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**Robert the Bruce Fights for Scottish Independence Once Again:
The Influence of Nationalism and Myth in Scotland's Modern Pursuit of
Independence**

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GPS 480: Senior Thesis

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Abstract:

Robert the Bruce, King of Scots from 1306-1329, led the Scottish to victory in the Wars of Independence against England. Today, the fight for Scottish Independence is alive and being led by the Scottish National Party (SNP) as they push for a second independence referendum. The first, in 2014, failed with 45% of Scots voting YES and 55% voting NO. Since Brexit, however, support for Scottish independence has consistently risen; polls in 2020 showed sustained majority support for Scottish independence for the first time in recent Scottish history. Nationalism, or the constructed ideology that is politically used to uphold a nation-state's existence, is on the rise in Scotland. With this rising nationalism, there has been a resurgence of honoring Robert the Bruce mythology. Anniversaries of his accomplishments, the Battle of Bannockburn and the Declaration of Arbroath, have been celebrated. Films about his life, glorifying his fight against the British, have been released. Heritage sites memorializing his legacy have been built. Media outlets and politicians have even explicitly referenced Robert the Bruce when discussing the modern-day push for independence. This paper examines the connection between nationalism, myth, and sovereignty through a content and discourse analysis of news media, films, heritage sites, anniversary celebrations, and SNP rhetoric. This analysis reveals that the recent glorification of Robert the Bruce's legacy reflects and amplifies Scottish nationalism, a force driving the fight for an independent Scotland.

Introduction:

In May of 2021, Scotland will hold parliamentary elections which will significantly impact Scotland's future. If the SNP wins a majority of the seats in this election, then Nicola Sturgeon, the Prime Minister of Scotland and leader of the SNP, will have the mandate to call for a second independence referendum in Scotland (Kirk & Gutiérrez 2021) Another independence referendum will give the people of Scotland a second chance to vote on independence. Scotland is approaching a crossroads: to continue as a member of the United Kingdom (UK) or become an independent country for the first time since 1707 ("Acts of Union 1707" n.d.). In this paper, I argue that Robert the Bruce, King of Scots, is once again on the front lines of Scotland's fight for independence from Britain. In the early 1300s, he fought on the battlefield. Today, his

legacy influences Scottish nationalism, a force propelling Scots' ongoing pursuit of sovereignty.

The Story of Robert the Bruce:

Myths and heroes are two critical aspects of a nation's collective memory, and they help define national identities. Robert the Bruce, King of Scots has become a romanticized, defining, and mythical hero in the medieval Scottish Wars of Independence. Here, I give a synopsis on this historical figure, his most famous battle, and a letter written on his behalf: the three defining elements of this national myth. My synopsis combines historical facts and popular narrative on the Scottish King because I aim to relay the myth of Robert the Bruce as interpreted and recounted by Scots.

Robert the Bruce was crowned King of Scots in 1306, after he killed his main adversary, John Comyn, for the throne. Even though he was officially crowned King within Scotland, the English, specifically King Edward I, refused to acknowledge the Bruce as the rightful king. There were also some within Scotland who sympathized with Comyn and therefore opposed King Robert. He was declared an outlaw by the British and seen as an imposter by some Scots. He spent his first years as king fighting for Scottish independence from Britain while also fighting those within Scotland who opposed him. Robert fought many battles against the British, and many of these battles were lost. Robert the Bruce and Scotland were widely considered underdogs, and the war he fought was long and cost many lives (Brown 2004).

The folktale of Bruce and the Spider is a mythical retelling of Robert's fight against the British. According to the tale, after several lost battles, Robert the Bruce took refuge in a cave, hiding from those who wanted to capture him and turn him over to

King Edward. In the cave, when Robert was close to giving up on Independence, he witnessed a spider building a web. The spider failed several times, but never gave up, and finally succeeded after its long toil. Bruce drew inspiration from this spider. Like the spider, he would not give up in his fight. He left the cave and raised an army of Scots who still dreamed of freedom. They went into battle against the British at Bannockburn (Lindy 1998; Brown 2020).

The Battle of Bannockburn in 1314 is seen historically as the turning point in the Scottish Wars of Independence, when the Bruce defeated the British. The Scottish were outnumbered but able to outmaneuver the British by using the lay of the land to their advantage. The war was not over after the Battle of Bannockburn, however. It would still be about 14 years until Robert the Bruce was recognized as King of Scots by Britain. While the Battle of Bannockburn did not end the Wars of Independence, this triumph is viewed as legendary and significant, the moment when Scotland finally showed their power and promise against Great Britain (Brown 2004).

The Declaration of Arbroath is another critical piece of Robert the Bruce's story. This document is a letter signed by thirty-eight nobles, barons, and freeholders, as well as the "community of the realm of Scotland" to Pope John. This letter, written on behalf of Robert the Bruce, appealed to the Pope to change his stance on the war. Previously, the Pope, disapproving of Rob the Bruce's actions in war against England, made moves to excommunicate the Bruce for his actions. The Declaration of Arbroath demanded that the Pope respect Scotland's fight against the British. The Declaration relays Scotland's mythical past which "proved" the divine right of the Scottish to live there. The letter established Robert as the rightful king of Scotland only so long as he fought against the British. Strong nationalistic language was evoked to illustrate the nobility of Scottish

Independence: “It is in truth not for glory, nor riches, nor honours that we are fighting, *but for freedom alone*, which no honest man gives up but with life itself...” (*The Declaration of Arbroath: 700th Anniversary Display* 2020). The Declaration of Arbroath established Scotland as a nation of individuals who believed that freedom, and freedom alone, was the noble cause of Scotland and of Robert the Bruce’s war with England (Cowan 2003).

In 1328, a peace treaty was finally signed between England and Scotland, and Robert the Bruce was recognized by his people and by England as the King of Scots. He died in June of 1329, with his realm at peace (Brown 2004). Even though this peace wouldn’t last long, Robert the Bruce’s legacy is iconic to Scotland’s identity and nationhood. As Brown (2004) writes, “Bruce’s achievements made him the decisive figure in the whole period of war and crisis between 1286 and the 1350s. Without his ability, without his ambition, Scotland’s future would have been very different” (p. 230). Robert the Bruce’s role in the Wars of Independence, which have been dramatized and honored throughout retellings of this period in Scottish history, establish King Robert as the brave hero of Scottish Independence.

Scotland’s Independence Referendum

A comprehensive understanding of the political pursuit of independence in Scotland requires background information on the SNP, a party who Mark Garnett and Martin Stevens argue is only politically consistent in their stance on independence for Scotland (2017). The SNP was created and established in 1934 after two parties, the Scottish Party and the National Party of Scotland, combined. The SNP was not popular at first; in its first election, the party ran for eight seats and won none. Roughly a decade

later, the SNP started to see some of its first electoral “successes,” such as winning a seat with 50% of the vote and losing it soon after or getting 46% of the vote in an election against the favored Labour Party, but the party was still not popular or dominant. The SNP had simply proven that they were a party that had some voter support (Black 2010).

Since the 1960s, Scottish nationalism has grown, and sovereignty has been relentlessly pursued. The 1960s is recognized as the decade when modern Scottish nationalism gained ground because the SNP saw its first significant electoral success in 1967 and 1968 (Smith, Cannon, Crowcroft 2015). In the 1970s, with electoral campaigns such as “It’s Scotland’s Oil,” the SNP continued to gain seats in Westminster; in 1974, the SNP had a record high number of seats in Westminster: 11. This success was short lived, however, with the SNP struggling to gain and maintain support throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s (Black 2010).

In the 1990s, Scotland’s pursuit of sovereignty continued as the SNP fought for devolution, which is defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as “the surrender of powers to local authorities by a central government.” To gain more political power and some sovereignty within the Union, Scotland’s government voted to create a Scottish Parliament and Scottish Executive within the overarching government of the UK in 1999 (Mullen 2014). This achievement of devolution gave Scots more political power within the UK, a voice in the government that determined conditions of their lives.

In 2007, the SNP won the largest number of seats in the Scottish Parliament, and the SNP has continued to gain political legitimacy since the 2007 election. In the 2011 election, the SNP was overwhelmingly successful, won the largest number of parliamentary seats of any party, and became the majority government in Scotland. The

success of the SNP signifies a shift in Scottish politics towards more nationalistic goals. This political shift is arguably the result of dissatisfaction among Scots in their government, a dissatisfaction that when combined with a strong national identity inspires collective action for social change and independence (Mullen 2014 & Abrams, Grant 2012).

In 2014, the combination of growing national identity and dissatisfaction in the government culminated in the Independence Referendum. Mullen (2014) writes that there was no longer a unifying identity between England and Scotland and that Scots were dissatisfied with British economic policies which were “imposed from afar and insensitive to Scottish needs” (p. 11). There was resentment in Scotland towards British policies. Scottish independence, however, was widely perceived as risky because Scotland was not guaranteed membership to the European Union (EU) as an independent nation, a benefit of remaining in the UK (Thompson 2019). These conditions set the stage for the referendum. On October 15, 2012, the Scotland Prime Minister (Alex Salmond at the time) and the UK Prime Minister (David Cameron) signed the Referendum Agreement, which allowed for the vote to take place in 2014. Powers of constitutional arrangement were transferred from the UK Parliament to the Scottish Parliament in this agreement so that the Scottish Parliament, which was majority SNP, could legislate for the referendum (“Scottish Independence Referendum” 2016).

The SNP led the YES campaign for Scottish independence, which was opposed by the Labour Party, who ran the NO campaign. The YES campaign centered around the idea that independence would bring a brighter future for Scots. The SNP pushed for independence on the grounds that Scottish politics differed from those in England, and

only with independence would Scots be able to govern themselves. On the other hand, the NO campaign focused on the economic risk involved with independence. The Labour Party promoted a “Better Together” campaign, highlighting the benefits of remaining in the union, such as EU membership. In September of 2014, Scotland voted on independence. Most Scottish citizens over the age of 16 were eligible to vote on the question: “Should Scotland Be an Independent Country?” (“Scottish Independence Referendum” 2016). The referendum did not result in independence, with 55% voting NO and 45% voting YES (Crowcroft 2015; Garnett & Stevens 2017).

