

# ['no man is an island' scottish culture](https://assignbuster.com/no-man-is-an-island-scottish-culture/)

This essay will examine this motion and discuss the idea that no man is an island. The phrase no man is an island means that everyone is influenced by the world around them; no person has total independence and freedom. This idea will be explored in relation to Scotland. The phrase will be no Scotland is an Island. Scotland over the years has had many challenges to its place, space and identity, and these will be explored through looking at Scotland’s history, its economy, its politics, its culture and how it is today. The idea of nationalism and Scottish Nationalism in particular, and whether nationalism is a good thing will be examined. The question of whether Scotland should be independent will be investigated. Scotland has struggled for years to be an island in its own right; the whole nationalist feeling and want for independence is a want to be their own Island. Has Scotland got this or is it still struggling with its nationalist views and identity?

## What is Nationalism?

Nationalism is difficult to define as there are so many different views on what it is. It is closely linked to the identity of a country and how a country promotes themselves. Nationalism is also a collective and shared feeling about a place. Nationalism is a way of showing pride towards your country (Smith, 1991). However there is an argument to suggest that nationalism is political and something that the government uses to show the rest of the world what makes their country special. One definition of political nationalism is:

the active solidarity of a group who share a common culture or history or history and who seek to give this common experience a political reality whether by means of self government or some other kind of political recognition if not autonomy (Phillip cited in Mitchinson, 1980).

Nationalism is an active movement from a group that collectively share the same culture and history and want to preserve that culture and history through a political party. This is similar to why the Scottish National Party (SNP) was set up and this will be looked at in more detail later. In Scotland there are different extremes of nationalism: there is the aggressive form of where people think Scotland should be an all Scottish country with no one else from other countries and there are the people who try and preserve what is left of Scottish culture and history. The second form of nationalism can be defined as Pseudo-Nationalism (Smith, 1991). Jim Silars, a former Labour MP, when describing Scottish Nationalism said:

I see a nation as formed by people with a shared historical experience whose customs, practices, social mores, culture, patterns of thought and attitudes form a human group which is quite a distinct part of humanity. When that nation can identify issues and perceive that its members have interest in them and when that nation asserts its right to decide its own attitudes to issues then we have a basic nationalism (Silars, 1986).

This is very similar to Isobel Lindsay, a member of the SNP, view of nationalism as a country’s national identity and ability to rule on its own (SNP). She considered that the sharing of power is important so that everyone has a fair say (SNP). The government is more socialist in its views because it looks after the less fortunate (SNP). The idea that the current way of running the country cannot continue and that Scotland should look at a more European structure (SNP) (Murison, 2003). This is a more political view of Nationalism and how it is used practically in running a country. Scotland has lost touch with some of these values because of its ties with England

In terms of ‘ No man is an Island’, when a country has strong nationalism they are saying that they are an island. It does not mean that they are really an island but metaphorically they should be viewed as a country in their own right and not politically attached or influenced by any other country.

## Scottish History

Scotland has a vast and well documented history much of which consisted of attempting to ward off continual attacks from England. England was always invading Scotland and claiming it as its own. The wars with England were known as the Wars of Independence. After the death of King Alexander III in 1286, Scotland was plunged into uncertainty whilst a new heir was chosen (Lang, 2005). Eventually, with the aid of King Edward I of England, John Balliol was selected in 1292, but his was not to be a peaceful reign (Lang, 2005). Refusing aid in England’s war with France, Balliol attracted the wrath of Edward and the two kingdoms descended into a conflict that would endure for more than 40 years (Lang, 2005). England was exercising a degree of hegemony in its pursuit of Scotland. This was a challenge to Scotland’s space and place. England wanted to expand.

