

# ‘Is Scotland worth coming Home to?’

A Question Time style debate  
on equalities in Scotland  
— myths and realities



Equality and  
Human Rights  
Commission

Scotland

This report follows the **‘Is Scotland Worth Coming Home To?’** event facilitated by the Equality and Human Rights Commission Scotland in January 2010.

The views expressed in this document are those of the authors, Cambium Advocacy, and reflect opinions expressed at a discussion event. The policies and views of the Commission were not part of the discussion, and this report therefore is not a representation of them.

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# Foreword



**The word debate can be defined as ‘a discussion of a public question in an assembly, involving differing viewpoints’.**

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has been facilitating a series of debates as an extension of our mandate to ensure that people are treated fairly, and are given a fair and equal chance to participate in daily life – politically, economically or socially. Our Question Time style debates join together experts, opinion formers, interested organisations and passionate individuals to consider topics of interest or prominence, and we always find it enormously rewarding to provide an environment in which people can express views and share experiences.

This, the third commission debate, asked ‘Is Scotland Worth Coming Home To?’ and considered issues of Scottish identity. While most of us like to think that we are a fair, welcoming and hospitable nation, is this really how others see us? The debate explored issues of identity, equality and the chasm between our national aspirations and cultural norms, and it was fascinating to observe an emerging picture of the kind of Scotland it appears we all want to live in.

The debate was as lively and thought provoking as ever, and I hope you enjoy reading this report.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Morag Alexander".

**Morag Alexander**  
Scotland Commissioner,  
Equality and Human Rights Commission



# Summary

This Question Time style event organised by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) on 21st January 2010 was designed to debate the main issues around Scottish national identity and ask whether Scotland is a country worth coming home to.

The main issues raised during the debate are presented in this report. For the sake of clarity, they are presented thematically rather than how they chronologically developed on the night. At the end of each of the main themes the key issues raised are set out.

The debate centred on the narratives surrounding what it means to be Scottish and how these narratives fit with the realities of modern day Scotland.

Some of the opinions expressed included:

- The traditional egalitarian narrative must be expanded upon to include equalities issues across all diverse groups.
- There should be no monolithic and prescriptive definition of Scottishness as this was inevitably simplistic, unrepresentative of diversity and dangerous to immigrant communities.
- Discrimination and disadvantage are experienced by all equalities groups at all levels of Scottish society.

Participants were also keen to discuss how Scotland and being Scottish relates to the wider world, and how simplistic views of Scottishness can help conceal the real discrimination and disadvantage faced by individuals and groups on a daily basis.



# Introduction:

## Is Scotland Worth Coming Home To?

**The Equality and Human Rights Commission** (EHRC) was established in October 2007 and has a remit to champion equality and human rights for all, work to eliminate discrimination, reduce inequality, protect human rights and to build good relations, ensuring that everyone has a fair chance to participate in society. The Commission is facilitating a series of debates tackling some of the policy issues that impact upon this remit and require attention due to the changing social, political, cultural and legislative contexts in which we live.

This is the third debate in the series and comes at a time when Scotland's constitutional future is the subject of much debate. Eleven years have passed since devolution and the establishment of the Scottish Parliament. At the present time all political

parties favour some form of further devolution of powers ranging from greater fiscal autonomy to full independence. The debate also comes as the Scottish Government continues its National Conversation on Scotland's future, and follows the publication of a White Paper setting out the case for independence and examining other constitutional options. The Scottish Government's Year of Homecoming initiative has also recently come to an end.

This report is intended to inform ongoing debates regarding what kind of Scotland we want to live in and is available to politicians of all parties, organisations and individuals in Scotland more widely.

# Current context

## **The Debate on Scotland's Future**

The devolution settlement between the UK and Scottish Parliaments has been surrounded by ongoing debate on the constitutional future of the UK. This has been more intense since the Scottish National Party (SNP) won the 2007 Scottish Election. A key plank of their manifesto for that election was a commitment to hold a referendum on independence in 2010. In August 2007 the SNP Government launched *'Choosing Scotland's Future: A National Conversation'*.

At the end of the National Conversation, the Scottish Government foresaw a choice facing Scotland of;

- continuing with the current constitutional settlement with no or minimal change,
- extending devolved responsibilities to Scotland in areas identified during the national conversation, or
- taking the steps to allow Scotland to become a fully independent country<sup>1</sup>.

The National Conversation ran for two years and continues through the publication

of *'Your Scotland, Your Voice'*<sup>2</sup>, the White Paper setting out the options for Scotland's constitutional future and paving the way for a Referendum Bill. In February the First Minister, Alex Salmond MSP, decided that rather than introduce a Bill to Parliament a public consultation would be undertaken. This consultation will ask people to consider a draft Bill, setting out a two-question referendum regarding extending the Scottish Parliament's powers.

In 2008 in response to the Government's plans on the constitution the three main opposition parties established, through the Scottish Parliament, the Commission on Scottish Devolution, chaired by Kenneth Calman. The remit of the Commission was to review the provisions of the Scotland Act 1998 in the light of experience and to recommend any changes to the present constitutional arrangements that would;

- enable the Scottish Parliament to serve the people of Scotland better,
- improve the financial accountability of the Scottish Parliament, and
- continue to secure the position of Scotland within the United Kingdom.

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1 Scottish Government, *'Choosing Scotland's Future: a national conversation'* (August 2007)

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2 Scottish Government, *'Your Scotland, Your Future: a national conversation'* (November 2009)

The Commission reported in June 2009<sup>3</sup> and made recommendations on increased powers for the Scottish Parliament within a social and economic union, greater co-operation between the Parliaments, and changes to the legislative and scrutiny processes within the Scottish Parliament. The report made no recommendations for further devolution of responsibility for equalities.