In 2014, Scotland voted against independence because there was too much risk associated with separation from England, despite Scotland’s rising nationalism and desire for self-governance (Mullen 2014, Thompson 2019). Brexit changed the circumstances in the UK and how Scotland viewed the Union. EU membership is no longer promised to Scotland as part of the UK. Post Brexit, Scotland faces risk remaining in the UK and risk becoming an independent nation. In an interview with *BBC* from August 6, 2020, professor of politics at Strathclyde University John Curtice analyzes the impact of the EU vote on Scottish nationalist views. 62% of Scots voted to remain in the EU and only 38% of Scots voted to leave, but Brexit still happened. Curtice also relays that Scottish polls in 2020 show consistent majority support for independence; for the first time in its history, Scotland has sustained majority support for independence (Aaronovitch 2020). In the view of nationalists and the SNP, Scotland is being governed against its will, and this injustice will continue to be the case until Scotland achieves independence, a goal now supported by the majority of voters in Scotland.

Considering there is consistent majority support for independence, Scotland's future is uncertain. In 2017, Nicola Sturgeon asked in a piece written for *The Daily Record*, "Are we prepared to have our future shaped by governments we don't vote for- or is it better to decide our future for ourselves?" This question is at the heart of today's push for a second independence referendum. Scotland wants sovereignty, but will they be able to gain the political support needed to hold another independence referendum? The opportunity to answer this question will arrive when elections for Scottish Parliament are held in May of 2021. For now, Scotland's future can only be speculated upon through the analysis of current political discourse and nationalist efforts.

Literature Review

The term "nation" has been given many definitions over the years, as theories around nationhood and nationalism are constantly in flux. In this paper, I examine several definitions, theories, and understandings on nationalism. I also explore scholarly studies on how the rise of Scottish nationalism. This research is applied to show how the Scottish situation fits into different theories and approaches to nationalism.

To understand nationalism, an understanding of what a 'nation' is must first be established. Benedict Anderson (1983) defines a nation as "an imagined political community" (p. 6). This definition places emphasis on how a nation is constructed through the collective imaginations of its people. A nation, or imagined community, unites strangers together around a shared identity, often utilizing the people's collective past and history as a unifying force. Anthony Smith (1996) writes on the importance of a "golden age" in a nation's collective imagination; a golden age defines for a nation "an

ideal, which is not so much to be resurrected (few nationalists want actually to return to the past) as to be recreated in modern terms" (p. 585). The golden age is central in a nation's collective memory because it constructs a standard that the nation can aspire to within their modern context. This aspiration is seen as realistic and achievable because it was a part of the nation's past. Smith underlines this point, writing that a nation's golden age is more powerful for the collective identity of a nation if the golden age is founded on history that is supported by physical evidence, such as documents and artifacts. From these theories, a nation is understood as an imagined community, linked together by a shared golden age.

As an imagined community which aspires to the ideals of a shared past, a nation must have the ability to govern itself towards a desired future. Anderson illustrates that a nation is defined by its sovereignty, or its self-governance, explaining that the nation is "imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (p. 6). The qualities of a nation that Anderson emphasizes here, limited and sovereign, refer to how a nation is understood in terms of governance and application. A nation must be limited or tied to a specific territory with defined boundaries. A nation is also sovereign; it has the right and ability to govern itself. In *Banal Nationalism*, Michael Billig (1995) defines nationhood: "established as the universal form of sovereignty" (p. 22). From this definition, it is once again illustrated that nations have a right to self-governance, and Billig extends the definition of sovereignty and nationhood to be "universal," illustrating that outside nations also must respect one another's sovereignty and not interfere with another state's governance. As James Mayall (1999) writes, nation-states recognize "each other's sovereignty and what this entailed, namely their territorial integrity and right to manage their domestic affairs without outside interference" (p. 475). From this understanding of

mutual respect among sovereign states, outside interference in a nation's government is seen as a violation of sovereignty. Therefore, if an outside force, another nation-state for example, interferes with one nation's governing, the outside force violates that nation's very existence. Sovereignty is the goal for burgeoning nations because the existence of universally respected sovereignty gives a nation legitimacy.

If nations are defined as a sovereign community, linked together through an imagined communal past, then what is nationalism? As Carlton J.H. Hayes (2017) writes, nationalism is the combination of patriotism, love of one's country, and nationality, shared language and historical background. Nationalism exists when aspects of nationality become "the objects of popular emotional patriotism" (p. 8). Hayes underlines the emotional nature of nationalism, or pride in one's nationality. Additionally, Billig theorizes that nationalism is "the ideology that creates and maintains nation-states" (p. 19). Nationalism, therefore, is a constructed force that is politically used. From these theories, nationalism is understood as an ideology of national pride which is politically used to continually establish a nation.

As an ideology, nationalism must be constructed by a society; it doesn't exist naturally without efforts of creation and maintenance by political groups and citizens. There are varying theories on how nationalism is constructed within communities. Michael Billig theorizes that nationalism has been widely misunderstood for some time. Previous theories of nationalism have spoken of the extreme, emotional belief 'others' have of their nation, but these theories ignore that nationalism is something that occurs in every nation regularly. Banal nationalism, a term coined by Billig, refers to the everyday occurrences that permeate into a national subconscious. On the other hand, hot nationalism is the "force which creates nation-states or which threatens the stability

of existing states” (p. 43). The distinction between hot and banal nationalism is critical because hot nationalism is more easily remembered than banal nationalism. Banal nationalism is designed to be forgotten and creates a common, unquestioned nationalism within an already established nation-state. One form of banal nationalism is the act of honoring fallen soldiers. Introducing their study comparing various countries who give a roll call for fallen soldiers, Valerio Severino writes “nationalist communities are gathered by imagining the sacrifice of a member who dies for the commonweal” (p. 17, 2017). The act of recalling soldiers who died for their country cultivates nationalism by adding their sacrifice to the collective imagination. When studying nationalism, the examination of both banal and hot forms of nationalism is critical to fully comprehend how nationalism is fostered for political outcomes.

Nationalism can be formulated through people and culture. *Nationalism and Pop Culture*, edited by Tim Nieguth (2020), reflects on how pop culture affects nationalism and the power of representation of the nation through pop culture. Nieguth writes that myth, symbols, and memories “play a crucial role in the genesis of national communities, not least because they filter the kind of national narratives that might successfully be employed in generating a sense of nationhood” (p. 4). Nieguth emphasizes the relationship between myths and national narrative, showing that something as simple as a story of a nation’s history can feed and strengthen nationalism. Nieguth also comments on the revelatory quality of popular culture, stating that an examination of aspects of culture, such as sports, television, and music, can answer critical questions on the root and qualities of nationalism.

The more myths are told or referenced in culture, the more present this nationalism is in a community’s collective imagination and memory. Attention,

therefore, must be paid to how and when myths resurface in pop culture to understand why the myth resonates and what messages the myth sends. In the book, *The Mirror of the Medieval: An Anthropology of the Western Historical Imagination*, K.P. Fazioli writes on how myths of the Middle Ages, specifically, are harnessed by nationalists for specific socio political purposes. Fazioli argues that “Many European nationalist movements have summoned a romantic, prelapsarian Middle Ages to give their ‘imagined communities’ a sense of identity, pride, and common purpose” (159). Here, Fazioli illustrates that nationalists often rely on a romanticized myth of their medieval past. Smith also speaks to the significance of national myths and symbols, asserting that they have significant power in crafting nationalism, and Smith further argues that the strength of a national myth directly correlates to the myth’s factual base. The more factual evidence there is for a myth, the stronger the myth resonates with nationalists. Myths can also reveal the character of nationalism through their message while they contribute to the ideology. According to Fazioli, nationalist groups place value in their collective past, and “refuse to believe that such an idealized, romanticized medieval past is lost and hold on to the fantasy that this past can be revived in the present” (159). Myths, and specifically myths of the Middle Ages for European nations, contribute to and reveal truths about modern nationalism when they are evoked.

Nationalism is crafted through everyday images as well as highly emotional charged instances, such as national celebrations (Billig 1995). Pop culture, myths, and symbols all influence nationalism and feed nationalist rhetoric (Nieguth, 2020; Smith, 1996). Nationalist rhetoric and the resurfacing of national myths must be studied because of nationalism’s influence on politics. Smith (1996) writes that, while nationalism is defined by the strength of national myths, “the timing of nationalist

resistance depends largely on material and geo-political trends” (p. 593). Here, Smith illustrates the definite connection between nationalism and politics, asserting that nationalist rhetoric is intrinsically linked to the political context surrounding it. While there is always a relationship between nationalism and politics, with politics affecting national ideologies, Baycroft (1998) in his book *Nationalism in Europe: 1789-1945* asserts that strong nationalist feelings can directly affect politics. Baycroft writes that when nationalist feelings become widespread, they can affect politics through nationalist movements. These movements seek “to put the ultimate political power into the hands of ‘the nation’ or its representatives, and to take it away from some kind of oppressive ruler” (p. 4). Here, Baycroft illustrates that strong feelings of nationalism can accumulate in political action when an organized nationalist movement comes together to achieve the goal of national sovereignty. Nationalism (its character and its strength) and the timing of nationalist rhetoric must be studied to fully understand political movements, particularly those which fight for sovereignty.

A nation’s heritage must also be considered in this conversation of myth, nationalism, and politics. Heritage is defined loosely by Barbara Little and Paul Shackel (2014) as “whatever matters to people today that provides some connection between past and present” (p. 39). This understanding of heritage is in direct conversation with theories on nationalism and its dependence on the establishment of a nation’s shared past, which is often romanticized through myth. This sense of “what matters” to the present nation to create a “connection between past and present” relies on the existence of a nation’s shared past. Jon Bohland and LC Pace (2019) write on the significance of national heritage, which they understand as the “selective remembering” (p. 373) of a nation’s past that provides a stable and unchanging identity for the people of that

nation. Bohland and Pace note that national heritage is often “framed as a story of progress and struggle replete with patriotic heroes and epic battles fought for freedom and territorial sovereignty” (p. 373), showing that national heritage overlaps with the romanticization of national myths. This selective remembering is often used to pursue political endeavors, making national heritage critical in the development of nationalism.

Laurajane Smith (2006) articulates that heritage is a “cultural practice involved in the construction and regulation of a range of values and understandings” (p. 11). National heritage is therefore understood to be a carefully constructed remembering that shapes culture and whose purpose is to determine values of a community. Much like forms of banal nationalism, heritage aids in the creation of a shared identity. Smith even notes that “To some degree the pervasiveness of the nationalizing discourse of heritage has itself become banal in the sense that Billig uses the term” (p. 49). Like banal nationalism, a nation’s heritage is continually constructed. One way that heritage is continuously cultivated is through the preservation of heritage sites. These heritage sites can include, but are not limited to, national monuments, statues, memorials, museums, and preserved landscapes (Bohland & Pace, 2019). These heritage sites are visible and reveal truths about what specific narrative and messages are being selectively remembered.