Many Scottish people died for their freedom and amongst these was William Wallace. Wallace, who led the Scottish rebellion against Edward I, inflicted a famous defeat on the English army at Stirling Bridge (Murison, 2003). However, English judges read a list of charges against Wallace and then tortured and executed him (Murison, 2003). Robert the Bruce had himself crowned King of Scotland in 1306 and defeated the English forces, while Edward I died before he managed to launch another campaign in Scotland (Lang, 2005). His successor, Edward II, was not able to precede his father’s policy and Robert the Bruce consolidated his position in Scotland (Murison, 2003). After deposition and assassination of Edward II in 1327 Robert invaded northern England and the Treaty of Edinburgh-Northampton in 1328 that recognized Scottish independence and him as its king was signed (Lang, 2005) (McCracken-Flesher, 2007). Scotland had its independence from England and was an Island and a country in its own right again.

In 1707 Scotland was starting to have economic problems due to harvest failure and problems with colonization so needed to unify with England (McCracken-Flesher, 2007). However, there was a divide in Scotland as some people were still very bitter towards the English and wondered if unification was a good thing. Conversely, the political powers saw it as an advantage economically. England wanted to bring Scotland back under control. The Scottish parliament was dissolved and Scottish representatives were sent to Westminster instead (McCracken-Flesher, 2007). The two countries were to have common economic politics and common tariff barriers. Scotland was to maintain its own Kirk, legislation and education system (McCracken-Flesher, 2007) (Brown, 2010). Scotland had lost its Island. There are still areas in Scotland that are bitter towards the English. This is where a lot of Scottish Nationalistic feeling stems from as their ancestors fought hard for Scottish freedom and independence. People feel Scotland should go back to being what it was like before 1707 it should go back to being an Island.

## What is Scottish Identity

Tartan, shortbread, haggis and whisky: this is stereotypical of what Scotland is known for. It raises the question of whether an individual can give themselves an identity or whether it is what others gives to the individual? Scotland is known worldwide for its Identity. Tourists come to Scotland with certain expectations of what it should be like and in a way people have given Scotland its identity.

Scottish Identity is what makes Scotland and its people Scottish. There are a lot of factors that come into it such as language, food, behaviour, heritage, clothes, culture and traditions.

Tartan is a symbol of Scottish Identity. The earliest example of tartan dates from the third century AD (Brown, 2010). A two coloured check, named the ‘ Falkirk’ tartan, was found near the Roman Antonine wall (Brown, 2010). Tartan has become the main symbol of Scottish culture and an emblem of Scottish descent (Brown, 2010). The first tartans were simple checks coloured by vegetable dyes found in the various districts of Scotland, the colours signifying a geographical base (Brown, 2010). The clans were recognised by regional shades caused by the diversity in weaving techniques. After Bonnie Prince Charlie’s defeat at Culloden in 1746, the wearing of the kilt was banned and the Gaelic language discouraged (Brown, 2010). Anyone caught wearing tartan or playing the bagpipes could be sent to jail for six months (Brown, 2010). This was oppressing Scottish Identity. The use of tartan and Scotland’s traditional way of life was lost.

There was an upsurge in the ‘ Highland craze’ after Sir Walter Scott stage-managed the Royal visit of George IV to Scotland in 1822 (Brown, 2010). The king arrived wearing a kilt. Tartan became even more popular during the reign of Queen Victoria when commercialisation took hold and tartan mania rolled on (Brown, 2010). Back then wearing tartan was a way of life for Scots but now they only wear it for special occasions such as weddings. Every Scottish family have their own tartan which is brought down from generation to generation these tartans stretch back from the Scottish clans. Tartan is a symbol of Scottish Nationalism people wear tartan with pride for Scotland. Tartan is recognised worldwide.

Scottish education left teaching about Scotland out. Scottish history was British history, and British history usually meant English history. Scotland does have its own education system but there is very little taught about Scottish history so kids can’t develop nationalistic views or make up their own mind about the future of Scotland. People don’t trust children with big issues as they don’t feel they will understand them.

