The SNP’s Conception of Scottish Society and Citizenship, 2007-2014

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Introduction

In a context where the pro-independence Scottish National Party (SNP) has become the dominant party in Scotland following its victories in the last two Scottish Parliament elections (2007 and 2011) as well as the latest Westminster election (2015), and where a significant proportion of Scots (possibly around a third) are hoping for a swift Scottish independence referendum repeat, this article seeks to explore one aspect of the SNP’s ideology, namely its conception of Scottish society and citizenship. It is mainly based on an analysis of the speeches made by former SNP leader Alex Salmond in the years when he was both party leader and Scottish First Minister (or head of the Scottish government), i.e. 2007-2014. This period was chosen because it was a turning point in the history of the party in several respects. First of all, it saw the SNP become a party of government for the first and second time, as well as the first party to ever win a total majority of seats in the Scottish Parliament. Secondly, the end of the period (2011-2014) was shaped by the campaign for the first ever Scottish independence referendum, a campaign which gave the SNP the starring role within the pro-independence camp and which led to a huge rise in party membership, to the point that it is now the third biggest party in the UK.

The aims of the article are to establish, first, how the SNP named and labelled Scottish society in those pivotal years; second, what these naming strategies revealed about its conception of Scottish citizenship, nationalism and national identity; and third, how this conception was made integral to its general political strategy and campaign for independence. The analysis shows that Scottish society and the Scottish people were portrayed in three, complementary ways. First of all, while the phrases “the Scottish people” and “the people of Scotland” used to be interchangeable for the party, the latter
phrase is now always preferred. It is argued that this is in keeping with the SNP’s perception of Scottish citizenship as one that is based on residence, rather than origins or ancestry, as well as with its claims to support a “civic” form of nationalism. Secondly, the Scottish people were also frequently referred to as “the sovereign people of Scotland” or as “the community of the realm of Scotland”. This bears testimony to the SNP’s belief in, and exploitation of, two powerful Scottish political myths: on the one hand, the idea that Scotland has had a tradition of popular sovereignty, as opposed to the English/British tradition of parliamentary sovereignty imposed on Scotland through the union of 1707, and on the other hand, the idea that Scotland defines itself through egalitarianism and community values. Thirdly, and most recently, in the years of the British coalition government (from 2010), Salmond frequently contrasted British Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron’s “Big Society” and his own vision of a “Fair Society” with a “shared sense of the common weal”. These visions of society and citizenship were used by the SNP in order to make its case for an independent social democratic Scottish State and to promote universalist policies at odds with both Labour and the Conservatives’ policy choices.

“The people of Scotland”: the SNP’s vision of citizenship and nationalism

From the formation of the SNP until recently, the phrases “the Scottish people” and “the people of Scotland” were used indiscriminately in the party literature and in leaders’ speeches. For instance, an SNP leaflet describing the aim of the party and issued just after World War II stated both that “the land of Scotland is the rightful inheritance of the Scottish people [my emphasis]” and that “Housing, industry, and agriculture must be planned on a Scottish basis, so that the people of Scotland [my emphasis] may enjoy the prosperity to which the natural wealth of their country entitles them”. By contrast, in the years 2007-2014, one can note a marked prevalence of the phrase “the people of Scotland” in Alex Salmond’s speeches and in SNP literature as a whole. For instance, in a speech made on Burns Day 2012 (Robert Burns being Scotland’s “national bard”) at the launch by the SNP government of a consultation paper on a Scottish independence referendum, Alex Salmond used the phrase “the people of Scotland” eleven times and the phrase “the Scottish people” only once. This particular speech was made in a context where Scottish independence had become a concrete possibility due to the SNP’s 2011 electoral victory, which had just led the British government to concede an independence referendum, with British Prime Minister David Cameron having spoken of the referendum on television for the first time in early January 2012. The preference given to the phrase “the people of Scotland” in this specific speech could thus be interpreted as a sign that the SNP had wanted to clarify how it perceived Scottish society and citizenship in the context of the upcoming referendum. More generally, however, it is here argued that the SNP has recently opted for this phrase, with its stress on the territory of Scotland (“the people of Scotland”) as opposed to any intrinsic quality that the people might have (“the Scottish people”), because it reflects the SNP’s conception of Scottish citizenship as one based on residence rather than origins. This interpretation is confirmed by the fact that in the aforementioned speech, the “people of Scotland” were defined as the “people who live, work and bring up their families in Scotland” – in other words, as people associated with a specific
territory, one which they chose to make their own, rather than people with a certain ancestry.