While recognizing that sites contribute to heritage discourse, Smith argues that heritage itself “is a cultural process that engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present, and the sites themselves are cultural tools that can facilitate, but are not necessarily vital for, this process” (p. 44). Heritage sites, therefore, are important in the discussion of heritage when present but do not define heritage. Orvar Löfgren and Ewa Klekot (2012) further discuss heritage

sites, emphasizing the role sites play as “embodiments of founding myths of national history” (p. 391). As a physical, designated point, heritage sites bring national myths physically to the present moment. Little and Shackel explain the importance of heritage sites, arguing that the “development of heritage and the promotion of heritage sites are essentially political acts” (p. 42). Therefore, the establishment of a heritage site by the government, whether local or national, reveals truths about the message that political body aims to promote, or the political goal that government is pursuing.

Nationalism, or the constructed ideology of collective national pride, has been employed to obtain political goals since the establishment of nations. In the case of Scotland, as part of the United Kingdom, different forms of nationalism have been employed during different geo-political contexts. During WWI, when England needed more troops, union nationalism, a term Graeme Morton (2017) describes as a collective pride in the union, was employed throughout Scotland by the British government to get Scottish men to enlist and fight on behalf of Britain. Scotland suffered economically after the war, however, while England seemed to prosper. This difference between the two nations within the union led to feelings of resentment in Scotland towards England for endangering Scottish lives in the war without making sure Scotland would be prosperous after the war (Kraner, 2019). Nationalism in Scotland shifted then during WWI, when the SNP advocated for the rejection of English requests for Scottish troops (Morton, 2017). The political ramifications of WWI in Scotland resulted in a shift from union nationalism in Scotland to one of suspicion towards the union.

Union nationalism in Scotland diminished throughout the 20th century, giving way to a more separatist nationalism. M.K. Thompson (2019) writes that a “continuing divergence of politics” between Scotland and Britain has resulted in rising separatist

nationalism in Scotland. Thompson writes that in the 1980s, with the economic policies of Margaret Thatcher, Scottish nationalism rose because the political and economic goals of Scotland were different from the policies being enforced in England. Scottish nationalism then centered around rhetoric that Scotland had the right to govern itself and further abuse from the English government should be prevented with devolution, or more governing power for Scotland. The rising popularity of the SNP, which has consistently pushed for Scottish independence, marks further evolution in Scottish nationalism towards a nationalism concerned with self-determination (Garnett, Steven, 2017).

Understanding nationalism requires the study of the character and origins of nationalism, otherwise known as the golden age of an imagined community, as well as a study of the political context surrounding the resurgence of nationalist rhetoric. The degree of nationalism present in a community can shift with ever changing politics, illustrating that nationalism is unfixed and fluid. Various factors influence nationalism, from everyday symbols and practices to pop culture, national celebrations, national myths, political rhetoric, and heritage both as a process and as physical sites. Understanding Scottish nationalism, which has shifted significantly from union nationalism to independent nationalism since WWI, requires a study of how and when Scotland's golden age is referenced in politics and media.

Methodology

In this paper I establish Scotland's golden age as the age of Robert the Bruce and examine how this golden age and its messages have seeped into political discourse, popular culture, media content, and the preservation and development of heritage sites.

Examining the connections between the resurgence of the myth of Robert the Bruce, Scottish nationalism, and the push for independence first requires thorough analysis on the discourse surrounding Robert the Bruce. I conduct my analysis of discourse and content around Robert the Bruce specifically through the theoretical lenses of nationalism, sovereignty, and myth discussed in my literature review. To understand if and how this myth contributes to Scottish nationalism, I first analyze how Robert the Bruce was used before Brexit, starting with the invocation of Bruce at the start of WWI, to promote nationalism in Scotland. I analyze the celebration of the 700th anniversary of the Battle of Bannockburn in 2014. I examine previous scholarship and discourse around the King of Scots to provide a foundation and framework for how the myth of Robert the Bruce has evolved and been used for different causes within different political contexts.

I then analyze discourse on Robert the Bruce after Brexit, since Brexit substantially changed the way Scots thought about their nation and independence. 2020 was the 700th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Arbroath. Considering this letter is a critical piece of Robert the Bruce's legacy, the celebration of the declaration provides insight to how this myth resonates with today's nationalism in Scotland. Several online sources, including the Scottish nationalist group All Under One Banner, have posted videos and articles on the anniversary of the declaration. I perform a content analysis of these videos and articles, looking at the language used around Robert the Bruce and Scottish independence specifically to understand how collective pride in these past events resonates within a modern context. I also analyze the heritage site at Bannockburn, examining the statue of Robert the Bruce, monuments, and the Bannockburn Visitor Centre to understand how Robert the Bruce has been

immortalized through this site. While analyzing modern representations of Robert the Bruce, the Battle of Bannockburn, and the Declaration of Arbroath, I apply theories on nationalism discussed in the literature review.

I then study the portrayal of Robert the Bruce in cinema. I first analyze his portrayal in the 1995 classic, *Braveheart*, and then I analyze two recent films, *Outlaw King* (2018) and *Robert the Bruce* (2019). In these films, I focus on how the medieval king is portrayed and the dialogue written promoting Scottish independence. Analyzing these films, especially considering both of these films were released after both the failed referendum in 2014 and Brexit in 2016, and their portrayal of the early myth of Scottish independence gives insight on how Robert the Bruce influences the level and character of Scotland's nationalism. My analysis concludes with a discourse analysis of SNP rhetoric to examine how the political discourse from Scotland's most popular nationalist party correlates with and feeds into Bruce nationalism.

Before diving into my analysis on nationalism in Scotland, which includes a discussion of responses to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, I must establish that I am a white American woman, and I approach this subject from that identity. I cannot speak to how Scots, specifically Black Scots, felt or responded to the event I analyze in my section on heritage sites. My analysis relies on press coverage of this event as well as responses on social media. I approach this subject with sincere care, and I understand that my comprehension of the controversy is affected by my identity as a white American. I also must admit that I fully support the Black Lives Matter movement, but I have done my best to not let this bias affect my analysis. In the rest of my analysis on Scottish nationalism, my nationality as American limits my understanding of what it means to be Scottish and how this myth resonates with Scots; I

rely on responses on social media and media interviews to develop an understanding of how Scots reacted, in general, to events discussed in this paper. That being said, I know my analysis cannot account for and include every possible reception of the events, media, films, and discourse which I analyze. My analysis, specifically my content analysis of the heritage site at Bannockburn and of the three films, focuses on the messages which the creators of this content involving Robert the Bruce intended to be portrayed by their work but also acknowledges that viewers of created works can interpret these works through the socio-political context they live in. As Smith (2021) writes in her book *Emotional Heritage: Visitor Engagement at Museums and Heritage Sites* “visitors can utilize sites to negotiate contemporary social and political issues” (p. 283). Responses to created works will always vary and diverge from authorial intent, but this paper aims to analyze, reveal, and discover the goals of the creator and the implications of these goals while also considering how these works can be viewed through the framework of the political pursuit of Scottish independence from the UK.

Analysis

Pre-Brexit

Since WWI, the character of Scotland’s nationalism has changed in correlation with Scotland’s relationship to the UK. As Morton theorizes, during WWI, Scotland’s national identity was linked to the union between them and England. Morton described this trend as “union-nationalism,” writing on how the British tried to curate union-nationalism among Scots to get young Scottish men to fight on behalf of the union in WWI. I argue, based on M.K. Thompson’s theory that Scottish independent-nationalism rises whenever their politics diverge from those of England, Britain’s

strategy here was only successful because Scotland believed their politics aligned with that of England, therefore believing the union worked in their favor. Union-nationalism was prevalent when the union was a source of pride for Scotland and when the political identities of Scotland and England paralleled, rather than now, when the union is a source of debate.

The myth of Robert the Bruce was used to promote union-nationalism among Scots by the British in their effort to recruit soldiers to fight on behalf of the union. David Goldie (2016) writes on how Robert the Bruce and Bannockburn were used by the British government at the beginning of WWI. When the British asked for Scottish troops in WWI, they attempted to use the story of Robert the Bruce and Bannockburn to recruit men, harnessing Scottish pride in the military heroics of Robert the Bruce. An image of Robert the Bruce in front of a crowd of men and Britannia was used in a propaganda poster asking for 100,000 Scottish men; the photo was captioned “Shades of Bruce: The Same Spirit Still Lives!” Goldie also writes that Lord Rosebery evoked Robert the Bruce when asking for troops, saying “Are we worthy of those men, of Bruce and his fellows? Do you children feel that you, too, might grow up to be heroes like them...” (p. 5). Goldie articulates that Scottish national pride in their medieval king, Robert the Bruce, was harnessed by the English to recruit Scottish troops for their war efforts.

This use of Robert the Bruce, specifically the invocation of Bruce’s fighting spirit and bravery at Bannockburn, establishes the rhetorical power of this myth in stirring nationalism. In 1914, when Lord Rosebery called for Scots to embody the bravery of Bruce and his men, this myth was used to cultivate the prominent type of nationalism at the time: union nationalism, proving the importance and power of this myth in the collective imagination of Scotland. A precedent was set when the British used Robert the

Bruce to promote nationalism: the myth of Robert the Bruce, especially the victory at Bannockburn, holds rhetorical power in the advancement of nationalist political goals.

Scottish nationalism shifted dramatically when Scotland's relationship to the union shifted after WWI and in the 1980s. After WWI, Scotland was struggling economically, much more than England, which led to resentment towards England for using Scottish soldiers in the war and not taking care of Scotland after the war. These feelings correlated with rising independent-nationalism, with the establishment of the SNP in 1934 (Kraner, 2019). Then in the 1980s, as Thompson (2019) wrote, Scots believed the economic policies during the Thatcher years were a disservice to Scotland and that the politics of Scotland started veering away from Thatcher's politics. With this veering, support for the SNP and devolution grew significantly throughout the 1980s, cultivating politically in the establishment of a Scottish parliament within the UK government in 1999. The rising support for greater governmental power marks a change in Scottish nationalism from union nationalism to independent nationalism, or pride in the individual nation of Scotland.

Scottish nationalists continued to push for commemorations of Robert the Bruce and the Battle of Bannockburn throughout the 20th century, though his general presence in popular discourse diminished (Goldie 2016). Notably, in the 2000s and 2010s, as the SNP grew more popular, there was burgeoning scholarship and literature around Robert the Bruce and the Wars of Independence, such as *The Wars of Scotland 1214-1371* (2004), *Bannockburn: The Triumph of Robert the Bruce* (2009), and *Robert the Bruce: King of Scots* (2014). These books highlight Robert the Bruce's life and his achievements, portraying him as a brave King who persevered Scottish Independence. The publication of these books is significant because the resurgence of a myth's

popularity reveals and reflects feelings of nationalism within a society (Smith 1996). Bruce's popularity, specifically the myth around his fight for Scottish independence, has risen significantly in the last two decades, reflecting rising independent-nationalist ideals.