Scotland’s traditional language is Gaelic which was one of the languages highlanders spoke. There are very few people who speak the language nowadays as not a lot of people teach it (Ferguson, 1998). The people who do speak it are in rural places or in highland areas. Scotland is also a more multicultural country so English is the language that most people understand. The Scots have made the English that they speak their own (Ferguson, 1998). They have retained a high percentage of vocabulary derived from Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon, and they speak with a lilt. Indeed (Ferguson, 1998), ‘ Scots’ is an actual ‘ language’ all on its own. However it was frowned upon in schools (Ferguson, 1998). Scots Gaelic, a language in its own right, was all but eliminated; less than 2% of Scottish people speak Gaelic today (Ferguson, 1998). There are numerous attempts to keep it alive, and the BBC as well as ITV offer segments of Gaelic programming for Scotland, where it survives mostly in the nether regions of the highlands and islands (Ferguson, 1998) (Anderson, 1997). There is little efficacy in speaking Gaelic nowadays.

Scottish culture and identity is very important to Scottish nationalistic feeling. People want to keep the old traditions and way of living alive. There has been a lot of struggle over the years especially with tartan and their language.

## Scottish Economy

Scotland’s main industry was heavy industry such as construction (Anderson, 1997). The essential industry had been in great demand during the post-war period, but as Europe slowly recovered from the lingering impacts of war, old competitors became active again, while the need for heavy industry continued to diminish (Anderson, 1997). Unemployment in Scotland rose steadily, having doubled the number of jobless labourers by the beginning of the 1960s – a tendency which continued in spite of attempts of bringing new industry to Scotland (Anderson, 1997)

However in the 1960s oil was discovered in the North Sea which is located just off the coast of Scotland (Russell, 2005). Aberdeen became the centre of Britain’s North Sea oil industry, with many oil terminals such as that of Sullom Voe on Shetland and Flotta on Orkney and at Cruden Bay and St Cyrus on the north east coast of Scotland, being built to support the North Sea oil industry (Russell, 2005). However Scotland could not reap the rewards economically from this as while Scotland was part of the United Kingdom it had no control over royalties and revenue and it thus could not be used to benefit of Scotland economically (Russell, 2005).

This strengthened the nationalist ideals and the fact Scotland should go independent because they would be able to take full advantage of the oil reserve and survive economically on their own. However, Labour claims that the oil is not sustainable and Scotland would not survive economically (GUNN, 2010). The oil is also a valuable resource for the United Kingdom so going independent would mean they lose out on that resource.

The Scots were not inclined to favour home rule or nationalism, but whether they did so or not, their attitudes were determined not by economic but by other issues. Whatever the reality of an economic case for nationalism in Scotland before 1914, none was imagined (Mitchinson, 1980).

Scotland economy provides a strong argument for independence. However does not give Scotland its national feeling, nationalism comes more from other factors. Nationalism is more about Scotland’s Identity rather than its economy. Scotland can sustain its Space, Place and Identity through its economy though for a good few years.

## Scottish National Party (SNP)

The SNP is a democratic left-of-centre political party committed to Scottish independence. It aims to create a just, caring and enterprising society in the mainstream of modem Europe by releasing Scotland’s full potential as an independent nation (Independent, 2011). The leader of the SNP is Alex Salmond (Independent, 2011). At the 2007 local elections, the SNP won 363 council seats of 1, 224 (doubling its 2003 total of 181 councilors), making them the largest group in Scottish local government. (Independant, 2011) The party has been at the forefront of the campaign for Scottish self-determination for almost seventy years (Independant, 2011). The evolution of the SNP has been paralleled by the political evolution of Scotland herself: from an almost totally unionist country to a nation on the brink of independence (Independant, 2011).

The Scottish people have invested a lot in their Parliament but there is a growing realisation that, although devolution was a job worth doing, it is a job half done. The SNP ideology is to restore Scottish Parliament and return Scotland to the normal status of an independent country. Independence means Scotland will have a direct voice in Europe and the international community, and the power to tackle Scotland’s social and economic problems by making Scotland’s wealth work for Scotland’s people (Independant, 2011).

