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Is Scotland Different on Race and Migration?

Abstract

This short article reports on a symposium at the University of Edinburgh entitled 'Is Scotland Different on Race and Migration'. The event brought together the latest research to consider whether Scotland really is different from neighbouring countries. Questions under discussion included, but were not limited to, what does the data tell us on mass Scottish attitudes? Is 'Scottishness' more inclusive than 'Englishness'? Where do migrants and racial minorities fit into this story and who is narrating it? What are Scotland's policy options in light of it?

Keywords: race; migration; Scotland; Scottishness; Englishness

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Is Scotland Different on Race and Migration?

Issues of race and migration are especially prominent across social and political arenas in contemporary Europe. As 'emic' categories, or categories of practice, race and migration are routinely run together and into other categories. Appeals to national identity, for example, have explicitly relied on categories of race in countries as different as Greece, Holland, France, Italy, England and Hungary, particularly in electoral politics but also wider (sometimes banal, sometimes febrile) public discourse. This has been apparent in relation to the so called refugee crisis, but is also evident over a longer period in the discussion of European Muslims and Islam. Yet while research confirms that race and migration are features of Scottish social and political life too, the topics are relatively overlooked in the separate (though related) debates over Scottish nationalism and Scottish Independence.

In an effort to bring these topics into greater focus, the University of Edinburgh's Citizenship, Nations and Migration Network (CNaM) and the Association of Ethnicity and Nationalism (ASEN) Edinburgh, in collaboration with and supported from the Royal Society of Edinburgh's (RSE) Young Academy of Scotland (YAS), organised a symposium entitled 'Is Scotland Different on Race and Migration'.¹ The public event

¹ Videos of the talks in the symposium are available to view on the CNaM website <http://www.cnam-network.cahss.ed.ac.uk/>

brought together the latest research to consider whether Scotland really is different from neighbouring countries. Questions under discussion included, but were not limited to, what does the data tell us on mass Scottish attitudes? Is 'Scottishness' more inclusive than 'Englishness'? Where do migrants and racial minorities fit into this story and who is narrating it? What are Scotland's policy options in light of it? The Symposium included Ross Bond, Emma Hill, Sarah Kyambi, Charlie Leddy-Owen, Nasar Meer as well as Henna Khan from the UK Cabinet Office, and was chaired by Michael Rosie. The topics covered were as varied as race and migration stories amongst Glasgow Somalis, evidence on national identities from the 2011 Census, English nationalism and politics in Portsmouth, as well as Scotland's migration policy options in a global context.

In his opening comments Nasar Meer summarised data on mass majority attitudes to immigration and race in Scotland and England. This showed that Scotland like England displays majority support for less immigration, but that unlike England only about a third of people rate immigration as 'bad for Scotland'. Meer also suggested that Scotland has more of a problem with racism than some existing surveys would have us believe – to the extent that UK wide perspectives can be misleading in telling a story about Scotland. Indeed, if we include the self-reported experiences of Scottish Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups, set against a UK wide picture, what emerges is a significant problem of under-recording. This doesn't seem to be about alienation but instead more about BME groups living with and negotiating everyday racism. Finally, he explored some issues of political conduct – including about the ways questions of race and migration do and do not come together in Scotland. What this suggested was a quite stark illustration of the difference between the salience of race in society and the racialization of mainstream political conduct in Scotland. For whilst the political rhetoric is broadly inclusive, there is a disconnect between elite visions of Scotland and popular opinion on this.

Like Meer, Henna Khan from the Cabinet Office presented comparable quantitative data from Scotland and the rest of the UK. Her focus was the work of the Race Disparity Unit, an initiative announced by Prime Minister Theresa May shortly after taking office. The Unit reported in October 2017, with the first in a planned series of Race Disparity Audits. The data, covering some 130 indicators, are broken down by local authority, income and gender, and freely consultable via an online platform 'Ethnicity Facts and Figures'. Khan presented some of the headline figures from the first Race Disparity Audit, highlighting stark disadvantages faced by some BME groups. On home ownership, for example, 2 in 3 White British people own their homes, versus only 2 in 5 from ethnic minority populations. The audit also revealed that different ethnic groups experience public services in different ways, confirming previously-known trends in areas such as police stop-and-search (far more commonplace for black men than white men) and university admissions (white working class young men are less likely to enter university). There is evidence also of a persistent employment gap, with the employment rates of ethnic minorities around 10% lower than the white British population. Khan then drew attention to specific Scottish figures, with the employment rate among those of Indian ethnicity at 69%, versus 74% for those of white ethnicity in Scotland. In this respect, the Scottish data do not compare

favourably with the situation in London, where the gap is smaller (76% Indian : 78% White British).²

The next two speakers analysed the extent to which national identities and nationalisms are inclusive of, or reactive against, minority ethnic groups, comparing Scottish and English discourses of national identity. Ross Bond presented his recent research on national identities among minority groups in the 2011 Census. He initially observed that, while it is important not to conflate national identification with social inclusion, in diverse societies a shared national identity may be viewed as an important source of social cohesion and being ‘symbolically’ excluded from identifying with a national group might also have negative social consequences. To the extent that people in minority ethnic groups feel able to identify with a sub-state nation such as Scotland, this may be described as ‘multinational multicultural citizenship’ (Kymlicka 2011) or ‘multicultural nationalism’ (Hussain and Miller 2006). Previous research evidence has indicated relatively strong levels of Scottish identification among minority groups in Scotland, not least when compared with English identification among their counterparts south of the border. However, this evidence is largely small-scale in nature, dealing with small sample sizes and/or specific minority groups (often Pakistanis and/or Muslims). The census question on subjective national identity, introduced for the first time in 2011, offered the opportunity for more robust and detailed analysis of national identities across various minority groups in Scotland. The resulting data also allow us to examine how these identities may vary by factors such as birthplace, ethnicity, religion and migration status, and to compare Scotland with other parts of Britain.