Scottish nationalism continued to rise. In 2011, the SNP saw overwhelming success in Scotland's election, marking a "hegemony" within Scotland's politics, and the SNP pushed continuously for an independence referendum until one was granted for September of 2014 (Garnett and Stevens). 2014 was also



Figure 1, Photo sourced from Gettyimages, taken by Jeremy Sutton-Hibbert

the 700th anniversary of the Battle of Bannockburn: an anniversary that was not ignored in the campaign for independence. Alex Salmond, the leader of the SNP at the time, enthusiastically spoke of the battle as the "birthplace" of Scotland as a modern nation, revealing national pride in the Battle of Bannockburn during the months leading up to the referendum (The Newsroom, 2014). Salmond was even photographed embracing an actor who played Robert the Bruce in 2014, bringing Robert the Bruce into the modern movement for independence. This picture (above), combined with Salmond's quote, illustrate a relationship between Scotland's pursuit of independence in 2014 and celebration of Robert the Bruce's accomplishments. While the referendum failed, the campaign for independence included commemorations of the Battle of

Bannockburn. Significantly, the rise in Scottish nationalism after WWI, throughout the Thatcher years, and leading up to the independence referendum correlates with the resurgence in popularity of Robert the Bruce's story.

From WWI to Brexit, Robert the Bruce's legacy was used to harness nationalism in pursuit of certain political goals. The myth's nationalist power was used by different groups with differing political agendas. The use of King Robert's victory at Bannockburn by the British in WWI established the power of his legacy, showing that Bruce's story lived in the collective consciousness of Scotland, and even the union, at that time and was appropriated to push union nationalism. With rising independent nationalism, the nationalism associated with Robert the Bruce shifted to the cause of Scottish independence. Leading up to the 2014 independence referendum, Bruce's myth resurfaced in both the political realm and in the popular realm, showing a relationship between rising popularity in Robert the Bruce and rising nationalism.

Post-Brexit

While the referendum failed in 2014, nationalism in Scotland did not disappear. The Brexit vote significantly changed the way Scots view the question of independence. In Aaronovitch's *BBC* radio interview from August 6, 2020, John Curtice explains that, to nationalists, the Brexit vote is the "clearest example possible that, for so long as Scotland is part of the UK, it's always at risk of having its democratic wishes 'overturned' by the differing views of those living in England." The majority of Scots voted against Brexit, but their votes did not sway the overall vote of the UK. Since Brexit, polls in Scotland have indicated rising support for independence. Specifically, in the past year, polls have consistently shown majority support for independence, which is historic in

and of itself, reflecting the growth of independence nationalism in Scotland. How has the discourse around Robert the Bruce shifted since Brexit? I ask this question to understand the relationship Robert the Bruce has to Scotland's nationalism and to analyze the prevalence of the myth.

An article in *The New Yorker* from March of 2020 connects Robert the Bruce to today's independence movement in Scotland. The article gives a brief summary on the Bruce's battle for independence and continues to underline the importance of the Declaration of Arbroath in Scotland. In the piece, Anna Russel writes that the letter would be displayed in the National Museum of Scotland for its 700th anniversary, and she underlines the importance of this document for many Scots, talking of how many students memorize passages from the document in school. As previously stated, national myths/golden ages are more successful in boosting nationalism when they have substantial facts backing them (Smith 1996). I extend this theory to argue that modern celebrations of The Declaration of Arbroath, in formal displays of the document and in schools, boost Scottish nationalism and pride in their history because they bring a physical artefact from Scotland's 'golden age' into the present. Each time the Declaration of Arbroath is honored in a display or glorified through memorization in school, pride in Robert the Bruce and the Wars of Independence is taught.

The repeated honoring of this document in recent months and years, especially considering the strong nationalist language used in the Declaration, contributes to nationalism during this uncertain period of time in Scotland, with potential independence on the horizon. Take for example the pamphlet published by the National Museum of Scotland celebrating the document's 700th anniversary: this pamphlet gives a transcript of the Declaration as well as historic information on the context

surrounding the letter. The pamphlet provides historic information on the document and the war occurring at the time, but it also includes biased language honoring the Scottish cause. Answering the question “Why was the Declaration Needed?”, the pamphlet reads “Despite the Scottish victory over English King Edward II at the Battle of Bannockburn in June 1314... Edward would not stop the long-standing English claim to overlordship of Scotland (2020). This language is nationalistic because it presents a narrative of England wrongly denying Scotland their independence which was “earned” at the Battle of Bannockburn. The pamphlet also emphasizes the importance of the document: “The Declaration’s stirring language, and its evocative sentiments of nationhood and freedom, have given it a special distinction since then, not just in Scotland but worldwide” (2020). By emphasizing the importance of the document in Scotland and internationally, this pamphlet highlights the Declaration’s message: that Scotland should be recognized as rightfully free of England. The online display of the document, which the pamphlet is attached to through a hyperlink, presented by the National Records of Scotland, similarly commemorates the Declaration of Arbroath and Robert the Bruce’s accomplishments as honorable and critical in Scottish history. The display, including the pamphlet, reawakens the myth of Robert the Bruce and brings the language of the Declaration of Arbroath into the current collective imagination of Scots.

A Scottish nationalist group called “All Under One Banner” has also published several videos on their website honoring the Declaration of Arbroath and Robert the Bruce. This group heavily campaigns for Scottish independence, and they celebrated Robert the Bruce on their website as part of this campaign. The multiple videos published celebrate the Declaration’s 700th anniversary push nationalist rhetoric of the document and its relevance today. One of these videos is an episode of *The Alex*

Salmond Show which delved into the Declaration on its 700th anniversary. Alex Salmond introduces the Declaration, saying “In today’s show, we ask the question: whether a 700 year old letter could hold the key to the future of Scotland” (2020). Immediately, Salmond brings the Declaration’s message not only into the present moment for Scotland, but also into Scotland’s future. In another video of *The Alex Salmond Show* published on All Under One Banner’s site, Salmond says “it’s an ancient document: it’s very modern in its concept,” (2020) once again bringing the document’s language and message into the modern era. Salmond also emphasizes that the document’s recognition of the people, or the community of the realm, and their right and ability to choose their government, is “a concept which might still decide the fate of Scotland” (2020). Through these comments on the relevance of the document in modern times and in Scotland’s future, Salmond pushes the Declaration’s nationalist language, which claims Scotland has a right to be free and the Scottish people have the right to choose their leader, into today’s push by the SNP for another independence referendum.

All Under One Banner also shared a short documentary called “Declaration, the Letter of Liberty.” This documentary gives a history of the letter and its importance to Scotland’s history, referring to the letter as the nation’s “most valuable historic document.” The document is hailed as revolutionary and progressive for medieval times by the historians interviewed in the films, specifically for the document’s evocation of the power that the “community of the realm of Scotland” held in Scottish politics. The letter underlines that the people have the right to be led by a king they support- Robert the Bruce. Robert the Bruce and this declaration are given credit for “400 years of relative peace” in this short film. The narrator even goes so far as to say that the

Declaration of Arbroath and “its core idea: that a nation is its people” may have “influenced the men who drafted the American Declaration of Independence.” This assertion gives substantial credit to the declaration, making the letter seem highly influential. The letter’s message is said to have “increasing resonance through time,” once again demonstrating a belief that the nationalist message in the letter is applicable even today. This film presents the history of Scotland and this letter as broadly significant, essentially establishing the ideals of the document and Robert the Bruce’s campaign for freedom as historic, legitimate, and incredibly influential.

An episode of *NPR’s Morning Edition* on rising support in Scotland for independence aired on 12 November 2020. In this episode, several Scots were interviewed and asked what their opinion on another independence referendum was. One Scot in the interview, John Craig, said that he felt Boris Johnson’s stance against granting another independence referendum was anti-democratic: “I feel my democratic right is being blocked within my own country.” This quote reflects the belief that Scotland’s sovereignty is being violated by British rule, which is not allowing Scotland to take the course of governance they desire. This perceived violation of sovereignty is significant because a nation is defined by its sovereignty; if nationalist Scots believe their sovereignty is being violated, they have more cause to pursue independence, or sovereignty in separation from the UK. Interviews continue in the short radio episode, with many Scots speaking of their dissatisfaction with Boris Johnson, illustrating the feeling that Scotland is governed from afar by a government not representative of their values. Frank Langfiit, the host of the program, goes on to describe the “long and bitter history” between Scotland and England. The first example he gives to prove this contentious relationship is the Battle of Bannockburn, Langfiit uses audio of swords

clashing and men bellowing from the museum at Bannockburn in the background, and he presents Robert the Bruce's defeat of the English as "one of the most famous battles" and the starting point for his brief history of the relationship between Scotland and England. The inclusion and portrayal of this battle within this popular and respected radio program shows that the myth of Robert the Bruce holds a critical position in the conversation around Scottish independence.

Brexit significantly changed the way Scots viewed their relationship to the UK and to England. There is a perception among some in Scotland that the Brexit vote exemplifies how England violates the sovereignty of Scotland or governs those in Scotland without listening to their voices. In line with the trend set in WWI and leading up to the 2014 referendum, these rising nationalist sentiments have correlated with rising popularity in Bruce's story. Post-Brexit, Bruce has been further commemorated and brought into the present Scottish consciousness by the National Records for Scotland in the form of their Declaration of Arbroath virtual display. Additionally, the media, specifically the *New York Times* and *NPR*, have published stories explicitly connecting Robert the Bruce's legacy to the current push for another independence referendum by the SNP. The continued memorializing of Robert the Bruce by the media and by national institutions in Scotland shows that there is a connection between his story's popularity and relevance when nationalism surges in Scotland.

Heritage Sites: Bannockburn

Heritage sites preserving the legacy of Robert the Bruce also critically influence Scottish nationalism by selectively upholding certain facets of his history and therefore highlighting and remembering specific messages from this history. Critically examining

these heritage sites, what message they send, and when they were developed reveals truths about nationalist trends in Scotland. The Historic Environment Scotland group makes recommendations to the Scottish government on which sites “promote Scotland’s historic environment.” The Scottish Ministers then decide whether or not to designate the site. On March 21, 2011, the Battle of Bannockburn site was officially designated by the Scottish government, but the site has been preserved and honored since long before then (Historic Environment Scotland n.d.).