The SNP have a very nationalist view. The leader of the SNP Alex Salmond said “ There is not an anti-English bone in my body. I have forgotten more about English history than most Tory MPs ever learned” (Bentley, 2009)

The leader and the party are very passionate for independence and pass their passion on to the people of Scotland. In the current economic climate people are more supportive of them because they are growing tired of other parties and having to suffer the same policies as England. The SNP want to take Scotland back to what it was like before the 1707 unification. They believe Scotland should be able to make all decisions itself and govern itself. However some people still think Scottish economy is too unstable and people also like the idea of a United Kingdom. . Lindsay says:

The Scottish National Party declares its unshakeable belief in Scotland’s destiny as a European nation and reaffirms its belief that the best course for Scotland to take lies in Independence in Europe (SNP)

The SNP think Scotland should be an island and not be influence by England. The issue for independence has cropped up again as the 2011 Scottish Elections saw the SNP win by an outstanding majority they won 69 seats in the Scottish Parliament which means they can push for an independence referendum (BBC, 2011). Scotland will be able to decide whether it will be a country in its own right or will still be part of the United Kingdom. It finally gets to decide whether it is an Island or if it is not.

## Scottish Parliament

The first Scottish Parliament arose during the early thirteenth century, and its first meeting was at Kirkliston in 1235 in the reign of Alexander II (McCracken-Flesher, 2007). However due to economic problems the parliament was unified with England in1707 (McCracken-Flesher, 2007). Since then Scotland had been governed by Westminster but more recently there has been a lot of nationalistic feeling in Scotland thanks to the SNP. As the Scotland Parliament Scotland’s Right report said:

The longing of the people of Scotland for their own Parliament rings clear and true every time opinion is sounded. We believe that the momentum for change is now too great to deny; and that a Scottish Parliament will soon be meeting for the first time in nearly three centuries (SCC, 1995).

In September 1997, a referendum of the Scottish electorate secured a majority in favour of the establishment of a new devolved Scottish Parliament, with tax-varying powers, in Edinburgh (McCracken-Flesher, 2007). The new Scottish Parliament met at the Church of Scotland General Assembly rooms until 2004 when they got given their own building called Holyrood (McCracken-Flesher, 2007).

This gave Scotland more control over domestic issues that affect their people. This was a great turning point for Scotland (McCracken-Flesher, 2007), However some people did not think it was enough and wanted more control over their decisions. The SNP keep pushing for more devolved powers to be given over to Scotland so it can take control of its own resources.

In conclusion, Scotland as it stands today is not an island: it still has nationalist views but is a long way from independence. Scotland has a vast history of standing against the English for independence from the wars of independence when many Scottish ancestors died which feeds a lot of the nationalist feeling in Scotland today. Scotland was a country in its own right prior to these wars. Scottish people today take pride in wearing tartan for special occasions but there was a time when it was suppressed. A lot of old Scottish past times that are a part of Scottish identity are dying out because of the unification with England such as the speaking of Gaelic. Scotland’s economy could hold the key for Scotland becoming an Island in its own right as the oil could mean Scotland could survive on its own. However the United Kingdom relies on it too and people worry that it would run out. The SNP is Scotland’s leading political party and keeps Scottish nationalism alive but also fights for Scotland’s right for independence. However Scottish people are divided with those who want it and those who do not. Scotland has been given more power as under Tony Blair they got the Scottish Parliament back but only with devolved powers. Nationalism is important for a country to have as they can have pride in their country, heritage, culture and way of life and what makes their country unique. Scotland may not have independence yet but does it need it? Even if Scotland was to become independent it would still have to answer to the rest of the world. It is important to share the aspects that make Scotland great and for Scotland to be enriched by other countries. Scotland’s culture will never fully return and Scotland will always be reliant on other people to keep what’s left of it alive. Scotland is not an Island as no man is an Island but it does not have to be.