Bond’s analysis of the census data to some extent substantiates previous research: especially when compared to levels of English identification among minority groups south of the border, Scottish identity appears to be relatively inclusive of people in minority groups north of the border. But his research also highlighted a number of important caveats to this broad conclusion. First, people in minority groups in Scotland are substantially less likely to identify as Scottish than are those in the White majority, even when important factors such as birthplace are taken into account. Second, identification with the state-level national identity (i.e. feeling British) is also prominent. While this is especially true in England, where, in contrast to the White majority, people in nearly all minority groups are much more likely to identify as British than as English, in Scotland too levels of British identification are somewhat higher than Scottish in nearly all minority groups. Third, there is evident variation in national identities *between* different ethnic groups, even when other important factors such as birthplace are taken into account. This suggests some caution is required in extrapolating the conclusions of previous studies (e.g. on Pakistani Muslims, the largest non-white minority group in Scotland) to other minority groups. Levels of Scottish identification appear to be less strong among some other ethno-religious groups, such as Indian Hindus, Chinese, or Black African Christians. Overall then, while there is certainly evidence of ‘multicultural nationalism’ in Scotland, Scottish identity is not straightforwardly inclusive of those in minority groups.

² Alarmingly, figures subsequently released in the Race Equality Action Plan by the Scottish Government (which declined to contribute new data to the Cabinet Office’s Race Disparity Audit), show an even higher overall employment gap for minority ethnic groups in Scotland, at 15% (59% all BME groups: 74% White British).
<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/12/8700>

So what of English identities? Charlie Leddy-Owen discussed analysis of qualitative data from fieldwork undertaken in Portsmouth during the 2015 UK general election (a book on which is to be published later this year by Routledge). Leddy-Owen argued that much recent survey analysis of anti-immigration politics in England is guilty of putting the cart before the horse by foregrounding threatened (English) identities, symbolic concerns or the effects of immigration itself ahead of ideologically nationalist interpretations of politics and society. Such analysis risks eliding the extent to which nationalist, often racist, ideologies and structures frame and provoke concerns regarding immigration in the first place (as well as many analysts' ontologies and methodologies). In relation to the goal of a more fundamental political understanding than that centred on party politics and voting patterns, Leddy-Owen provided narrative-based, qualitative evidence suggesting that contemporary English political divisions might be better explained in relation to competing ideological interpretations of economic inequalities than by the foregrounding of purported 'culture wars' or 'identity-based' cleavages.

Qualitative evidence was also to the fore in Emma Hill's ethnographic portrait of Somali groups and individuals in Glasgow, presenting a grounded analysis of Somali people's experiences of racialisation and racism in Scotland. The settlement of Somalis in the city is largely the result of Glasgow City Council's participation in the Home Office's Asylum Seeker Dispersal Scheme since the early 2000s. As Hill's research elsewhere notes, many Somali people are active participants in Glasgow's communities (Hill 2017). However, these activities are frequently marked by experiences of multiple racisms in public space, in which Somali people encounter abuse that racialises their skin colour, physical appearance, religion, gender and voice. As a result of these encounters, she suggested, Somali people experienced public space in Glasgow as 'white space': as space in which whiteness remained normative, and in which Somali people were 'marked' (Ahmed 2007) as 'out of space' (Gunaratnam 2013).

Hill also argued that the way in which whiteness responds to Somali people in public space places comprehensive restrictions upon their access to belonging in Scotland. Somali participants recounted how, in their experiences in Glasgow's public spaces, they were frequently racialized either as 'Black' or as Muslim, never as Black *and* Muslim, categories Somalis might simultaneously mobilise to talk about Somali ethnicity. Through this racialisation, non-white populations are not imagined to experience ethnic or racial complexity, nor to be complex or active citizens. These experiences not only demonstrated that whiteness was not an ethnic option for Somali people in Scotland, but also that *Somali-ness* was not an ethnic option. Instead, white, public spaces shaped Somali people – and their civic activities – in terms that misrecognised, fragmented and obscured them. Hill suggested that processes of misrecognition encountered by Somali people might be understood as part of broader shortcomings in public and political discourse in Scotland. She argued that though Scottish Government policies have increasingly adopted anti-racist positions, they fail to consider whiteness as a structural and active force in Scottish public life.

The policies pursued by the Scottish Government were also in focus in Sarah Kyambi's intervention, which turned to the topic of migration policy. Her presentation 'Scotland's Migration Policy Options in a Global Context' highlighted the divergence

of the drivers of immigration policy between Scotland and the rest of the UK. Her overview highlighted the rising proportion of EEA nationals among migrants to the UK over the past decade and a half. Considering in what ways the UK immigration system is likely to change post-Brexit, she outlined some reasons why priorities in Scotland relating to immigration stand at odds with the more restrictive position likely to be taken by the UK government. Given the Scottish Government's greater willingness to try to harness immigration to offset population and labour market challenges she identified an idea whose time has come, namely a differentiated immigration policy that allows a greater role for regional authorities in setting the parameters of the immigration system.

Looking to the future, one of the conclusions which can be drawn from the deliberations of the workshop participants is that a 'different' and more open Scottish immigration policy would nonetheless be a hard sell in a Scottish polity where racism continues to be wished away (Davidson et al. 2018), and where attitudes to immigration remain hostile – albeit less so than in England. As the contributions of Bond, Hill and Meer underlined, though an ostensibly inclusive civic belonging is celebrated by political, academic and public elites (Meer 2015), the complexities and messiness both of racialisation, and of its relationship to belonging in Scotland remains under-articulated and under-acknowledged.

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