## Homecoming

The Year of Homecoming centred on the 250th anniversary of the birth of Robert Burns. Planning for the Year of Homecoming 2009 began in 2005 initiated by the then Labour/Liberal Democrat coalition Government. The purpose of the Year was to attract Scots from home and abroad to ‘reconnect with our great country’<sup>4</sup>. This was to be achieved by a range of cultural and artistic events with a focus on celebrating the national poet and ‘Scotland’s many great contributions to the world including: whisky, golf, great minds, innovation and our rich ancestry, culture and heritage’.

As a tourist initiative the Year of Homecoming portrayed Scotland not only as a country rich in culture and heritage but also as a nation which is warm, friendly and welcoming, imbued with the egalitarian spirit of Burns. At the Launch of Homecoming in January 2009, the First Minister

spoke of Burns as the ‘...voice of Scotland – (a voice) that displayed honesty, integrity, was bold and independent.’<sup>5</sup>

## Policy Context: The Scottish Government’s Approach

The White Paper on the referendum states that:

*‘Scotland has a strong tradition of striving for a fairer and more inclusive society, combining equality of opportunity to thrive and excel, with support for those in need.’*

Since 2007 the Scottish Government’s approach to achieving its aims has been to set out 15 National Outcomes that establish its priorities for the next 10 years<sup>6</sup>. These aims are linked to the strategic objectives of making Scotland *wealthier* and *fairer*, *healthier*, *safer* and *stronger*, *smarter* and *greener*<sup>7</sup>.

There are two national outcomes that are important to consider in relation to the debate that follows.

1. **National Identity (we take pride in a strong, fair and inclusive national identity)** The Scottish Government believes that Scotland’s

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3 Commission on Scottish Devolution, *Serving Scotland Better: Scotland and the United Kingdom in the 21st Century* (2009)

4 Homecoming Scotland 2009 website

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5 Speech by First Minister, Homecoming Burns Supper (January 2009) [www.scotland.gov.uk/News/This-Week/Speeches/First-Minister/homecoming-launch](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/This-Week/Speeches/First-Minister/homecoming-launch)

6 Scottish Government, National Outcomes

7 Scottish Government, Strategic Objectives: [www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Strategic-Objectives](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Strategic-Objectives)

identity is *'defined by our sense of place, our sense of history and our sense of self. It is defined by what it means to be Scottish and to live in a modern Scotland in a modern world. It is the tie that binds people together'*. Whilst stating that Scotland's identity is *'owned by the people of Scotland'* the Government set out their role in working with local authorities and other partners to deliver policies, programmes and initiatives which deliver *'increased pride in a strong, fair and inclusive national identity'*.

- 2. Inequalities (we have tackled the significant inequalities in Scottish Society)** Under this outcome The Scottish Government states that tackling inequalities remains a major challenge. Whilst asserting that outcomes are improving for many, they believe they are not improving fast enough for the poorest sections of Scottish society, or for people who face discrimination because of their race, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation or faith. As well as taking action to promote equalities the Scottish Government believes it needs to work across the public and private sectors to identify the key determinants of inequalities in Scotland and agree shared responsibility for action.

## Equalities in Scotland

### Responsibilities

Equal opportunities are largely reserved to Westminster. There are two exceptions. Firstly, Scottish Ministers are able to encourage equal opportunities and secondly to place duties on Scottish public bodies, and cross-border bodies with responsibility for devolved matters, requiring them to make arrangements to ensure they are operating within the law. Equality provisions have been incorporated into Scottish legislation on housing, education and local government whilst the Scottish Parliament has recently introduced legislation on hate crime and Scottish Ministers have placed a duty on Scottish public authorities to report on equal pay.

Equalities have, then, become central to the debate on Scotland's constitutional future. The Scottish Government believes Scotland should have full responsibility for equal opportunities legislation and enforcement agencies. They assert this would allow Scotland to deal appropriately with those issues which particularly affect Scotland, such as sectarianism. As noted earlier, the Commission on Scottish Devolution did not recommend new arrangements. However, the Commission's recommendation that the Scottish and United Kingdom Parliaments discuss and agree common social rights could potentially include reference to equalities.

## Current Inequalities

A report for the EHRC reviewing equality issues in Scotland, including an examination of current research and statistics on gender, age, disability, ethnicity, religion or belief and sexual orientation, found that inequalities are experienced across most areas of life<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, it is clear that there are substantial inequalities in income, wealth and health. A report in 2008 from the World Health Organisation found that a boy in the suburb of Calton, Glasgow, can expect to live 28 years less than one brought up in Lenzie, a few miles away<sup>9</sup>.

Ethnic minorities continue to face significant barriers. The recent report of the National Equality Panel found that nearly all minority ethnic groups are less likely to be in paid work than White British men and women. Moreover, compared to a White British Christian man with the same qualifications, age and occupation, Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslim men and Black African Christian men's pay is between 13% and 21% lower<sup>10</sup>.

Inequalities are also clearly linked to gender, disability, and age. Gaps in pay between women and men remain significant. According to the National Equality

Panel whilst women up to the age of 44 are better qualified than men their median hourly pay is 21% less. According to the EHRC review of equalities research in Scotland, disabled people face serious difficulty in accessing the labour market, with 69% said to be economically inactive. The proportion of people aged 50 to state retirement age in employment is lower than for any other working age groups.