The site of the Battle of Bannockburn has been continually established and developed as a heritage site since 1870, when a flagpole was erected at the Borestone, the site where Robert the Bruce raised his standard during the Battle of Bannockburn. The land surrounding this flagpole was purchased by the head of the Bruce family, the Earl of Elgin in 1932. Then, in 1954, the National Trust for Scotland, a conservation charity founded in 1931, incorporated remains of the Borestone into a cairn at this site. The escalating interest in preserving this site marks an attempt to bring Scotland’s past at Bannockburn, a story of the successful pursuit of independence, into the nation’s collective consciousness (Historic Environment Scotland n.d.).

In 1964, in preparation for the battle’s 650th anniversary, the site of the battlefield was formally redefined architecturally and in its landscaping. This redefinition is when the heritage site became much more developed, and significantly this development occurred alongside growing nationalism in Scotland with the first electoral successes of the SNP in the late 1960s. The



Figure 2, sourced from geograph.org, photo taken by Kim Traynor

landscape plan centered around the flagpole at the Borestone site. The Borestone cairn was enclosed in a circular monument, and a statue of Robert the Bruce (pictured above) was erected and unveiled on Bannockburn Day, June 23, of 1964. The face of the statue itself was modelled from the presumed skull of Robert the Bruce in 1954. In the further development of this heritage site, the Scottish government and Historic Environment Scotland celebrated the site of this battle as important to Scotland's national identity. The Battle of Bannockburn and Robert the Bruce were brought into the present moment. This resurgence reflects the growing nationalism of the time and also marks a choice by the Scottish government to bring Robert the Bruce, and his message of Scotland as a rightfully free nation, to the nationalism (Historic Environment Scotland n.d.).

Historic Environment Scotland writes in their description of this site and the Battle that "the significance of the battle can hardly be overstated. It is the center of Scottish national consciousness and a major element in the definition of Scotland as an independent entity rather than North Britain." By calling the battle the "center of Scottish national consciousness," this organization attributes the Battle and Bruce's accomplishments of freedom from England as the critical, defining aspect of Scottish identity. The organization recognizes the power this narrative holds for nationalists and writes that the battle has recently been a "cornerstone" of nationalism in Scotland and calls the battle a "rallying point for nationalist groups." By preserving and continually developing a heritage site tied to a battle and historic figure who feeds nationalism, the Scottish government as well as Historic Environment Scotland willingly celebrate this nationalism, even if they do not explicitly state that they agree with the nationalists who see Bannockburn and King Robert as pillars of their identity.

With rising nationalism and the success of the SNP, heritage sites became important to the newly elected SNP government in 2007. Clarke (2020) notes the explicit ways the SNP published intentions to promote and spread Scottish national heritage, publishing statements about improving “awareness of Scotland’s reputation” and creating an “aspiring, confident country.” Clarke notes the overt politicization of national heritage here, and astutely connects the SNP’s attempts to improve national heritage with a simultaneous effort to be granted an independence referendum. Both efforts culminated in 2014, when the new Bannockburn Visitor Center was opened and when the independence referendum was held.

The heritage site at Bannockburn was expanded upon leading up to the 700th anniversary of the battle, when the Bannockburn Visitor Center was opened on March 1, 2014. The center was developed in partnership by Historic Environment Scotland and the National Trust for Scotland, and it includes a 3D digital experience of the Battle of Bannockburn which aims to immerse visitors in the battle itself, discussing the armies, tactics, and weapons used in the battle (Herald Staff, 2014). By digitally immersing visitors into the battle, this site brings the nationalism of Bannockburn and King Robert into the present moment more than ever before. Visitors not only visit the physical site and see statues but are now experiencing the battle with higher technological displays and sounds. The opening of this center only months before the 2014 independence referendum is an example of how national heritage and nationalism feed one another. The site at Bannockburn continues to be developed and preserved even after the failed independence referendum. In December of 2016, Gillies Hill, the hill where Robert the Bruce’s servants or “sma folk” scared away British troops during the Battle of Bannockburn, was designated as a Local Nature Conservation Site (The Newsroom

2016). The continued development of the Bannockburn heritage site reveals that with rising nationalism comes rising celebrations of heritage, and with rising celebrations of heritage comes rising nationalism.

In 2020, in response to the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, statues of confederate soldiers and other historical figures associated with white supremacy and slavery in the United States were taken down and defaced (Taylor 2020). In correlation with this act of resistance, the statue of Robert the Bruce at Bannockburn was defaced with graffiti calling him a “racist king.” The statue was also tagged with “BLM,” and the rotunda surrounding the flagpole was graffitied with “Robert was a racist Bring down the statue.” The vandalism was anonymous (Campsie 2020).

Since the vandalism was anonymous, it is not confirmed whether or not this graffiti was actually done by BLM protestors. Many responded to these claims that King Robert was racist with disbelief and anger. Asher McShane reported for *LBC News*, writing that Scots online “pointed out that Robert the Bruce's reign in 14th century Scotland was hundreds of years before the period in which the slave trade existed.” One opinion piece by John McGuirk for the Comment Ireland section of Gript.ie was quoted multiple times on Twitter. In his piece, “Also now a racist: Robert the Bruce,” McGuirk reacts with anger and condescension towards the supposed BLM protestors who would vandalize this statue:

The truth is, of course, that it doesn't really matter what Robert the Bruce thought of questions of racial equality. His sin isn't racism, his sin is being an old white dude who's on a statue, and is therefore probably a racist. That's the level of thought we're dealing with.

McGuirk claims that to call Robert the Bruce racist is baseless and mocks those who would say he is by claiming their “level of thought” is ridiculous and that these claims

are only based off of the fact that Robert the Bruce was white. As shown by McGuirk’s opinion piece and also reporting of the Twitter response by McShane, the idea that Robert the Bruce could be racist angered many Scots and the potential for his racism was generally not taken seriously based on the fact that he lived “hundreds of years” before the global slave trade that started in the 16th century.

After searching Twitter, Reddit, and press coverage of this vandalism, the speculated motivations for calling Robert the Bruce racist, if this was indeed a sincere form of protest by BLM supporters, was that his heart went on a crusade after his death.

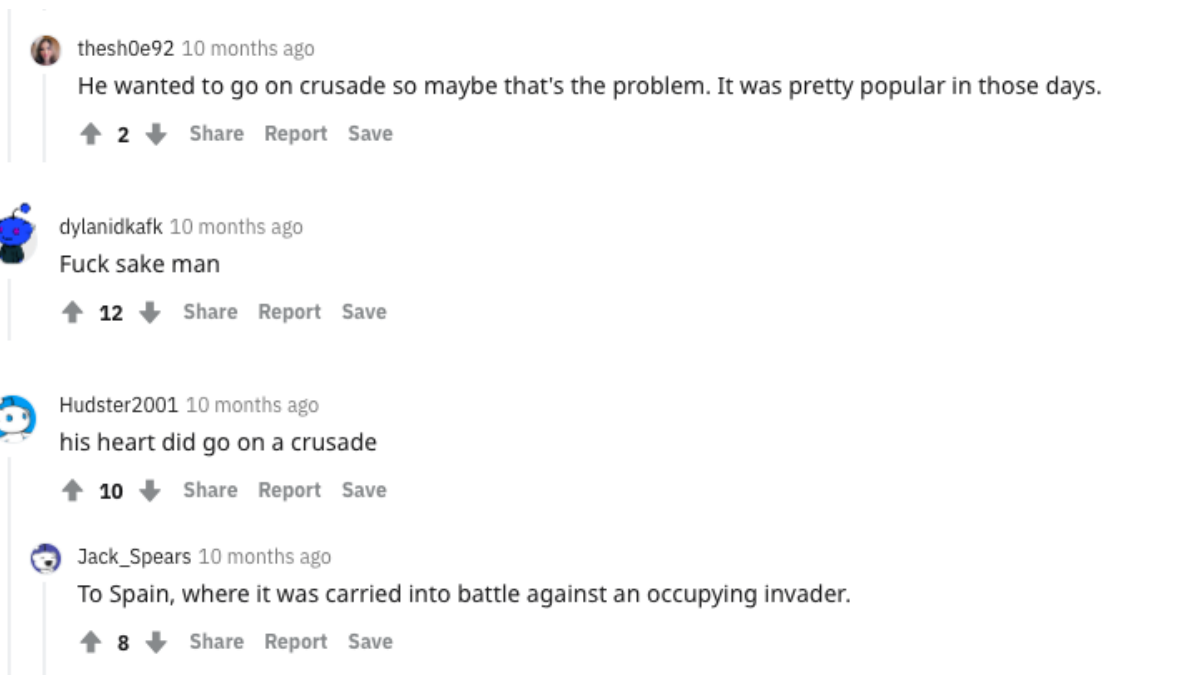


Figure 3, screenshot taken from Reddit

The Bannockburn Visitor Center released a statement on the statue’s defacement attempting to explain why Robert the Bruce may be perceived as racist. The statement speculated it could be in response to the crusade taking Robert’s heart after his death to Jerusalem (this event is the crusade speculated about on Reddit). In this crusade, James Douglas was instructed by King Edward II to battle the “Saracens” (a medieval term for

Muslims used by white Europeans, usually in an offensive way) (Abuthawabeh 2019). The center's statement continued to say that racial bias existed in Europe during medieval times, but that there was a lack of Scottish sources on racism within the Scottish political community. The center included in their statement that they wanted Black visitors to feel welcome and safe at the center and wrote "The Battle of Bannockburn was a hugely significant moment in Scottish history and is part of a heritage that Black Scots have as much right to share in as anyone else." The center said they were disappointed by the graffiti, especially since it came at a time when the National Trust for Scotland, which relies on donations for funding, was struggling financially (Campsie 2020).

If this anonymous vandalism was a sincere attempt of protest in solidarity with BLM, the motivation for calling Robert the Bruce racist has remained unclear to Scots. Many online have presented the idea that this vandalism was not actually BLM protestors but instead someone trying to delegitimize the movement and create animosity. Joe Smith reported for *Edinburgh Live* that "Several Twitter users put forward the theory that the graffiti was done with the intention of discrediting the movement." Smith quotes several tweets which note that nobody had come forward to defend the "racist king" claim, raising suspicion among the Twitter users. Smith quotes: "Scott Cuthbertson said: "The most surprising thing about the graffiti on Robert the Bruce's statue is that some people really believe the #BLM movement put it there." Twitter and Reddit threads (screenshots included below) on the vandalism revealed

beliefs that the vandalism was done by “unionists” or someone from the al-right attempting to villainize BLM.

Whatever the motivation, the vandalism caused a strong reaction

among Scots and brought the figure of Robert the Bruce into national discourse. Significantly, if this vandalism was an attempt to delegitimize the BLM movement, that reveals the belief that Robert the Bruce is a loved and important figure who, if slandered, will inspire some Scots to rally against the group responsible for tarnishing his image.

