the steady growth of a select number of strands of contemporary nationalist ideology that have become prominent during the latter half of the twentieth century, sensibly

acknowledging the need for a focused analysis to facilitate the precision required to undertake such a complex task within the confines of a single monograph.

Indeed, Jackson makes a nod to other similarly insightful texts on Scottish political nationalism within which his own work is juxtaposed, such as the fine texts from David McCrone's *Understanding Scotland: The sociology of a nation* (2001), Christopher Harvie's *Scotland and Nationalism: Scottish society and politics 1707 to the present* (2004), Murray Stewart Leith and Daniel Soule's *Political Discourse and National Identity in Scotland* (2011), and Tom Devine's *Independence or Union: Scotland's past and Scotland's future* (2016), among others. Whereas this positioning of Jackson's work perhaps lacks the historical range of the work of say McCrone, Harvie, or Devine, nor the more contemporary focus of Leith and Soule or Hassan, this in many ways acts as a strength of the book's contribution to academic writing on modern Scottish nationalism as it helps to bridge the gap between these comparatively historical and contemporary analyses.

Although the majority of Jackson's book places emphasis on the post-war Scottish political context, the opening chapters of the text provide a concise overview of the ideological roots of Scottish nationalism from the early twentieth century onwards in his discussion of the early Home Rule political movements and parties of this era. His discussion then turns to an engaging and lucid analysis of the embryonic years of the Scottish National Party (SNP), charting the party's splintered foundations in the inter-war era through to the current time with an insightful account of the various developments that have shaped the shifting ideological positions of the SNP as the leading player in the pro-independence movement on the electoral stage.

While the aforementioned lack of attention to the historical roots of Scottish cultural and political nationalism may disappoint readers with personal or theoretical interests in the pre-modern era of Scottish society, this does not mean to say that Jackson is not cognizant of

such debates. Indeed, academics who are well-acquainted with some of the heated theoretical debates regarding nationalism will note Jackson's references to the tensions between modernist and ethnosymbolist positions on the roots of Scottish nationalism. Jackson acknowledges this schism in Chapter 3 "Britain in Decline," where he explores the influence of Tom Nairn within the theoretical debates on Scottish nationalism. However, this is not a debate that Jackson engages with in any length, and nor would it seem appropriate to do so—as interesting as this may have been for theoretical purists, this would have only detracted from the central crux of Jackson's analysis.

Instead, Jackson proceeds in the middle and later stages of the text to accessibly chart the various stages of ideological development within Scottish political nationalism, skillfully marrying in-depth discussions of key influencers on the nationalism movement with the chronological political events that often acted as the catalyst for evolution in the pro-independence movement. Furthermore, Jackson is careful to outline the relative merits of the contrasting ideological positions with a critical yet balanced tone, allowing the reader to make her or his own mind up on the clarity of the various schools of nationalist thought during this period.

The closing sections of the book inevitably consider the nature of modern political nationalism in the pre- and post-referendum periods surrounding the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. Jackson skillfully articulates the various ideological stances that influence the political debate during this momentous period of Scottish nationalist politics, placing emphasis not only the role of the SNP but also contrasting advocates of Scottish independence during this period, such as the Radical Independence Campaign (RIC). It could be argued here that Jackson could have offered more scrutiny of the ideological contributions of the smaller actors within the "Yes" campaign in the 2014 referendum, such as the RIC and the Scottish Greens; furthermore, there is little to no reference to the significant ramifications

of the 2016 “Brexit” referendum in reshaping the ideological and political context for the pro-independence movement in the post-2014 era.

However, as alluded to above, such debates have been covered elsewhere, and would arguably dilute the analytical focus of the current text. Indeed, as it stands, Jackson’s book offers an excellent contribution to the field on this topic at hand, and it is this well-delineated scope that underpins an engaging and welcome contribution for academics and a broader readership engaged in a tumultuous, yet fascinating, era for Scottish nationalist politics.

Dr Stuart Whigham

Oxford Brookes University

swhigham@brookes.ac.uk