## Public Attitudes and Opinions

Attitudes to national identity, and as to whether Scotland should be independent or not, are changing over time. The Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (SSAS) shows that the number of those who think of themselves as Scottish and not British between 2001 and 2007 has declined from 35% to 26%. Also evident is a slight increase, 27% compared to 26%, of people who see themselves as equally Scottish and British.<sup>11</sup>

The SSAS also shows that trust in devolved government to act in Scotland's best interests has outstripped trust in the UK government to do the same, in every year since 1999. On the impact of devolution, in 2007 61% of people stated that devolution was giving Scotland a stronger voice - this was the highest level since 1999.

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8 McPherson S and Bond S. *Equality Issues in Scotland: A review of research 2000-08 (2009)*

9 World Health Organisation, *Closing the gap in a generation: Health equity through action on the social determinants of health (2008)*

10 National Equality Panel, *An Anatomy of Economic Inequality in the UK (Jan 2010)*

Following the publication of the Scottish Government's White Paper in 2007 TNS-

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11 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, 2001-2007

BMRB have carried out a series of polls<sup>12</sup> to establish how the Scottish electorate would respond to the two options specified in the White Paper if such a referendum were to be held. Table 1 shows how this has changed over time but remains broadly similar now to when the White Paper was published.

**Table 1**

***“The Scottish Government should negotiate a settlement with the Government of the United Kingdom so that Scotland becomes an independent state.”***

	<i>I agree</i>	<i>I do not agree</i>
September 2007	35%	50%
December 2007	40%	44%
April 2008	41%	40%
November 2008	35%	43%
February 2009	38%	40%
June 2009	36%	39%
December 2009	31%	46%

Source: TNS-BMRB

<sup>12</sup> TNS-BMRB [www.tns-ri.co.uk/our-sector-focus/scottish-market\\_polling-results.aspx](http://www.tns-ri.co.uk/our-sector-focus/scottish-market_polling-results.aspx)

# The Panel

## Alex Bell



Alex Bell (Chair) was a BBC Trainee and then a producer, reporter and presenter for the BBC. He has also worked for The Observer, The Herald

and the Irish Times. He was also speech writer and head of policy to Alex Salmond and the Scottish National Party.

## Aamer Anwar



Aamer is one of Scotland's highest profile lawyers and has made a major contribution to changing attitudes on equality and social justice throughout

Scotland. Practising law since 2000, Aamer set up his own firm of Criminal Defence Solicitors based in Glasgow in 2006. Prior to becoming a lawyer he was the national organiser for the Anti Nazi League. He is a leading member of the Stop the War Coalition and Glasgow Campaign to Welcome Refugees, and most recently helped set up Scotland United.

## Janey Godley



Janey is a multi-award-winning Scottish comedienne, playwright, award-winning blogger, best-selling author and former Scotsman newspaper

columnist. Janey has performed her comedy shows and one-woman play around the world, including off-Broadway in New York. She is a regular on BBC Radio 4's Just a Minute. In 2008, she also won Edinburgh's WAG of the Year Award as 'Best After Dinner Speaker', was nominated as 'Best International Guest' in the 2008 New Zealand Comedy Guild Awards, and was voted No 3 by readers in London listing magazine Time Out's list of Top Ten Comedians.

## Gerry Hassan



Gerry is a writer, commentator and thinker about Scotland, the UK, politics and ideas. Hailed by the Sunday Herald as 'Scotland's main public

intellectual', Gerry has written and edited a

dozen books in the last decade on Scotland and the wider world: from the setting up of the Parliament, to its record, policy, in-depth studies of the Labour Party and Scottish National Party, and looking at how we imagine the future. Gerry's activities include facilitating events, discussions and conversations which bring people together in Scotland and across the world.

### **Charlie McMillan**



Charlie is one of two Directors of Operations with the Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH), Scotland's leading mental health charity. He trained as

a social worker and has worked in a variety of settings including alternatives to custody, homelessness, and HIV and sexual health. Charlie has been an equalities trainer since 1989 and worked with the Scottish Executive Health Department between 2002 and 2005 advising on equalities issues. He has a keen interest in both equalities and human rights, especially impact assessment, and has recently completed the first year of an LLM in Human Rights Law.

### **Mona Siddiqui**



Mona is Professor of Islamic Studies and Public Understanding at Glasgow University and Director of the Centre for the Study of Islam. Mona started her academic

life with a BA in Arabic and French, which led eventually to a PhD in Classical Islamic Law. Mona came to the University of Glasgow in 1996 and two years later founded the Centre for the Study of Islam, which she directs. Professor Siddiqui is the only female Muslim Professor of Islamic Studies in the UK and holds three honorary doctorates from British universities for 'outstanding contribution to religious studies'. She is currently the Chair of the BBC's Scottish Religious Advisory Committee, a member of the Commission on Scottish Devolution and a member of the World Economics Forum's Global Agenda Council on the Islam-West Dialogue.

# ‘Is Scotland Worth Coming Home To?’

## Opening remarks

### Charlie McMillan

Charlie McMillan stated that he had never left Scotland and was therefore not sure whether it was worth coming home to or not, although he remained hopeful it was. His concern was that he doubted people in Scotland are very good at *‘celebrating diversity’*. Rather he thought people’s focus tends to be on what divides us and makes us different, *‘...we are all good at defining difference and looking at how people are different’*. This he believed was the challenge faced in defining national identity and moving to a place where we can recognise and embrace our *‘common humanity’*.

### Mona Siddiqui

While explaining she had lived in Glasgow for 18 years and that this was the only part of Scotland she knew, Mona Siddiqui focussed on her experience of views from people abroad which she felt were *‘polarised’*, being based on either an image of *‘... green hills, mountains and lakes or this rather dower, cold, dingy place...’*.

She thought the main issue was that, while Scotland had *‘enormous talent’*, it didn’t know how to sell itself.