This incident illustrates another way in which heritage sites bring national heritage into the present consciousness of a nation. While Robert the Bruce can be viewed by nationalists as inspiration for Scotland’s current pursuit of independence, other individuals apply his legacy to either contribute to or attempt to slander other social and political movements. When a historical figure is preserved in the collective memory of a nation, their legacy can be both celebrated and criticized in relation to current movements. The labeling of Robert the Bruce as a racist king, whether or not meant sincerely or intended as a way to delegitimize the BLM movement, establishes that his legacy, which has been recognized by National Trust for Scotland to include medieval racial biases and Islamophobia, is currently present in the modern consciousness of Scots. As a part of deliberately preserved Scottish heritage, Robert the Bruce’s legacy is brought into the present collective imagining of the Scottish nation,



Figure 4, screenshots from Twitter

meaning that his legacy can be applied to whatever circumstances the nation endures in the modern moment. His presence in the collective mind of this nation also means that his legacy is subject to change as the Scottish attitude towards various social and political movements shifts with time.

Films

The myth of Robert the Bruce has been a popular topic in films, starting with *Braveheart*, released in 1995. As understood from theories on nationalism previously discussed, retelling a national myth, especially in highly visible areas of pop culture such as movies, is a way to spread nationalism among citizens. Studying the representation of these myths in pop culture can also provide critical insight to the type and strength of nationalism that is present or attempting to be spread. *Braveheart* is a popular and critically acclaimed film which celebrates Scottish nationalism. Understanding the socio-political context of Scotland at the time aids in the general comprehension of nationalism in this film. In the 1990s, Scotland was pursuing devolution, which they achieved for Scotland in 1999 with the establishment of a Scottish Parliament. It is significant that *Braveheart* was released in 1995, only a few years before the achievement of devolution, when the SNP was campaigning heavily to gain political support and nationalism was on the rise in Scotland, with the goal of devolution in mind.

Braveheart's hero is William Wallace, a legendary figure in the Wars of Independence. In the film, Wallace is portrayed as fierce, brave, devoted to Scotland, and unwavering in his fight for independence. Wallace leads the Scottish rebellion against the English, even though the English have more men, money, and weapons. The

Scottish fight for freedom is glorified and portrayed as noble in this film, while the English, led by King Edward Longshanks, are portrayed as cruel and merciless, especially towards Scottish women. The contrast between the portrayal of William Wallace, leading the fight for Scotland, and King Edward Longshanks, leading the fight for England, establishes a binary between the Scottish and the English where the Scottish are heroes, and the English are villains.

In *Braveheart*, Robert the Bruce's character is at first portrayed as overly diplomatic, almost cowardly. He is often talking with his father in the film, and in these conversations, the Bruce's father always convinces him to err on the side of caution and voice support for Wallace's cause while also voicing support for Scottish nobles siding with King Edward Longshanks. In the movie, Robert the Bruce wants to fight for independence, and William Wallace puts faith in Robert the Bruce to unite Scotland. Wallace even tells Robert the Bruce at one moment that "you [Robert] and you alone can unite Scotland." Even though Wallace, the hero of the film, puts his faith in Robert, Robert is continually convinced by his father to not commit to fighting alongside Wallace in fear of angering the king. Robert the Bruce even abandons William Wallace at Stirling, and he stands on the "wrong" side of the battlefield with King Edward Longshanks. This characterization of Robert the Bruce portrays him as diplomatic and controversial, almost insinuating that Robert the Bruce stood in the way of Scottish independence while William Wallace led the rebellion.

Eventually, Robert the Bruce decides to join forces with William Wallace, but, in the film's version of events, Wallace is captured as he goes to meet with Robert, a scheme which Robert did not know about. Wallace is tortured and killed, famously screaming his last word "freedom," and Robert the Bruce has a complete change of

heart. The film ends with Robert the Bruce leading the Scots into battle against the British. He motivates the Scots, saying “You have bled with Wallace, now bleed with me” and the troops chant “Wallace” before they charge against the British. Bruce’s portrayal in this film shows him as diplomatic and eventually brave, but the film also credits William Wallace with motivating and inspiring Robert the Bruce to lead Scotland to freedom. *Braveheart* ends with narration sharing the success of the Scottish at the Battle of Bannockburn, and the film recognizes that Robert the Bruce led this fight against the British but also credits William Wallace with inspiring Scotland to fight for its freedom. Robert the Bruce was not hailed as the hero of *Braveheart*, but William Wallace was. Raising the question, why did Robert the Bruce become the hero in later films released on the Wars of Independence, specifically those released after Brexit? And how does the portrayal of Robert the Bruce in these films compare with his portrayal, as well as William Wallace’s, in *Braveheart*?

Scottish nationalism presented in *Braveheart*, shown in the glorifications of William Wallace as well as general celebrations of Scottish heritage, such as the presence of kilts and tartan in the film, reveals a pro-Scottish attitude at the time the film was released. The film also contributed to Scottish nationalism at the time by popularizing the story of a tumultuous relationship between the Scottish and the English. This film spread a message that Scotland’s freedom was limited under the cruel English during a time when Scotland was campaigning for more political freedom within the UK. The timing of this film’s release as well as the nationalist message of the film reveal a tradition of honoring the Wars of Independence in Scotland, especially during times of political turmoil between Scotland and England.

Since Brexit in 2016, two major films have been released on Robert the Bruce: *Outlaw King* in 2018 and *Robert the Bruce* in 2019. The release of two movies which glorify Robert the Bruce's battles for Scottish independence is indicative and reflective of rising independent-nationalist sentiments in Scotland. The timing of these two movie's releases also reflects that nationalism in Scotland has been rising since Brexit, as both of these movies were made and released recently after the Brexit vote. As Smith (1996) wrote, the timing of nationalist resurgences is determined by geo-political contexts. It is revealing that two movies glorifying the king who won independence for Scotland in 1328 came out during a time when another independence movement is underway. How the narrative of Robert the Bruce's fight for independence is presented in these films reflects what aspects and messages of this story resonate in the modern context.

The portrayals of the relationship between Scotland and England in these films reflect nationalist ideals, which is significant considering both films were either written or directed by Scots who are directly affected by the politics of Scotland. David Mackenzie directed *Outlaw King*, and in an interview for *The Scotsman* claimed he was trying to accurately portray the historical figure of Robert the Bruce in this film and not stir up dangerous levels of nationalism Mackenzie said "You don't want to be doing the big, volatile, jingoistic stuff at this moment in time," showing that he is aware the timing of the film's release could result in the film's message and nationalism contributing to political discourse. Mackenzie, interestingly, does not "mind it being used in political discourse" but is "very conscious of the fact that it's a 700-year-old story." He is quoted further, saying "Any attempts to make contemporary parallels are not being made by me [Mackenzie]. If it's part of a discussion, it has to be done as an interpretative thing by

the person discussing it” (The Newsroom 2018). This interview is significant because it reveals that, while Mackenzie might not be intentionally adding to the nationalist discourse on the modern movement for independence through his film, he is aware of the rhetorical power of Robert the Bruce’s story and is not against his audience interpreting the movie’s parallels to today’s moment in time. Interpretations of this film that apply to Scotland’s pursuit of a second independence referendum and acknowledging that this film glorifies Scotland’s historical fight for independence is obviously something Mackenzie was aware of when making this film, as seen from this interview with *The Scotsman*.

Robert the Bruce, played by Chris Pine, is the protagonist of *Outlaw King*. The King is characterized as brave, compassionate, and diplomatic, evoking sympathy for Robert the Bruce and his cause: freedom for Scotland. Robert the Bruce, King of Scots, is depicted as a noble man with a noble cause; his nobility is revealed through his grieving over the loss of soldiers and brothers and his determination to serve the Scottish people. This depiction stands in stark contrast to the depiction of the English, particularly the Prince of Wales, who is the antagonist in the film. The Prince of Wales and the English are illustrated as brutal, merciless, and greedy: taking boys as soldiers, collecting large amounts of taxes, and being excessively violent. Particularly, the English are shown to be extremely sexually violent towards Scottish women. Robert the Bruce and his Scottish army are incredibly violent too, but their violence is portrayed as necessary and noble because it is taken in the pursuit of freedom. In contrast, the British violence is shown as a desperate ploy for power and control of Scottish land and people.

The juxtaposition of these characterizations, the Scottish as noble freedom fighters vs. the English as merciless brutes, provides insight to Scottish collective

memory. Collective memory is constructed through the retellings of historical events, and, as a constructed force, collective memory is not always accurate or rational. These characterizations retell history and shape the way this historical period is viewed. This retelling of history favors Scotland, reflects the presence of nationalism, and contributes to nationalist messaging. This film, through the characterizations of the Scottish and the British, crafts a nationalist narrative of this history where Robert the Bruce and the Scottish are honorable in their fight for independence and freedom.

Several moments of dialogue in *Outlaw King* also contribute to the film's nationalist narrative. The dialogue used by Robert the Bruce and members of his army when they defend and promote their war for independence reveals nationalist tones in the film. For instance, after Robert the Bruce is crowned king, he still has to defend his position to the Scots who are not yet convinced that fighting the English for freedom is a worthy cause. In the movie, Robert the Bruce and his soldiers come across a group of Scots, the Macdougalls, who ask Robert the Bruce why he fights the war. Robert the Bruce responds, "No more taxes for Edwards' pockets. No more good men dying in wars not of their making." This response underlines the importance of sovereignty in Robert the Bruce's fight. Here, the King defends his war for independence by claiming that Scotland has the right to not be governed by another king, i.e. the right to not pay taxes to the king of another country, who does not represent them. When Robert says "wars not of their making" he reveals the motivation for this fight is the ability for Scots to decide for themselves which wars they will die in, the ability to govern themselves. Later in the film, Robert the Bruce reiterates the importance of sovereignty by describing himself as king of a "sovereign nation." When he defines Scotland as sovereign, he tells his enemies that the British have no right to govern over Scottish land and people. These

bits of dialogue reveal a nationalist message in the film: Scotland has the right to sovereignty undisturbed by England.