This is in keeping with the way that the SNP has always defined citizenship. To establish how the SNP would envisage Scottish citizenship in an independent Scotland, one can compare the different “model Constitutions” (or Constitutional blueprints) that it has produced in the previous decades. Its model Constitution of 1995 stated that:

[C]itizenship of Scotland will be the right of everyone whose principal place of residence is in Scotland at the date on which the Constitution comes into force. (...)

Citizenship will also be open to those whose place of birth was in Scotland.¹

The two main citizenship requirements would therefore be place of residence and place of birth. In its model Constitution of 2002, the SNP defended what it termed “an inclusive definition of citizenship, and voting rights based on residence not ethnicity”.⁶ Once again, citizenship was to be based on residence or place of birth, but not on blood and origins. Most recently and most comprehensively, the SNP government published an “interim Constitution for Scotland” in June 2014, a few months before the independence referendum; this was to be used during a transitional period in the event of a vote for independence. The interim Constitution included the following article on Scottish citizenship:

(1) The following people automatically hold Scottish citizenship, namely—

(a) all those who, immediately before Independence Day, hold British citizenship and either—

(i) are habitually resident in Scotland at that time, or
(ii) are not habitually resident in Scotland at that time but were born in Scotland,
(b) any person born in Scotland on or after Independence Day if either of the person’s parents, at the time of the person’s birth—

(i) holds Scottish citizenship, or
(ii) has indefinite leave to remain in Scotland, and
(c) any person born outside Scotland on or after Independence Day if—

(i) either of the person’s parents, at the time of the person’s birth, holds Scottish citizenship, and
(ii) the person’s birth is registered in Scotland.

(2) The following people are entitled to claim Scottish citizenship according to the prescribed procedures, namely—

(a) any person born in Scotland on or after Independence Day if either of the person’s parents meets the prescribed requirements,
(b) any person with—

(i) a prescribed connection by descent with a person holding Scottish citizenship, or
(ii) any other prescribed connection with Scotland.

(3) A person holding Scottish citizenship may also hold other nationalities or citizenships at the same time.

(4) Further provision about entitlement to Scottish citizenship is to be made by Act of the Scottish Parliament, and “prescribed” means prescribed by or under such an Act.

(5) Such an Act may, in particular, include provision supplementing, qualifying or modifying the provision in this section.”

This article gave form to the principles announced in the 2013 independence White Paper, which had already established that Scottish citizenship would be automatic for “British citizens ‘habitually resident’ in Scotland” at the moment of independence, as well as for “Scottish-born British citizens currently living outside of Scotland”, and that it would be open to (though not automatically given to) “those who have a parent or grandparent who qualifies for Scottish citizenship”, and even “[t]hose who have a demonstrable connection to
Scotland and have spent at least ten years living here at some stage”. Moreover, the “interim Constitution” of 2014 specified that Scottish citizenship would be compatible with holding one or several other citizenships, without however singling out British citizenship. The 2013 independence White Paper, on the other hand, had specifically alluded to the potentially thorny issue of Scottish-British dual citizenship in an independent Scotland; it had thereby acknowledged that having to give up their British nationality (or identity). The White Paper had clearly stated that “the Scottish Government [would] allow dual citizenship” and that even though it was “for the rest of the UK to decide whether it allow[ed] dual UK/Scottish citizenship”, the Scottish Government would “expect the normal rules to extend to Scottish citizens” – one of the normal rules being that “[t]he UK allows dual or multiple citizenship for British citizens”.