### Aamer Anwar

Aamer Anwar suggested that whether or not Scotland was worth coming home to depended upon where one is coming from, and if it is Barbados, perhaps not. While describing himself as *‘proud’* of the people of Scotland and *‘how they have responded to issues over the years’*, he noted the existence of what may be described as institutional or structural racism. He argued that one doesn’t need to be called a *‘paki’* to experience racism as it exists widely, for example in the *‘lack of people of colour in positions of power...’* in institutions such as the legal system. He felt that since the *‘war on terror’* the debate has moved away from how to tackle racism to *‘...whether one apologises enough for being Muslim or bears allegiance to the Queen...’*. He also argued that racism was apparent when people were being pulled aside by security at Glasgow airport based on the colour of their skin.

Overall he felt,

**‘... the answer is yes, I think it is worthwhile coming back to, but we can’t be complacent, there are a lot of things that are wrong within Scotland as well.’**

## Janey Godley

Janey Godley also highlighted the views from abroad about the people of Scotland and how she loved to give the positive side of Scotland, convincing foreign audiences that *'we are not all alcoholics, drug addicts, wife beaters, King Billy fanatics, gay bashers...'* She also noted that while there are severe issues, such as the life expectancy of a male born and brought up in Carlton in the east end of Glasgow, being just 54, nevertheless, the place and people have *'such verve and sparkiness'*.

## Gerry Hassan

For Gerry Hassan the very search for a monolithic national identity may in itself become part of the problem due to some people's belief that,

**'...if we go on about it enough, [we will] somehow come out the other side with a perfect identity with no contradictions...'**

He argued that this sets back progress on recognising diversity and awareness of inequalities. He wondered why there was an obsession about *'Scottish'* identity as it *'... isn't frail and fragile and isn't under attack from anyone else. It is strong and in some senses... is positive...'*

He went on to argue there are,

**'...so many things that we celebrate that are worth kind of taking note of, our culture, how that is seen around the world and yet so many things that are really a disgrace for a modern nation that we still don't take action on, we don't talk about and so on.'**

He closed with the view that inequalities should be recognised, and that we need to focus on these inequalities and how they linked to, *'... the tragedy of the Blair and Brown governments...'*

# The Debate

The debate was wide-ranging, covering many topics and viewpoints. The main themes to emerge focussed on:

- Narratives
- Identity in a wider world
- Discrimination and disadvantage

The Scotland Commissioner for the Equality and Human Rights Commission Morag Alexander set the scene, explaining that the debate was intended to cover questions such as,

**‘... what is Scottish identity? ... I hope it is going be about recognising and valuing the diversity of Scotland today.’**

## Narratives

Central to any concept of national identity are the stories which variously express, shape, defend and progress it. The Year of Homecoming initiative, based as it was on Burns, tied into one traditional Scottish narrative of an egalitarian, internationalist, fair, just and inclusive people embracing diversity.

Gerry Hassan stated,

**‘I think one of the things we have, is a story that has gone for centuries in Scotland, the Scot’s egalitarian myth.’**

This narrative undoubtedly remains wide-

spread in Scotland and was recently seen to be expressed through the choice of Burn’s ‘A Man’s a Man’ for the opening of the Scottish Parliament. The continued importance of the narrative to the Scottish Government can be seen not only in the language of Homecoming but also in how policy is driven by trying to achieve a ‘fairer’, more ‘inclusive’ Scotland through the National Outcomes.

However, during the debate it was generally agreed this narrative was inadequate to describe Scottishness on four main grounds;

- it offered an overly narrow view of ‘equality’,
- it is often used as a smokescreen,
- it was being displaced by individualism,
- it is overly prescriptive and monolithic.

## An overly narrow view of ‘equality’

Gerry Hassan argued the ‘*myth*’ has now become too focussed on a very narrow view of what equality is, namely the relationship between worker and management, while wider equalities issues such as sectarianism or sexuality were not mentioned in ‘polite society’.

He felt we must find,

**‘...ways of dealing with that and to**

**face up to some of these taboos which I don't think we are good at acknowledging.'**

He suggested our narratives are expanded upon to widen the concept of egalitarianism to become more inclusive,

**'...we need stories that acknowledge the complexity of Scotland, [both] the things we celebrate and areas we have trouble talking about and addressing.'**

### **The egalitarian narrative as a smokescreen**

It was also felt that the use of Burns and the wider Enlightenment narrative, upon which the Homecoming messages were built, served both as a form of self delusion, and an excuse for inaction.

In response to a question from the floor Aamer Anwar answered,

**'What concerns me is the idea constantly perpetuated, its all Burns fair play, tolerance, it is all self serving narcissism. I remember .... a programme which showed two Asian under cover journalists with hidden cameras, went and rented a house and were attacked every time they stepped outside the door. A grown man would strike the Asian house wife, calling her Taliban,... one journalist was assaulted brutally.**

**...loads of people... said 'it is England it doesn't happen in Scotland'. But it does happen in Scotland, in villages up and down the country, but it doesn't get reported or prosecuted.'**

The idea that racism has been denied and

ignored in Scotland was added to by Gerry Hassan,

**'... [in] the 70s you remember the rise of the National Front and the .. wave of xenophobia and racism - ... [the assumption] was, it is all something that happens elsewhere - 'It is not Scottish'. I remember going to my first ever game at Hampden, somebody trying to sell me Bulldog News, the NF weekly.'**

He added,

**'It is not just bigotry or ignorance, it is choosing to turn a blind eye to obvious facts.'**

One speaker felt that, while new stories were needed to express growing complexities, in the Year of Homecoming only good news stories were wanted and it was generally an attempt to paint an overly rosy picture of Scotland,

**'...what we continuously have are selective stories. At the moment, my feeling is that we want to be the best nation in the world, so good news stories only please. Bad news stories, we are not that keen to hear them.'**

It was therefore felt that an overly positive view of Scotland detracted from efforts to tackle such discrimination.