Robert the Bruce (2019) also supports nationalist messages of Scotland's right to independence. Robert in this film is shown as a guilt-ridden, thoughtful, brave, and sympathetic king. The film follows him as he takes refuge in a family's cabin for the winter and contemplates his fight for independence. He is depicted as conscious of whether or not independence is worth all the lost lives. The small family eventually inspires him to keep fighting, and, after he decides to fight again, Robert the Bruce is shown as stronger and more determined to free Scotland. The antagonists in this film are a Scottish sheriff and his allies, who are hunting Robert the Bruce to turn him into the English King and collect the reward. The Sheriff has given up on Scottish independence and wants to profit off of Robert the Bruce's status as an outlaw. The antagonists in this film, Scottish citizens who are anti-Bruce and anti-independence, are portrayed as despicable people, void of nuance. The Sheriff and his men are shown as greedy, traitorous, drunks, and disrespectful towards women. Again, Robert the Bruce and his allies are shown as noble, complex, and brave. The characterizations in this film conflate anti-independence/pro-union attitudes with disgust, corruption, and dishonor. This film is designed so all the sympathy from the audience goes towards Robert the Bruce and his cause of independence, conveying nationalist ideals that independence is a virtuous cause.

Dialogue in *Robert the Bruce* (2019) also exhibits the rhetorical power the national myth has in conversations of Scottish independence. Throughout the film, the mother, who lost her husband to the war, speaks of the hope that Robert the Bruce and his war for independence represents. She speaks endlessly of freedom and how worthy

of a cause it is. Before the film's climactic battle, Robert the Bruce gives an inspirational speech to the family on the importance of their fight for freedom, saying "We have known Scotland, clutched in the grip of a mighty hand. And now we'll set her free. Is that not worth fighting for?" This speech illustrates a nationalist attitude towards the relationship between Scotland and England, one where Scotland is stifled under the rule of England, through the image of Scotland "clutched in the grip of a mighty hand." The emphasis on freedom as a cause worth fighting for, and potentially dying for, conveys a nationalist message that Scotland should be free from England, its own, sovereign nation.

Two of the film's directors, Richard Gray and Angus MacFayden, were separately interviewed by Nancy Tapia for LRM Online. In these interviews, Tapia asked the directors about their motivation for making the film and what they hoped viewers would get from the film. Richard Gray hoped that viewers would learn something about Scottish history they did not know before. He is quoted in the LRM piece as saying that the film's release is "great timing and I [Gray] just look forward to a lot of eyes being out to see it, to get a perspective on Scotland that they maybe haven't seen before" (Tapia 2020). The perspective represented in *Robert the Bruce* which Gray was excited for a wide audience to see is one of the historic dispute between Scotland and England, and in this film the perspective is decidedly pro-Scottish, pro-Independence, and pro-Robert the Bruce. In Angus MacFayden's interview, Tapia and MacFayden discuss how this film and MacFayden's revival of his role as Robert the Bruce, as he played Robert the Bruce in *Braveheart*, is a welcomed dose of nostalgia for both the times when *Braveheart* was released and when Robert the Bruce was alive. MacFayden is quoted: "Just looking at how things never really change. They just seem to repeat themselves" (Tapia 2020).

MacFayden's quote here is ambiguous, but, based on the nostalgia present in the interview and the nationalist tones of his movie, he seems to state that the situation in Scotland today is an instance of history repeating itself, specifically the history of Scotland fighting against England for independence. MacFayden clearly sees parallels between Robert the Bruce's time and the modern push towards independence in Scotland, and interpreting this film as a pro-independence, nationalist movie that contributes to the nationalism driving the pursuit of another referendum in Scotland seems to correlate with MacFayden's and Gray's revealed intentions.

Both films climax with battle scenes which are incredibly violent and gruesome, and both films end with the deaths of young men. In *Outlaw King*, a young soldier named Drew dies holding the Scottish crown which he was entrusted to keep safe, as Robert the Bruce comforts him. In *Robert the Bruce*, the young son in the family, Scot, dies at Bannockburn, the battle marking the turning point in the war for independence. The film ends with his mother at his grave, which overlooks the Scottish Highlands, and she says to her dead son "your blood set us free." These scenes, scenes of young men dying honorable deaths and contributing to Scotland's freedom, depict the sacrifice and loss that was necessary for Scotland to gain freedom from England. As Severino (2017) wrote on, commemorating those who died cultivates nationalism by establishing a community around the dead. I argue that recalling these deaths not only gathers a national community but also honors the cause/nation these soldiers supposedly died for. The death scenes in both of these films remember the young men who actually died fighting in the Wars of Independence under Robert the Bruce, and commemorating these deaths cultivates an imagined community around those who died and honors their fight for independence.

These two films depict and honor the Wars of Independence led by Robert the Bruce, bringing narratives of a golden age in Scottish history into modern discourse. As Anthony Smith (1996) wrote, golden ages hold discursive power in nationalist conversations because they represent an ideal to be re-established in modern terms. I argue that these films honor the Wars of Independence and present Scottish sovereignty and freedom from England as honorable principles of the nation's history. The films present a clash between the nations: the Scottish, who are good and right in their cause for independence, vs. the British, who are oppressive and wrong. This narrative embodies the ideal Smith writes on, an ideal of independence that nationalists want to be re-established within the context of today. Interestingly, the characterization of Robert the Bruce in these films is similar to the characterization of William Wallace in *Braveheart*. *Braveheart* was released while Scotland and the SNP were pursuing devolution and tied the nationalism of William Wallace to the fight for devolution. These two recent films were both released during a time when Scotland's relationship with England is in flux, and they films reflect a rising pro-independence nationalism in Scotland and tie Scotland's modern fight for freedom to the myth of Robert the Bruce.

SNP Discourse on Independence and Nationalism

The Scottish National Party has consistently and continuously campaigned for Scottish independence, and their rising popularity in Scotland has been linked to a rising nationalist ideology in Scotland. The movement for Scottish independence relies on the SNP and their continued popularity; studying this movement, therefore, requires a thorough understanding and analysis of the SNP's discourse around independence. It is also critical to understand how the SNP contributes to nationalist attitudes in

Scotland, specifically by critiquing the nationalist messages they espouse. In my discourse analysis of the SNP, I incorporate other scholars' analysis of SNP discourse and nationalism with my own and also look specifically for how Scotland's mythical past and Robert the Bruce are present and absent within SNP rhetoric.

Much research has been conducted on the SNP and what brand of nationalism they use in their rhetoric. Garnett and Steven argue that the SNP appeals to civic nationalism rather than ethnic nationalism, meaning the political rhetoric of nationalism by the SNP is concerned with Scotland's economy and politics and not interested in the ethnic backgrounds of the Scottish people. Garnett and Stevens argue that while the SNP claim to unite around ideology and not ethnicity, the lines between civic and ethnic nationalism are often blurred (2017). In *The Limits of Nationalism*, Chaim Gans argues that civic nationalism is not purely civic: "Without resorting to common culture and history, loyalty to common political principles cannot be considered nationalism, not even civic nationalism" (p. 17). Gans underlines here that even civic nationalism requires a backdrop of common culture and history. From this research, even though the SNP claims to appeal to civic nationalism and not ethnic nationalism (Garnett & Steven, 2017), the SNP's nationalism cannot be purely civic and must be supported by ethnic nationalism to some degree, even if not explicitly stated.

There have been times in the SNP's history, however, when their nationalism was more explicitly ethno-nationalist, even though they still claimed to be civic nationalists. For instance, according to an article in *The Independent*, at a screening of *Braveheart* in 2011, the SNP actively attempted to gain supporters by handing out leaflets (Arlidge). Outside of theatres, the SNP handed out leaflets which attempted to play off of the ethno-cultural nationalist messaging in the film to gain support for the Scottish

independence movement. These leaflets said “You’ve seen the movie-Now face the reality.” These leaflets took advantage of ethno-cultural nationalism shown in the film and asked viewers to apply this nationalist mentality to the SNP’s political movement for independence. By asking viewers to “face the reality”, the SNP explicitly connected the trials of the Wars of Independence with the upcoming independence vote of 2014.

In the article, the SNP’s then Vice President Paul Scott is quoted as saying:

Wallace saw independence as a prerequisite for common good. He realised that without it, the freedom of his country to trade, to develop resources and freely to decide on alliances and its own priorities would be destroyed. In modern terms, the desires of civic nationalism are exactly the same. We can have no economic future unless we invest our own resources in that future. We can play no effective role in Europe unless we speak with an independent voice.

Here Scott attempts to claim that the SNP are appealing to “civic nationalism,” but by presenting “modern terms” of Scottish independence alongside the myth of William Wallace (and Robert the Bruce, despite his portrayal in this film), Scott is appealing to ethno-cultural nationalism as well. As Gans argues that civic nationalism is not enough to unite a nation without a shared past, Scott here proves that the SNP’s claim to civic nationalism is linked, in times explicitly and others implicitly, with an appeal to the mythical glory of Scotland’s Wars of Independence.

Alex Salmond, the leader of the SNP at the time, was open in his celebrations of Robert the Bruce and the Battle of Bannockburn leading up to the 2014 independence referendum. At the opening of the Battle of Bannockburn Visitor Center in 2014, Salmond said “Bannockburn secured the emergence of the modern Scottish nation” (The Newsroom 2014). Salmond appealed to ethno-cultural nationalism openly in his independence campaign. While Alex Salmond as leader of the SNP often referenced

Scotland's past, Nicola Sturgeon is more careful in her messaging to unite the nation around goals for Scotland's future.

The nationalism under Sturgeon's leadership is one of unity to pursue a better future for Scotland. Nicola Sturgeon's official statement from 31 January 2020 on Brexit, for example, does not unite Scotland around a shared past of glory and independence, but instead looks towards hope for a better future for all of Scotland, "A future in which our path as a country is determined by those who care most about Scotland's interests – all of us who live here" (SNP). This message is at the core of Sturgeon's statement on Brexit; Sturgeon emphasizes hope for the future and does not reference Scotland's history of fighting for independence. In the SNP's continuous focus on Scotland's future and not their past, they attempt to stop their national pride as being motivated by ethnic nationalism or as exclusionary.

Some in Scotland, however, believe that today the SNP should look to Scotland's past, specifically Robert the Bruce's achievements for Scotland, in their pursuit of independence. Kenny MacAskill, a previous SNP politician ("MP Kenny Macaskill Quits SNP for New Alba Party"), wrote an opinion piece published by *The Scotsman* where he explains that the SNP should push hard for another independence referendum. He writes "Rather than waiting on Johnson blinking, let's test the water and, if we lose the case, we simply go again like Bruce's spider." MacAskill's reference to Robert the Bruce in relation to the SNP's pursuit of a second independence referendum demonstrates two things: there is a link in the minds of some Scots between Robert the Bruce and today's push for independence and there is a perception that followers of the SNP will respond to ethno-cultural nationalism. This opinion piece reveals the presence of ethno-cultural nationalism among Scots who support Scottish independence, specifically nationalism

rooted in the myth of Robert the Bruce. MacAskill's piece also reveals ethno-cultural nationalism within members of the SNP and a post-Brexit example of an SNP politician referencing Robert the Bruce explicitly in connection with today's movement for another independence referendum. While the face of the SNP, Nicola Sturgeon, may not be as explicit in connections to Robert the Bruce, the party is still connected to those who will use the nationalist myth to further their cause.