What the SNP has repeatedly described as an “inclusive” model of citizenship is consistent with its promotion of a “civic” form of nationalism. Theoreticians of nationalism have traditionally opposed so-called “civic” and “ethnic” versions of nationalism, the former being more inclusive, primarily territorial and based on a community of laws and institutions, and the latter being more restrictive and exclusive, and based on common ancestry and kinship ties between the people, as well as shared characteristics such as religion, race or language. One can choose to join a civic nation, whereas one is born into an ethnic nation. Today, it is widely agreed upon that this theoretical distinction faces a number of limitations, not least because “nationalist actors within the same nationalist movement may deploy ethnic and civic conceptions of the nation”. Yet, however relevant this distinction may be, the SNP has consistently stressed its belief in civic nationalism, with its emphasis on the idea of choosing what nation you wish to belong to. For example, in a document describing the aims of the party and dating back to 1974, one could read that the “Scottish community” was composed of “people who were born here” as well as “people who came here by choice”, and an SNP campaign leaflet issued in the same year answered the question “Who is a Scot?” with the words “A Scot is someone who chooses to live in Scotland, and values the best things in Scottish life. English, Italian, Canadian, or any other, you can be welcome and rightful citizens of Scotland”, before adding: “Demonstrate your citizenship by voting SNP”.

More recently, in the acceptance speech that he made in the Scottish Parliament after being voted in as Scottish First Minister for the second time, in 2011, Alex Salmond dwelt on Scotland as a land which “belongs to all who choose to call it home” and is “open to all, whether they hail from England, Ireland, Pakistan or Poland”.

“The sovereign people of Scotland” and the “community of the realm of Scotland”: the SNP’s exploitation of two Scottish myths

In his speeches, Salmond often associates his preferred phrase “the people of Scotland” with the words “sovereign” or “sovereignty”. This was repeatedly the case in the years of the so-called “National Conversation” on Scotland’s future, an initiative which was launched in 2007 by the Scottish Government a few months after the SNP was first elected to power, and ran until late 2009. It started with the publication of a White Paper entitled Choosing Scotland’s Future in August 2007 and ended with a public consultation on a second White Paper, Your Scotland, Your Voice, published in November 2009. In a speech which Alex...
Salmond made in front of civil society representatives on 26 March 2008 in the context of this “National Conversation”, the people of Scotland were once again defined as the people “living and working in Scotland”. They were also presented as a sovereign people, one with “the sovereign right to determine the form of government best suited to their needs”:

On taking office, the [Scottish] Government was conscious of the responsibility of this Government, of any Government, to the people of Scotland. And we are aware - as we always will be – of the sovereignty of the Scottish people. The decisions on Scotland's future lie ultimately with those living and working in Scotland – and no-one else. We should remember that (...) before the Constitutional Convention in the late 1980s there was a foundation document (...) called the Claim of Right. (...) What was was an assertion of the sovereign right of the Scottish people to determine the form of government best suited to our needs. One of the signatories to that Claim of Right was Gordon Brown. I have to believe that today, as Prime Minister, he remains just as committed to the sovereignty of the people of Scotland as he was when Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister. That sovereignty, that assertion of the right of self-determination, was encapsulated in the Scottish Parliament’s establishment by a referendum. (...) The people of Scotland are sovereign. The Scottish Parliament is their Parliament. The right to choose a future for this country is their right, the people of Scotland’s right.17

Similarly, the two “National Conversation” White Papers included numerous references to “the sovereign people of Scotland” and “the sovereignty of the people of Scotland”.18 By naming the Scottish people as a “sovereign people”, the SNP tapped into the commonly-held belief that Scotland is a nation where the principle of popular sovereignty applied until the parliamentary union with England imposed on it the principle of parliamentary sovereignty (which, since then, has been considered as the most crucial constitutional principle in the UK). It also reinforced its case both for an independence referendum, and for independence itself.