### **Rising individualism**

In addition to the critiques set out above, of the Homecoming and egalitarian narratives being too narrow and concealing the realities of discrimination, it was also felt that political narratives (including Homecoming) were in reality no longer based on the belief that such egalitarianism was desirable.

Is Scotland worth coming Home to?

One speaker expressed her concern that the Scottish Government's National Outcomes are focussed mainly on growth rather than equality,

**'...I am really struck by that [national] outcome using three powerful words, 'strength, fairness and inclusion'. My reading of the activities under the outcome are they are very much economic ones about moving people back to Scotland, very Homecoming oriented language - and fairness and inclusion, where is that addressed?'**

Alex Bell added,

**'...I think the Homecoming thing was invented as a desperate effort by the SNP to copy the Irish who are perceived to have created a groovy international brand which everybody wants to be part of ... but the Irish who went through a great period of high wealth managed to invest even less in social justice than anybody else in Europe and there is huge inequality in their society. It is fair to say or maybe it is my prejudice, the Government did not care about fairness, equality and wanted a brand like Coca Cola which we could sell...'**

On the Irish experience Charlie McMillan added,

**'...on the economy.....when I went to a mental health conference [in Ireland], the big shout there was, "are we building an economy or are we building a society?"'**

Aamer Anwar thought that Scotland is indeed moving away from the ideal of fairness and equity based upon the primacy of society rather than individualism.

Aamer Anwar,

**'...the problem in Scotland, [is] all mainstream politicians seem to..... forget the welfare state and move to the market state. The first one, the state, used to look after its own people. Now what we have....[is] individual advancement over group welfare.'**

Speaker from the floor,

**'I have noticed the traditional leftist views are being replaced by a more right [wing] view, young people are becoming more anti-immigration for instance, something needs to be done to tackle this and the key [place] to start is education.'**

It was argued that such emphasis on economy over society, and individual over group interests, had exacerbated poverty and divisions in society. In this view the far right had been allowed to progress their own narratives which link unemployment and poverty to immigration and fuelled racism in Scotland.

Aamer Anwar,

**'You can speak to the old, young, children who are 10, 11, 12, who have no future. When you look into that vacuum which the far right are feeding off - they are hoping to... pick up five seats in the Holyrood election, it is shocking...'**

He went on to link this perceived move to individualism to the neo-liberalism of Margaret Thatcher,

**' ... many people have many memories of what Margaret Thatcher did. They introduced Poll Tax in Scotland a year before it came into force south of the**

**border... I cannot give a damn about having to [re] live .. what I remember of the Thatcher government, I don't want to see that introduced again.'**

Charlie McMillan added,

**'... I don't want to go back to Thatcherism, all that that held for us. I spent ten of my teenage years and early twenties campaigning out in the streets, protesting...'**

### **Too monolithic and overly prescriptive**

Beyond the critiques above was the opinion that any national identity must avoid becoming prescriptive and monolithic.

Charlie McMillan highlighted the historical ethnic diversity of Scots,

**'I think we have to get away from thinking... 'Scottish' is one culture, or there is some kind of indigenous culture, we have a thousand years of migration in Scotland. We need to learn to celebrate that...'**

In terms of what makes up Scottishness it was argued there could be no single definition as this was inevitably simplistic, unrepresentative of diversity and dangerous to immigrant communities,

Aamer Anwar,

**'...I don't think it matters that much, if you are happy with who you are, I don't think we should make the mistake of dictating to people what is a Scot. We are looking for something different from what has gone on in the last decade, with a New Labour government, trying to dictate who is a citizen, what qualities count, what gives you a right to remain in this country...'**

This divergence of identity was further expressed by Mona Siddiqui. While noting she saw herself not as Scottish but British she added that what people see isn't her nationality but her ethnicity and gender.

**'... I am.... a non-white, Muslim female, whether I am in England or Scotland, any room I walk in, that is what people are going see.'**

Moreover, she pointed out that many new immigrants come with their own stories and no links to Scottish culture,

**'...if you don't have roots here it is very difficult to feel you have a heritage in a place. You can enjoy the present, perhaps make a future, I hope...'**

While discussing elements which might help identify Scottishness, Janey Godley introduced what she felt was a distinct Scottish sense of humour. Aamer Anwar suggested instead that the distinctive humour referred to was not Scottish but instead Glaswegian,

**'I am not convinced Scottish [humour] is different but Glasgow [humour] is similar [to Liverpool's].'**

Clearly there are links between Glasgow and Liverpool through industrial, immigration and religious histories which may go some way towards explaining any such similarities. However, these histories are less relevant to other places in Scotland from the Borders to the Shetlands which have their own myriad stories shaping and reflecting identities and values. In this geographical and historical diversity there is a fundamental issue in trying to find an identity which covers the whole of Scotland.

Is Scotland worth coming Home to?

Further fundamental problems of trying to identify a 'monolithic' Scottishness were explored in relation to religious identities with one participant describing,

**'...a country that is still marked by sectarianism and where there are religious clashes between Catholics and Protestants.'**

It was pointed out that these religious identities/histories can in some instances be linked to wider views on such as independence and unionism with Aamer Anwar noting,

**'...half the city won't bear allegiance to the Queen, half are flying one flag, half another flag...'**

Clearly there are many other factors which shape a person's approach to independence and world views more generally, with religious history having a very limited role for many. What is important to note is that these factors are numerous and vary greatly across Scotland. It was felt it was essential to ensure 'Scotland' is not defined only through the experiences of a few groups, or the stories of some of its places, and that its diverse history is recognised as shaping many different cultural norms.

