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and Sustainable Society

Edited by Gregor Gall

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To Bob Thomson, for ensuring – without fear, favour or any financial recompense – that the Jimmy Reid Foundation, the progenitor of this collection, has survived and prospered since its launch in 2011.

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16 Race and Migration in Scotland

Gareth Mulvey, Talat Ahmed
and Colin Clark

Introduction

Although 'race'¹ and migration intersect in multiple ways, they are often discussed separately. Indeed, opposition to migration is now often used as a 'legitimate' proxy for racism. Scotland occupies an interesting space in this regard. It is a country with a limited history of anti-racist movements, and – apart from Irish migration and associated anti-Catholic discrimination – has had a limited history of migration until relatively recently. Scotland is also a country where matters of 'race' and migration, at a level of policy and practice, are currently situated in an uncomfortable devolution settlement. Taking issues of 'race' and racism first, there are few clear limitations on what Scotland can do under the constitutional settlement. As such, problems of – and with – racism in Scotland, as starkly illustrated by Davidson et al. (2018), are Scottish problems, fundamentally connected to an under-recognition of the country's past as well as present.

¹ We regard 'race' as a social/political construction that, fundamentally, does not exist. As such, we place the term in quotation marks in this chapter to signify its weakness as a term and concept.

The distribution of powers and policy-making becomes more complex when we look at migration and 'race' together. The polycentric nature of migration connects to questions of 'race' in profound ways. This is evident when considering the devolved settlement: we can observe distinct differences between immigration policy – which is currently reserved to the UK Government – and immigrant policy – which is currently devolved to Holyrood (Hammar 2006, Pietka-Nykaza et al. 2020). The UK Government maintains control over entry to the country and the conditions of entry, and the Scottish Government has control over how migrants, and people of colour, experience their lives once they are here. However, it is clearly not possible to disentangle these powers and where they sit. The various rights, including citizenship, remain determined by Westminster, and the politics of UK Government immigration policy casts a shadow north of the border in Scotland (Mulvey 2018).

Differences in terms of these 'hard' politics are also joined with variations in 'soft' politics. The largely civic nationalist language and rhetoric of the Scottish Government when compared to successive UK Governments has been perceived as considerably more 'migrant-friendly', and successive Scottish Governments have supported increased migration to Scotland, largely for demographic and economic reasons (Flynn and Kay 2017). This has been accompanied by some variations in terms of who is allowed rights associated with social citizenship. However, these expressions of welcome are rarely translated into actual material support, which is where we dovetail with issues of 'race'. Expressions of solidarity and a shared rejection of racism are just not enough for a progressive long-term strategy to be inclusive or for an anti-racist country choosing to embrace a radical, inclusive, civic nationalist agenda.

So this chapter first examines how we have historically (mis)understood 'race' and racism in Scotland before progressing to critically consider the legacy this has left for the present and future. In terms of contemporary analysis, we consider timely questions of racial equality and racialised violence in Scotland. A concluding section imagines some of the alternative futures if a more progressive Scotland can be realised where neo-liberalism is countered.

Historical Amnesia

To progress, we must retrace our steps. Questions of 'race' and racism in Scotland have for too long been pushed South – presented as an 'English' problem that has no place or presence this side of the border. Indeed, political rhetoric from public figures, including First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, tends to signal a message of an open and welcoming Scotland, a country that celebrates diversity, and when racism does appear, responses such as 'that is not who we are' are broadcast (see *Edinburgh Live*, 17 December 2020).

Such positivity is reinforced by a hospitable narrative around immigration epitomised in the 2014 independence referendum, whereby all those who had made Scotland their home, irrespective of birthplace or nationality, were entitled to vote (*BBC Scotland News online*, 8 January 2014). This marked a shift in official projections of Scottish civic and cultural identity, predicated upon shared understandings of a 'rainbow nation'. Nonetheless, current language and policy around migration is still largely couched in neo-liberal instrumental terms. Thus, it is the 'needs of' demographics and economy that are pivotal: Scotland has an ageing population, therefore Scotland needs immigration to ensure economic development and a future sustainable tax base.

While soft politics and warm words are welcome, there is also a question about the degree to which heritage is prioritised by the Scottish Government. Support for what it calls 'heritage languages' places an emphasis on those with a long lineage in the country, and it is striking that similar support is not available to speakers of other minority languages (Meer 2020). Viewing immigrants as only productive units of labour narrows migration policy to fit a highly instrumentalist agenda dictated by neo-liberal capitalist priorities rather than anti-racism, humanitarianism or even 'public good'. As such, we argue that a far more robust defence of a multi-racial, multi-cultural socialistic society is required.

Our central argument, viewed through a historical lens, is that a reductionist approach to migration tends to operate in tandem with a continued amnesia over Scotland's role in slavery and empire. We know Scots were actively involved at all levels of imperial industry: as owners, investors, overseers, doctors and slaving crews. As an example, in 1796, male Scots owned nearly 30% of the estates in Jamaica, and by 1817 a staggering 32% of the slaves (Black History Month 2015). While slavery was still legal on Scottish soil, adverts regularly appeared in newspapers for both the sale of enslaved people and enticing rewards for return of runaway slaves (*Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 13 February 1727).

As the 'second city' of Empire, Glasgow's wealth was built on the bloody fruits of slave labour in the colonies, evident in the sugar, cotton and tobacco plantations. Familiar names such as Scot Lyle, of Tate & Lyle fame, built their fortunes on chattel slavery (Chalmin 1990). James Ewing from Glasgow was the richest sugar producer in Jamaica (Cooke 2012). Tobacco from the Americas arrived from slave plantations into Leith in the seventeenth century, and James Gillespie profited via Virginia tobacco and snuff (*BBC Scotland News online*, 31 October 2018). The fortunes that slaves helped create kick-

started the Industrial Revolution in Scotland and brought its merchants and traders great wealth. Many Scottish masters were also considered amongst the most brutal, with life expectancy on their plantations averaging a mere four years (Black History Month 2015).

The 1707 Anglo-Scottish Union created opportunities for more active Scottish involvement in the economic activities of the British Empire, particularly in India. Many Scotsmen found employment in government services, as missionaries, in commerce or in industry. Scotland's landed families gained access to the East India Company (EIC), and gradually became its dominant force, particularly when Henry Dundas both chaired and became President of the Board of Control of the EIC in 1784 (Bowen 2005). Under his leadership, as many as one-fifth of the EIC's writers in Calcutta and Madras were of Scottish origin by the 1790s. Indian imperial Scottish merchant firms include many names still known today: Andrew Yule, Forbes and Campbell, and Balmer Lawrie. Dundas's Indian adventure was surpassed only by his role in the Caribbean, where he brutally suppressed slave revolts in Grenada and Jamaica, using troops with dogs to hunt Jamaican Maroons down (*Open Democracy*, 30 July 2020).

In colonial India, at the political level, the first three governor-generals were all Scots. Indeed, by 1792 Scots made up 1 in 9 EIC civil servants, 6 in 11 common soldiers and 1 in 3 military officers. An even more prominent role was later played by Scots in the Indian military, with 8 out of the 38 Indian viceroys and governor-generals between 1774 and 1947 being of Scottish origin – the last being the Earl of Linlithgow. The riches of the East furnished a lavish lifestyle for Scottish elites. McGilvary (2011) estimated that in 1725–1833, around 3,500 Scotsmen worked in India and were remitting £500,000–750,000 p.a. back home. This was, as McGilvary (2011: 27) suggested, 'a colossal stimulus to life in Scotland'. It is evident