In the aforementioned speech of 2008, the belief that the Scottish people are sovereign was used to justify the organisation of an independence referendum – a policy that the SNP had not always supported. Until early 2000, in the wake of the birth of the Scottish Parliament, the SNP had argued that getting a majority of seats in Scotland (by which was meant a majority of Scottish seats in a British general election) would be mandate enough to demand independence from London and enter into negotiations with the British government. After the creation of the Scottish Parliament, the SNP had adopted the policy of the dual mandate: the SNP would be legitimate in demanding independence if it obtained a majority of seats, now in the Scottish Parliament rather than at Westminster, but also a majority of Yes votes in an independence referendum. At the time when Alex Salmond made the aforementioned speech, the SNP had just obtained a majority of seats in the Scottish Parliament for the first time; it now needed to make a principled case in favour of an independence referendum. What could better reflect a belief in popular sovereignty than the recourse to referendums?

The idea that “the people, rather than politicians or state institutions, are the sovereign authority in Scotland”19 was also presented as a key argument in support of independence itself. The 2013 independence White Paper stated that the (written) Constitution of an independent Scotland would “replace the central principle of the UK constitution – the absolute sovereignty of the Westminster Parliament – with the sovereignty of the people of Scotland, which has been the central principle in the Scottish constitutional tradition”.20

The belief that parliamentary sovereignty is a principle which is English and alien to Scotland found its first legal expression in a Scottish lawsuit of 1953, when Lord Cooper,
the Lord Justice General (the head of the judiciary in Scotland), gave his opinion that “[t]he principle of unlimited sovereignty of Parliament is a distinctively English principle which has no counterpart in Scottish constitutional law”.21 This idea has since then been accepted by all political parties in Scotland apart from the Conservative Party. It was famously formulated in the Claim of Right for Scotland, which as Salmond reminds us, was the “foundation document” of the Scottish Constitutional Convention in 1989. This claim, which stated “We (...) do hereby acknowledge the sovereign right of the Scottish people to determine the form of government best suited to their needs”, was signed by all Scottish Labour MPs except one (Tam Dalyell), as well as by all Scottish Liberal Democrat MPs – but not by the SNP or the Tories, who refused to take part in the Constitutional Convention. However, the SNP included the principle that Scotland is a land of popular sovereignty in the introduction to its model Constitution of 1995, which stated:

Sovereignty in Scotland rests with the people, not Parliament. That clear legal situation must be reflected in the constitution and in the operation of government.

The people will be Scottish citizens, not British subjects.22

Even more clearly, the SNP government got the Scottish Parliament to vote on the 1989 “Claim of Right” on 26 January 2012: it was then endorsed by all Members of the Scottish Parliament, apart from the 14 Conservative MSPs.

Another Scottish myth which Salmond regularly taps into, and which is often linked with the first, is the belief in Scottish egalitarianism and support for community values. In his Burns Day speech of 2012, the phrase “the people of Scotland” was at one point replaced by the phrase “the community of the realm of Scotland”. This had also been the case in two speeches which Salmond had made in front of the Queen. On the tenth anniversary of the Scottish Parliament, in 2009, Salmond had thanked the Queen for her presence “on behalf of the people – the community of the realm of this ancient nation”.23 Similarly, at the official opening of the third session of the Scottish Parliament, on 30 July 2007, Salmond had started by thanking the Queen for her presence “on behalf of the people of Scotland”, before reminding his audience that the Scottish Parliament had always met “on behalf of the community of the realm” of Scotland.24

The phrase “community of the realm” is famous in Scotland for having been used in the so-called “Declaration of Arbroath” of 1320,25 a medieval document which has been interpreted as “Europe’s first statement of a contractual relationship between government and citizens”,26 and it is often used to demonstrate Scotland’s long tradition of popular sovereignty. For instance, the Scottish Constitutional Commission, a Scottish think tank, claims that one of the three axioms on which its work is based is “that legitimate sovereignty in Scotland resides in the ‘whole community of the realm’, and not in the Queen-in-Parliament at Westminster.”27

However, the phrase “community of the realm” is also used to invoke Scotland’s support for community values, as is made obvious in a speech which Alex Salmond made in October 2011:

[O]ur politics are not just constitutional but also people based. I tried to reflect this on election night when these self-same people, the community of the realm of Scotland presented to us the greatest ever mandate of the devolution era – an absolute majority in a PR system (...) It is a good phrase ‘the community of the realm’. It was developed in mediaeval Scotland to describe a concept of community identity which was beyond sectional interest. The best Scots term for it would be the common weal. It does not ignore the fact that sometimes as a Government we have to take sides within Scotland, as well as taking Scotland’s side.
Particularly when times are tough we have to ask the rich to help the poor, the strong to help the weak, the powerful to help the powerless. But we do so in pursuit of the common weal, the community of the realm.28 Here, the phrase “community of the realm”, which has traditionally referred to a community of power and the idea of collective authority in the government of a kingdom, and the phrase “common weal”, which refers to the public good or welfare, are taken to mean one and the same thing. As labels of Scottish society, these phrases were used by Salmond to signify Scotland’s intrinsic belief in community values and the Welfare State. This article will now show how such labels are ways for the SNP to attack the policy choices made by either the British government or the Labour Party and to promote its project of an independent, social democratic, Scottish State.

The “common weal” and the “Fair Society” versus the “Big Society”

In his Christmas message of 2008, Alex Salmond claimed that “that fine Scottish tradition of protecting the ‘common weal’ and looking out for one another is something that marks us out as a nation”.29 In a speech made in late 2006, Salmond had similarly declared that the “common weal” was “the very essence of Scottishness”.30 What precise policies did Alex Salmond associate with the protection of the “common weal”, which to him was the “essence of Scottishness”? In his address to the SNP National Conference of October 2012, Salmond described the Scottish Parliament’s distinctive policies on personal care, transport and education as a reflection of the common weal of Scotland. We see that through the idea of a Scottish “common weal”, Scottish society was presented as one that was by essence supportive of social democratic values in general, and of universal services and benefits in particular. Defining Scottishness and Scottish society in this way was part of the SNP’s strategy aiming at showcasing it as the party best suited to represent Scotland. By defending the welfarist policies mentioned earlier, the SNP under Salmond’s second leadership distinguished itself not only from the British coalition government (and thereby from both the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats), but also from the Scottish Labour Party, which was its main opponent in Scotland. Indeed, in 2012, Scottish Labour leader Johann Lamont made the headlines for claiming that Scotland was now a “something for nothing” country and that the many people in Scotland who were “attracted by policies like free prescriptions, free tuition fees and the council-tax freeze” (some of which had been introduced under Labour-led Scottish governments) should “look at how they are paying for those free things”.31 Thereafter, the SNP became the only big party in Scotland still standing for the defence of universal services and benefits.32 This policy change on the part of Labour in Scotland explains why in his aforementioned address to the SNP Conference of 2012, Alex Salmond made the following declaration:

Let us tell the Labour leadership about the reality about our fellow Scots. They don’t want something for nothing. They just want the right to live in a country which understands the importance of society. A country that knows the value and not just the price of the services we hold dear. These are the fruits not just of this party or this government, but the fruits of a Scottish Parliament that chose to reflect our nation in these ways. It is the social contract between our Parliament and our people. Some call it universality, and say its time has passed. I call it human decency and its time is now.33
Here, the defence of “universalism” is shown to be integral to the Scottish nation, the implication being that only a party supporting this principle can adequately represent Scotland. This is an instance of what has been termed ‘welfare nationalism’, which is when welfare policies are used as tools for nation-building, either at State or at sub-State level. This is especially the case in Scotland where the first years of devolution produced, as has already been hinted at, some “prominent examples of policy divergence in the area of welfare development” such as the abolition of up-front tuition fees and the introduction of free personal care for the elderly, “both of which have become emblematic of Scotland’s political autonomy.” As Scottish academic Nicola McEwen has convincingly argued, even before the introduction of devolution, Scottish national identity came to be defined in social democratic terms and the defence of social democracy came to be couched in national terms. In the 1980s and 1990s, the defence of social democracy became associated with the creation of an autonomous Scottish Parliament and, conversely, attacks on social democracy were interpreted as attacks on Scotland’s distinctive national identity. In summary, “[n]ational identity, social democracy and the demand for constitutional change thus represented mutually reinforcing factors that combined to emphasise a sense that ‘Scotland is different’.” The post-devolution SNP has inherited this perception of Scottish national identity and made it an integral part of its strategy to promote independence. Just as home rule (or devolution) was presented by its supporters as the only way for Scotland to protect itself against Thatcherism and defend public services in the 1980s and early 1990s, independence was presented by the post-devolution SNP as the only way for Scotland to protect itself from austerity measures imposed by the Unionist parties (both Labour and the Conservatives), in power either in Scotland or throughout the UK. One year after the aforementioned speech, Alex Salmond again made the point that Scotland was essentially a social democratic country, this time by making Scottish Labour leader’s “something for nothing” soundbite into a byword for both Labour and the Conservatives’ ideology:

Friends, where we have the power we have chosen a different path. A path that reflects Scotland’s social democratic consensus, our shared progressive values - our priorities as a society. Now Labour and Tory dismiss these gains as the luxuries of a something for nothing country – really? Personal care for older people, free tuition for young people, to be cast aside as something for nothing? This is not a something for nothing country but a something for something society and this party shall defend that social progress made by our parliament.

We have seen how Salmond took advantage of an ideological U-turn on the part of Scottish Labour to present both Scottish society as a social democratic “common weal”, and the SNP as the party best suited to represent it. Let us now consider how the SNP positioned itself with regard to the British Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government’s policy choices and ideology. In another address made by Salmond at an SNP National Conference, this time in October 2010, when David Cameron was promoting his concept of a “Big Society”, several of the SNP tropes that have been discussed so far were brought together:

[O]ur objective is to spread the vision of a fair society, built with the tools of an independent nation. (...) [To David Cameron:] Do not sacrifice the public services to appease your ideological gods. Do not let the people suffer for attitudes forged on the playing fields of Eton. (...) Our first duty is to protect the people of Scotland. (...) Much has been said about the Big Society. I am more concerned by the Fair Society. (...) We are not helpless agents of globalization, but free citizens of a wealthy land. We are not slaves to the banking system or vassals to the lords of high
finance. (...) And when we look to our neighbours, we can all see the family who can't quite make ends meet, the child who needs some extra help, the grandmother alone who needs a hand, the mother struggling with hands full, the man at the end of his tether – for we are all the people who choose to live on this land, and by our shared values, we are the welfare of everyone in our community. 37

In this speech, Salmond opposed Cameron’s “Big Society” and his own vision of a “fair society” defined by what he called a “social democratic ethos” and an egalitarianism alien to Eton-educated British political leaders, while at the same time reminding the “people of Scotland” that they are the people who “choose to live on this land” and who thereby form a commonwealth. Here is another instance of welfare nationalism: only independence can allow Scotland to be true to its ethos and nature as a “common weal”. This idea was at the heart of many of Salmond’s speeches, as can be seen in the following two extracts, taken from two different addresses he made in 2011:

If we are to become a crucible of the new society, then we need the power of independence – we must have these powers. (...) Our sense of the common weal is strong and should not be denied by the rich elites of elsewhere. (...) The definition of a nation is a community of people with a shared commitment to their culture and to their children. By having a strong sense of ourselves. (...) And that sense of self is built on community. On the shared value of helping each other out, lending a hand. On a sense that society should try to be as equal as it can be. That is what we value and what we think is the purpose of government. 38

[g]ive Scotland the tools, put the people in charge and see our nation flourish as never before. Let us build a nation that reflects the values of our people. With a social contract – and a social conscience – at the very heart of our success. The society, the country that Scotland desires, that Scotland believes in – it is not a country or a future on offer from the Tory government down south. Even that one institution which really made Britain great, the National Health Service, is being dismantled in England. The Tories call it a Big Society. I call it no society at all. 39

Conclusion

One of the SNP’s key strategies in its campaign for independence is to label Scottish society as well as define Scottish citizenship and Scottishness (or national identity) in certain ways that form a cohesive whole. Scotland is presented, first, as a civic nation in which citizenship is dependent on a shared territory and a willingness to live together, rather than on common origins; secondly, as a land where the people are sovereign and hold their destinies in their own hands, and in their hands only; and thirdly, as a commonwealth (or “common weal”) where people hold dear welfarist values and policies. The speeches that Alex Salmond made as SNP leader in the years 2007-2014 are classic instances of nation-building, in the sense that Salmond sought to construct or maintain certain collective meanings of Scottish nationhood, of who Scottish people are, while emphasising what made Scotland different. The Scottish people were taken to be a compassionate and egalitarian people whose sense of identity was related to social democratic values and to a belief in the “common weal”.