Speaker,

**'... I think it is really difficult to have that definition of what is a Scot. I think that that is shown by the complexity of each of your answers tonight. .... I do think that each of the answers that people have given have kind of different facets of what it is to be a Scot.'** (speaker from floor)

## Key points raised

- While disputing the reality or adequacy of the egalitarian narrative participants tended to aspire to an egalitarian society.
- The traditional egalitarian narrative must be expanded upon to include equalities issues across all diverse groups.
- The realities of discrimination should be recognised and an overly rosy picture of Scotland should not be allowed to excuse inaction on discrimination.
- The concept of 'society' is central to tackling inequalities between social groups.
- Moves towards economic individualism lead to increased poverty and inequality and lend strength to extreme right-wing narratives
- Any search for identity must recognise the many factors which shape people's world views.
- With the breadth of geographical, historical and social diversity there is a fundamental issue in trying to find an identity which covers the whole of Scotland.
- There should be no single definition of Scottishness as this was inevitably simplistic, unrepresentative of diversity and dangerous to immigrant communities.

## Identity in a wider world

Beyond consideration of Homecoming and egalitarian narratives there was discussion about how Scottish identity is affected by the changing nature of relationships with England, the limitations of the unionist versus nationalist perspective and, more widely, the influence of globalisation.

## Scotland, England and the Union

Scottish identity within the context of changing relations with England and the UK over time was explored.

Alex Bell,

**‘Perhaps we got stuck in defining Scotland as a way of saying we want political change, we are not the same as the English... [I was] wondering if the need for that has gone, with devolution? We are kind of growing up. Was it a false thing in the first place, have we moved on a bit?’**

Janey Godley believed,

**‘Sometimes we can fall into the trap of being anti-English, especially in Glasgow..... We have that [as] part of our psyche, it is based on racism.’**

Charlie McMillan,

**‘ I think that the English question, if I put it that way, absolutely diverted so much of our energy and attention, up until probably the year 2000, with the new parliament.’**

During this debate there was little more than a brief discussion about England which perhaps itself answers Alex Bell’s

question and reaffirms Charlie McMillan’s hope that we have indeed moved on and ‘grown up’ from defining ourselves as ‘not English’ and instead look more to what we actually are following devolution.

Gerry Hassan however lamented the continued focus of political debate on unionism versus nationalism,

**‘I think we need much more than that ... I don’t want to live in Scotland, if that’s what politics is about. I want to see politics post unionist, [when] we are comfortable with where we are and where we want to be, and post nationalist...we need stories that acknowledge the complexity of Scotland, the things we celebrate and areas we have trouble talking about and addressing. As far as I can see failing, fading tribes of unionism and nationalism are part of the problem. They don’t address those issues...’**

## Globalisation and homogeneity

Besides concerns about being too fixated on developing one national, monolithic culture which people’s Scottishness can be tested against, there were also warnings about losing touch with national identities in the context of globalisation.

Gerry Hassan warned,

**‘... we all become this great global blank man, it is a bit frightening and horrible, you walk down a Dubai shopping mall everywhere is the same, what globalisation does is, it brings some degree of inter-dependence and leads to people celebrating and wanting firm local difference, national difference and it is no acci-**

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**dent the last 15 or 20 years has been one of the most creative periods of nation state building in the last 200 years...'**

Mona Siddiqui agreed with this,

**'Globalisation, in fact if anything, it has made people more aware of their cultural differences,...ethnicity and culture...'**

But cautioned against becoming insular,

**'...there is a Meta narrative, not just a local narrative about how we are connected. What happens in Afghanistan happens here, what we do matters to the other side of the world, that is globalisation. We cannot.... afford not to be part of that.'**

## **Key points raised**

- It was felt that Scotland may well have moved on from defining itself as 'not England', and in post-devolution Scotland it is more likely we can look more to what we actually are.
- Globalisation brings greater interactions across the world and debates around national identities must account for this.
- Globalisation serves as a driver to recognise and maintain national/local differences in the face of a growing multi-national culture.

## Discrimination and Disadvantage

The debate covered many elements of discrimination and the disadvantages people experienced because of this. It was felt that discrimination was seen on two levels;

- the personal level, such as homophobic or racist abuse from individuals, and
- at the structural level, for example in our educational, legal and political systems where discrimination creates and maintains inequality of opportunity and outcomes.

## Personal level

### Racism

**‘Is it a not a minority of racist Scots that are tarnishing the name or are we a racist nation?’** (*question from the floor*)

Within the discussion surrounding what it is to be Scottish and the narratives which shape identity there were many personal examples and general evidence given of abuse and discrimination.

During discussions on the question of whether Scotland is a racist society, one speaker related her brother’s experiences of being brought up in Scotland,

**‘...if you ask my brother the same question, he will tell you, no, it is not worth coming home to...[he felt] Scotland is very racist ... he would not come back to Scotland because it is not worth him introducing his children ... my experience and his experience is different because he was growing up as a boy, he had more racial attacks, but it is ...[a] sad reality, our family divided as well...’**

Gerry Hassan pointed to an ‘insidious’ form of racism which, it was argued, is widespread and seen as somehow acceptable,

**‘... they used to say ‘I am not racist because I hate the English so much’. People used to actually say that! ... There is a huge issue ... [of] low level xenophobia that exists in this country, particularly about Englishness. It is such an insidious and horrendous problem...’**

Speaking from the floor, Anne McLaughlin, MSP cautioned against complacency,

**‘If we sit here thinking well, we are not racist, we will go and talk to those people who are racist and tell them how not to be racist, then we are missing the point.... every single one of us has to face... the fact that we have all had racist thoughts and it is about being honest...’**

Mona Siddiqui argued that one should avoid an oversimplification of racism. Clearly racism can be between white populations such as the anti-Englishness described above, or between other ethnic groups as alluded to by several speakers.