Why then, with such a powerful nationalist metaphor available, does the SNP not explicitly reference Robert the Bruce more now? The SNP could praise the recent movies on Robert the Bruce or quote the Declaration of Arbroath, but they do not. The absence of Bruce's legacy here is noteworthy and revelatory of the campaign the SNP is leading under Sturgeon's leadership. Referencing Robert the Bruce, explicitly, would be an obvious appeal to ethno-cultural nationalism, which is something the SNP has tried to avoid recently. The SNP wants to be seen as appealing to civic nationalism, they are campaigning for "An independent country, where those of us who live here shape the future and work together to overcome our challenges" (Sturgeon 2020). They want to unite around a shared vision of Scotland's future, and leaning heavily into the Robert the Bruce narrative would work against their current campaign. Referencing Robert the Bruce would also bring up the vandalism of the statue that occurred in 2020, and if the SNP wants to avoid stepping into the complicated discourse of that scandal, they may not want to explicitly speak of Robert the Bruce.

Their messaging, however, does fall into the same rhetorical tradition as the one seen in the myth of Robert the Bruce, leading me to assert that, while the SNP does not explicitly promote ethno-cultural nationalism through Robert the Bruce, this myth has embedded itself in the party's nationalist messaging, even though the SNP aims for civic

nationalism. The myth of Robert the Bruce appeals to a nationalism that frames the English as the roadblock standing in the way of an independent and thriving Scotland. The Declaration of Arbroath famously states “never will we on any conditions be subjected to the lordship of the English...” (*The Declaration of Arbroath: 700th Anniversary Display* 2020). In December of 2020, Nicola Sturgeon asked “Who do we trust...a Scottish government...with Scotland’s interests at heart? Or Boris Johnson’s band of Brexiteers?” This question sets up a false duality, makes it seem as if the only choices for Scotland are with freedom in their own government or misguidance from the British government. Sturgeon uses the same oppositional rhetoric that was used in the Declaration of Arbroath, the same argument that Robert the Bruce and his supporters used to defend the Wars of Independence, that Britain is standing in the way of Scotland’s future.

Another theory as to why the SNP currently favors and plays up civic nationalism is presented in an article by Amy Clarke. Clarke argues that before Brexit, the SNP subscribed to an ethno-cultural nationalism, specifically around the Battle of Bannockburn. According to Clarke, however, Brexit marked a shift where the SNP starts to discuss Scotland’s historical claim to independence less and argues more for Scotland continuing a historic relationship with Europe. For instance, Nicola Sturgeon has pursued increasing diplomatic relations with EU countries since Brexit. This strategy centers the case for an independent Scotland around Scotland’s desire to re-enter the EU (Clarke 2020). A focus on forming a case for Scotland as a member of the EU who has historic and diplomatic ties to Europe leaves little room to campaign around themes of ethno-cultural nationalism. Explicitly referencing Robert the Bruce may even work

against the discourse pushing Scotland as historically European because of how powerfully nationalist the myth has proven to be.

The SNP's brand of nationalism seems to oscillate between civic and ethno-cultural nationalism. As Andrew Mycock (2012) analyzes, the SNP can drift into ethno-cultural nationalism, giving the examples of the SNP encouraging ancestral Scots to immigrate to Scotland or pushing for the teaching of Scottish history in schools. Mycock writes that "sections of Scottish society- and possibly SNP voters, are influenced by exclusionary ethnic as well as more inclusive nationalism is somewhat understandable considering the party itself remains uncertain as to how the ethno-cultural past and the civic present shape contemporary constructions of Scottish nationalism" (p. 58). The myth or its brand of nationalism is not at the center of their campaign, and the SNP under Sturgeon's leadership is intentional in their avoidance of Bruce nationalism. Their campaign for independence, however, is tied to the myth of Robert the Bruce through rhetorical overlaps with famous writings associated with the king and through previous SNP members explicitly referencing Robert the Bruce as they campaign for independence. This political discourse, which includes explicit references to Robert the Bruce, deliberate omissions of his story, and rhetorical mirroring of his nationalist messaging, shows that Robert the Bruce's legacy casts a shadow on the SNP as they seek the nationalist goal of independence from England.

Conclusion

Nationalism is an ideology that can be harnessed and used to pursue specific political pursuits, and nationalism is especially powerful when it evokes a historic golden age as support for said political goals. Myths are a powerful tool for nationalism

because they give nationalists a goal, or ideal, to aspire to, and this ideal is especially powerful when the myth is rooted in history. For Scotland today, Robert the Bruce has become the myth inspiring nationalism. The recent glorification, celebration, and popularization of Robert the Bruce reflects and amplifies Scottish nationalism aimed at independence from England.

Robert the Bruce and his victory at Bannockburn have been honored and amplified by groups who also advocate for the independence of Scotland, such as All Under One Banner and SNP officials. Post-Brexit, the Declaration of Arbroath, a central aspect of the myth of Robert the Bruce, has been recognized and praised for its importance in Scotland's history. Considering that the declaration uses independent nationalist rhetoric and was appraised while the SNP campaigned for independence, the myth of Robert the Bruce has been connected to the modern movement for independence through this document. The news media have also shown a perceived connection between Robert the Bruce and today's fight for independence when they reference the Wars of Independence as relevant history of Scotland's relationship with England. The heritage site at Bannockburn, as well as the vandalization of this site in 2020, provides an example of how this myth still rests at the center of Scottish national consciousness. *Outlaw King* and *Robert the Bruce* also revealed that the myth of Robert the Bruce resonates with popular culture in Scotland at this time, indicating that rising nationalism is linked with rising commemoration of Robert the Bruce.

The ever-changing political situation in Scotland has presented roadblocks for this research. With elections approaching in May of 2021, the political landscape of the Scottish Parliament will shift soon. If the SNP and Sturgeon win a large enough majority of Parliament seats, they will have the precedence to demand another independence

referendum. Since Bruce nationalism has only risen since the first referendum in 2014 and escalated further since Brexit in 2016, further study into how the May elections and the SNP campaign for another independence referendum will be critical to fully understand how Bruce nationalism shifts with the political climate of Scotland and how his legacy informs, feeds, and escalates nationalism among Scots.

Epilogue: The Alba Party

Since the SNP is currently pushing for a second independence referendum and Scottish nationalism is rising, my research has had to shift with current news and updates. I had to put a timeline on my research, which resulted in me not being able to fully discuss or analyze the recent formation of the political party, Alba as well as a video released by them on April 11, 2021. The Alba Party was launched by Alex Salmond, the leader of the party, in March of 2021 (“Former SNP Leader Alex Salmond launches new political party” 2021). The main goal of the Alba Party is Scottish Independence. As published on their website, “National Independence for Scotland as an immediate necessity, and overwhelming priority, achieved by democratic means through a vote of people resident in Scotland.” Other than Alex Salmond, two other previous members of the SNP, Kevin Macaskill and Neale Hanvey, have defected from the SNP and joined the Alba Party (*BBC News* 2021). Considering that Kevin Macaskill has quit the SNP for the Alba Party, his opinion piece urging the SNP to look towards Robert the Bruce now indicates that the more explicitly ethnic nationalist members of the SNP are changing their allegiance to a party who is not shy in their promotion of nationalism.

In a striking show of Bruce nationalism, the Alba Party on April 11, 2021 released a video where “Robert the Bruce,” voiced by Angus MacFayden, endorses the Alba Party

and an independent Scotland. This video shows scenes of Scots at the site of the Battle of Bannockburn holding Scottish flags with narration over top describing the Battle of Bannockburn and Robert the Bruce's triumph over the English "oppressors." The narrator speaks of how the "sma' folk" defeated the English in 1314, and "Here and now, people power will prevail again. Alba will unite the clans!" This video clearly illustrates that Scottish nationalism is informed by Robert the Bruce and that extreme nationalists are using his image, his voice, and his legacy to gain support for an independent Scotland.



Figure 5, screenshot from Twitter

The Alba Party, however, has been criticized for this extreme show of nationalism. Christine Lavell, writing for *The Sun*, reports on several individuals who have critiqued the videos "blood and soil dog whistle nationalism," as Stirling University professor Kreistein Rummery branded it. Among the critics quoted by Lavell is SNP MP Pete Wishart who criticized Salmond and the Alba Party for looking to the past to inspire independence when Scotland should be attempting to achieve independence by positioning itself as a progressive nation (2021). Since even before this video was released, the Alba Party has been a source of controversy. The party's leader Alex Salmond has been accused, but acquitted, of sexual misconduct and criticized for being "uncontrollable" (Soussi 2021). Mike Small, a freelance journalist and co-founder of the

site Bella Caledonia, wrote an opinion piece criticizing the party and its officials. Small writes that the party, whose new member, Alex Arthur, has been called out for racist tweets and misogynist comments, is “is riddled with misogyny and cultural conservatism” (2021). This self-proclaimed nationalist party is tied to, as Small names it, the “unconscious right,” or far-right, white-patriarchal supremacy, even though they claim to be oriented with the political left.

The Alba Party, their explicitly ethno-cultural nationalism, and the criticism of this party’s associations with racism, misogyny, and homophobia bring to light a topic which this paper has not discussed enough: the dangers of nationalism. Nationalism is often a tool used by far-right extremist parties to uphold white, patriarchal, supremacist ideals. One needs only to look at the rise in support of politicians like Donald Trump in the United States and Marine Le Pen in France to see that far-right nationalism is on the rise globally. These parties often use nationalism to gain support, and their brand of nationalism is rooted in racist rhetoric which relies on uniting “us,” usually a group of white elites, against “them,” usually a group of minorities such as immigrants, Black Americans, Muslims, and members of the LGBT+ community. The tendency of nationalism to slip into the extreme of uniting a nation against a common enemy is one all of us must watch out for. This nationalism upholds systems which rely on the oppression of some for the ascension of a few and is counter-productive to the pursuits of equality and justice.

That being said, nationalism is clearly present in Scotland, and the myth of Robert the Bruce is being continually used to aid in the nationalist fight for Scottish Independence. His legacy has been referenced and celebrated by government officials, museums, journalists, and films. The story of Robert the Bruce is filled with pro-

independence messaging, anti-British, and anti-Union rhetoric. When Robert the Bruce is mentioned in the debate on independence, the nationalism associated with his story is also brought to the table. In this process, Robert the Bruce aids in the nationalist campaign for independence. His myth has proven to hold rhetorical power for these nationalists, and once again, he is a critical part of Scotland's fight for sovereignty.

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