Such nation-building served three main aims for the party. The first was to present independence as the best way for Scotland to be true to its nature in a context where all of the UK’s parties of government, Labour, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, had given up or were giving up on universalism. The second was to showcase the SNP as both the national and the natural party of Scotland: as the only big party that still defended the community values which were core Scottish values, and the only one that
upheld the sovereignty of the Scottish people. The third and final aim was to reassure voters that the SNP’s brand of nationalism was perfectly civic, unlike the nationalism of right-wing parties such as UKIP: in an independent Scotland, the primary criterion for citizenship would be residence.

Even though the SNP has never been a single-issue party, it has clearly supported and campaigned for the independence of Scotland since its early years. As a consequence, its main frame of reference has logically been Scotland and Scottish society, rather than the UK and British society. The party is more concerned with framing Scottish identity in a way that suits its political purposes, and with defining Scottish citizenship (that is, the conditions of citizenship in an independent Scottish State), than it is engaging with current debates on Britishness and on British citizenship. However, in its 2013 independence White Paper, the SNP government noted that it intended for “the rights and responsibilities which accompany Scottish citizenship” to be “broadly in line with those currently aligned with British citizenship.” Moreover, the SNP does not pitch Scottishness against Britishness. On the contrary, its leaders have in the past few years repeatedly put forward the belief that a common sense of Britishness would survive after Scottish independence.41

It is here argued that rather than disparage Britishness, the SNP has generally preferred to bypass the UK frame of reference altogether, in favour of a wider frame of reference which has always included the whole of the British Isles, and which, until the end of the Empire, encompassed the whole British Commonwealth of Nations. In that respect, the rhetoric of the SNP has little evolved since its early days, and in the years 2007-2014, Alex Salmond merely tapped into a rich SNP tradition of using a wider frame of reference than the British one, as a comparison between the following extracts, taken respectively from the 1950s and from the 2010s, reveals:

There is no desire to isolate Scotland from the other nations of the British Isles and Commonwealth. The Scottish people and the people of these nations have the strongest ties of kinship, history and interest which would not be weakened but immeasurably strengthened by the fuller, more direct and more satisfying relationship which self-government would make possible.42

If Scotland becomes independent, it will continue to share close ties with its neighbouring countries. (...) The British Irish Council already provides a model of how all the people of these islands can work together on issues of shared interest. (...) [I]n addition to these institutional, cultural, economic and practical links, Scotland shares ties of family and friendship with its neighbours on these islands which never can be obsolete, and which I expect will continue and flourish after Scottish independence.43

I'm going to emphasise two points. The first is that the ties that bind the nations of these islands will continue and flourish after Scotland becomes independent. You will remain Scotland’s closest friends, as well as our closest neighbours. And the second point I want to make is that Scottish independence wouldn’t just be good for Scotland; it would be good for all of the nations of these islands – and it would create opportunities for co-operation and partnership.44