**‘I don’t think I can be as crude as to say white people should beat themselves up about racism all the time because a lot of other people are racist...’** (*Mona Siddiqui*)

There was general agreement that in Scotland there is indeed racism and racists, and that traditionally people have hidden behind the myth that Scots are somehow immune, while ignoring the realities. Whether that means Scotland is a ‘racist society’ or what that term actually means was less clear.

## **Other forms of discrimination**

Although the debate focussed predominantly on issues of race, other equalities issue were also raised.

Speaker from the floor,

**‘... I am a bit concerned that we have concentrated so much on one aspect of discrimination. I think it is important to recognise that discrimination is there for lots of people....Can we talk a bit about the other forms of discrimination which I think are as bad.’**

Charlie McMillan noted his experiences of discrimination at a personal level,

**‘I am a gay man in a modern Scotland, that is, I have been beaten up as well. These are horrific experiences...’**

Janey Godley highlighted domestic abuse and what she felt was a growing issue of sectarianism,

**‘...when Catholics and Protestants are tied up with Rangers and Celtic, domestic abuse goes up by 80% during a match, that just makes me feel vile and sick. Sectarianism has got worse for some awful weird reason.’**

Aamer Anwar agreed and pointed to the need for solidarity among groups facing discrimination,

**‘...various groups feel “well what about disability discrimination, homophobic discrimination”.... I don’t think there should be an aristocracy of oppression, the Government has made us fight for the crumbs at the table and we have to fight each other to get this resource and that resource.’**

On sectarianism he pointed not only to its brutal impacts but also argued that it also served as a diversion from working-class people finding common cause,

**‘ ... in Glasgow we have more sectarian marches than anywhere in Northern Ireland, the reality is on the streets of Glasgow and other places young men are murdered for the colour of their jersey... but people forget you can’t rip it away from the poverty, it stems from housing schemes, the same old empire policy of divide and rule.’**

Charlie McMillan supported Gerry Hassan’s point about a lack of empathy driving discrimination and standing in the way of a society embracing diversity,

**‘I think we are getting to the heart of the matter ... I think that ... as a society, we define people by difference...’**

## **Structural discrimination**

It was suggested that Scotland’s institutions were both part of the problem and the potential solutions.

## **Schools**

On faith-based schools Aamer Anwar argued,

**‘...it is time politicians had the guts to stand up for schools that allow our children to be educated together, rather than separately. Religious orders protect their own empires, [we need] to say enough is enough, we want our children to walk the same streets, go to the same schools...’**

In order to overcome the identification of various groups as ‘other’ two speakers, still at school, also believed that the education system had a central role to play in creating a more tolerant Scotland.

Speaker from the floor,

**‘...I was growing up with a merged religious experience at school. When I saw Ramadan, it wasn’t strange...It wasn’t something mysterious... which creates fear. So, when later on in life I started seeing the images on TV, the anti-Islamic bias in the media, I didn’t have the [fear] of terrorism, I had this image that I had grown up with. I think the key to tackling racism is to start in education, to start early on. My early experiences of merging with other faiths and races really helped shape my view today...’**

Speaker from the floor,

**‘...a racist is a person not educated, people need to be educated and informed about the issues, I don’t think people are naturally racist.’**

It was suggested therefore that schools could and should play a role in tackling catholic/protestant sectarianism and general racism.

## **Employment and poverty**

There was agreement that inequalities created greater levels of poverty, unemployment and poorer housing and education among specific groups. For example Charlie McMillan pointed out that, in Scotland,

**‘...79% of people with significant mental health problems are unemployed and have been unemployed for years and years and are more likely to die than get a job...’**

The earlier speaker whose brother had grown up regularly facing racist attacks added,

**‘...he left straight after university and... He went back to Hong Kong, he wouldn’t have established the same career in Scotland as in Hong Kong, many of my friends have chosen to go back to Hong Kong after studying.’**

Within her family’s experience is evidence then of discrimination at these two levels, the personal, the racist attacks he suffered as a boy; and the structural, which creates unequal access to employment opportunities.

Beyond viewing and tackling poverty through the lens of equalities groups alone it was argued it needed to be dealt with more generally,

Aamer Anwar,

**‘The problem in Scotland and throughout the UK, mainstream politicians have abandoned hundreds of thousands of working people to mass unemployment, poverty, Glasgow, Edinburgh, anywhere across Scotland, growing levels of poverty, bad housing, public services are rock bottom, poor public services, it is a hopelessness about the future...’**

He felt that such feelings of abandonment and hopelessness allowed the extreme right wing to exploit such poverty and progress their own narratives.

## **Equal opportunity**

A speaker from the floor highlighted her experience of trying to challenge inequalities in the workplace,

**‘I work as an employment development officer, supporting minority ethnic communities to access employment and training opportunities. I am so dismayed at the...absence of visible minority ethnic people among organisations...including the local authority itself...I wonder what the Government is doing ... towards making equal opportunity a reality.’**

Mona Siddiqui felt this was an issue of human rights,

**‘For me, human rights has to be about ‘how do you give every person the chance to maximise their potential?’ Not just white middle class able-bodied people but everybody. It is not enough to pass legislation to say we have access to buildings ... a person also wants a vision and a hope for their life. Not just access to places. Human rights [means you should] maximise people’s potential, sometimes at the expense of those people who have the ability to maximise their own potential...’**

## **Public funding**

Another speaker argued that public funding is more likely to be given to groups solely because of their ethnicity rather than groups challenging racism per se. She felt this had to change if we are to challenge the structures and cultures of discrimination and develop a more equal society.