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2. SNP, leaflet describing the aim of the party (c.1946-47) (archives of the National Library of Scotland).
4. BBC One, “Andrew Marr Show”, 8 January 2012. In the event, the Scottish independence referendum took place on 18 September 2014. A majority of 55% voted against independence.
11. Ibid., pp. 254, 271, 497.
17. Alex Salmond, speech at the launch of the second phase of the “National Conversation” (with representatives of Scottish civil society) at the University of Edinburgh, 26 March 2008, transcript of the online video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3saBb3ir2Lk consulted March 2016.
20. Ibid., pp. 334-335.
23. Alex Salmond, First Minister’s address in the Scottish Parliament on its tenth anniversary, 1 July 2009.
24. Alex Salmond, First Minister’s address at the opening of the third session of the Scottish Parliament, 30 June 2007.
26. To quote Alex Salmond himself, in a speech made to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland on 25 May 2009.
27. See the Scottish Constitutional Commission’s website: http://www.constitutionalcommission.org/about.php consulted April 2016.
28. Alex Salmond, speech to the SNP National Conference, 22 October 2011.
31. See for instance the following news bulletin: http://news.stv.tv/politics/191807-labour-leader-johann-lamont-demands-end-to-something-for-nothing-culture/.
32. The SNP’s commitment to universalism was confirmed more recently in a motion voted in the Scottish Parliament. The motion opposed the “damaging impact the UK Government’s approach to public spending [was] having” and renewed the SNP’s commitment to “the universal benefits and services of free personal care, free prescriptions, concessionary travel free eye tests and free tuition”. Apart from the SNP, the motion was only supported by the Scottish Greens. See motion S4M-06225, lodged by the SNP and taken in the Scottish Parliament on 16 April 2014.
35. McEwen, op. cit., p. 139.
41. See for instance Alex Salmond’s interview by BBC journalist James Naughtie on 16 January 2012, which can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q9RgEPC9_Zk.
42. SNP, *Policy of the Scottish National Party* (SNP, undated [195-?]).
In a context where the Scottish National Party (SNP) has become the dominant party in Scotland, this article explores one aspect of the party’s ideology, namely its conception of Scottish society and citizenship, based on an analysis of the speeches made by Alex Salmond in the years 2007-2014, when he was both party leader and Scottish First Minister. The language of politics provides the focus for this article. Its purpose is threefold: first, to present the way in which the SNP named and labelled Scottish society in those pivotal years; second, to establish what these naming strategies revealed about the party’s conception of Scottish citizenship, nationalism and national identity; and third, to explain how this conception was made integral to its general political strategy and campaign for independence. The analysis shows that Scottish society and the Scottish people were portrayed in three, complementary ways: as the people who reside on the territory of Scotland, which is in keeping with the SNP’s “civic” nationalism and with its perception of Scottish citizenship as one that is based on residency rather than ancestry; as a “sovereign people” and as “the community of the realm of Scotland”, which bears testimony to the SNP’s exploitation of two powerful Scottish political myths; and as a social democratic society with a “shared sense of the common weal” which translates into support for universalist policies at odds with both Labour and the Conservatives’ policy choices. These visions of society and citizenship were all included in the SNP’s case for an independent social democratic Scottish State.

Dans un contexte où le Scottish National Party (SNP) est désormais le parti dominant en Écosse, cet article explore un aspect de son idéologie, à savoir sa conception de la société et de la citoyenneté écossaises, à partir d’une analyse des discours faits par Alex Salmond dans les années 2007-2014, lorsqu’il était à la fois chef du parti et chef du gouvernement écossais. Il vise à établir la manière dont le SNP a désigné la société écossaise pendant ces années, ce que cela révèle de sa conception de la citoyenneté, du nationalisme et de l’identité nationale, et enfin la façon dont cette conception a été intégrée à sa stratégie politique générale et à sa campagne pour l’indépendance. L’analyse démontre que la société et le peuple écossais furent définis de trois façons complémentaires : premièrement, en tant que peuple fait des personnes résidant sur le territoire écossais, conformément au nationalisme « civique » du SNP et à sa vision de la citoyenneté comme étant fondée sur la résidence plus que sur les origines ; deuxièmement, en tant que « peuple souverain » et que « communauté du royaume d’Écosse », ce qui permet au SNP d’exploiter deux grands mythes politiques écossais ; et troisièmement, en tant que société social-démocrate ayant le sens du « bien commun », ce qui se traduit par un soutien à des politiques universalistes contraires aux orientations du parti travailliste comme du parti conservateur. Ces visions de la société et de la citoyenneté furent mises en avant afin de promouvoir l’indépendance de l’Écosse et la mise en place d’un État social-démocrate écossais.
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**Mots-clés:** Scottish National Party, Alex Salmond, citoyenneté, nationalisme, identité écossaise, souveraineté

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