**‘We find for example a lot of funding for ethnic minority groups on the basis of let’s give it to the Bangladeshis or Pakistanis... or whatever. Groups challenging racism and discrimination... most of their funding is dried up. That’s what is needed if you are going to create a situation where other people are welcoming of us.’**

Likening this to the situation in human rights activities Aamer Anwar argued,

**‘...we have the universal framework of rights, but the fact is ordinary people on the ground don’t have the resources, those groups and organisations fighting to put those rights on the map actually don’t get the funding and resources because as soon, as was said earlier, as soon as you challenge ...whoever is funding you, the Home Office, Government or police, they say “ we are not giving you money for that, we won’t allow you to do that...”’**

## **Establishment**

There was also some discussion surrounding the conservatism of Scotland's 'establishment' and what was felt to be was its inherent racism.

Mona Siddiqui,

**'At a higher level I would say in the establishment community, it is far more subtle. One of the problems of Scotland..[is] the establishment here is far more Conservative than ... in England, perhaps it is a minority within a large majority, I am not sure. The racism [at this level] is far more subtle. It is not in your face, you don't necessarily feel it but you have no idea what is going on behind the scenes which might be obstructing you from maximising your potential, because people don't want to talk about it.'**

Based on his experience of the Scottish legal system Amer Anwar agreed,

**'...if you look at the judiciary, the prosecution, legal system, nothing changes, a lack of people of colour in positions of power, racist attacks at the highest level ever. You don't ... have to be called a paki' [to experience racism]**

Specifically on political representation and the effective exclusion of minority groups from elected positions, one speaker thought tackling this would go some way to overcoming the structural and institutional discrimination it was felt existed across Scotland,

**'... I work in a project focused on encouraging ethnic minority communities to ... learn more about the political processes in Scotland and ... how to get involved in those. We have heard a lot of very accurate and just... criticisms of our politicians and political systems ... We only have ten from non-white communities just now, including none currently in Edinburgh ... There is a lot there that is wrong .. that ... needs to be changed to ... encourage more people from... not just ethnic minority communities but other communities to become more involved.. if we have more diverse elected representatives working on our behalf then I think ... that is one of the ways we would see ... changes'**

## **Asylum and immigration**

In the context of immigration and asylum policy being reserved to Westminster Alex Bell asked,

**' ... about asylum seeking, is the view of the audience that we should have control of asylum seekers handed over from London to Edinburgh?'**

Anne MacLauchlan MSP (SNP),

**'...I wanted to say something about the asylum issue. It is on the detention of children, it is, [one of] the most sickening ....things that the British Government has done... I was going to visit a ten year old child and mother, that child suffered greatly as all children do in detention and we have absolutely no say in Scotland over the care of those children in Dungavel...'**

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Aamer Anwar agreed,

**‘... in terms of refugees and asylum seekers, it is an absolute disgrace what we have done to those people in this country.... The way the UK Government has treated asylum seeker children in Dungavel....people shouldn’t forget every day of this week asylum seekers are sent back to their deaths I don’t give a damn whether asylum seekers are here for economic reasons ..and are dying from starvation... or because their countries were bombed from the sky.’**

On the Scottish approach to it he added,

**‘Scotland needs more immigrants, it is a reality we can’t get away from. The birth rate is diminishing, the lowest ... birth rate in Europe....I welcome the fact the Scottish Government tried to introduce the fact we need immigrants in Scotland but they need to be pushed harder. Politicians need guts to stand up and say we are different and want the closure of Dungavel and say what differentiates us from the rest of the UK.’**

Another Speaker was very clear that the devolution of relevant powers to Holyrood was what was required,

**‘Coming to the issue of asylum and immigration, I totally agree... there is a real need for Scotland to be in charge of the immigration system.’**

There was general agreement among those who engaged with the debate on asylum policy that a Scottish approach to it should and would be different, and that the Scottish Parliament and Government should have more influence over asylum and immigration policy.

## **Key points raised**

- There was widespread experience of discrimination at a personal level in relation to sexuality, mental health, disability, race and all equalities groups generally.
- While messages embracing diversity such as the Scots egalitarian narrative, and ‘we’re a’ Jock Tampon’s bairns’, upon which Homecoming was based may be something to aspire to, these instead served to portray a disingenuous picture of Scotland behind which discrimination, tribalism and abuse could prosper unchallenged.
- Schools could play a role in tackling sectarianism and racism.
- As well as viewing poverty through the lens of equalities it needs to be dealt with more generally to help tackle an emerging racist right-wing narrative.
- In Scotland’s political and legal institutions, and across society more generally, there is a conservatism at work helping to maintain the relative positions of power of a white elite and exclude other minority groups while serving to maintain or deepen inequalities across Scotland.
- A Scottish approach to asylum and immigration should and would be different. The Scottish Parliament and Government should have more influence over asylum and immigration policy.

# Conclusions

This was, then, a wide-ranging debate about the myths and narratives which have defined the people and places of Scotland over time. These myths both shape and reflect our realities. It was argued however, that they are inadequate to reflect our current diversity, indeed there was no evidence presented to suggest they have ever been adequate to reflect the diversity of all people in Scotland.

However, this was not to undermine their importance. Such narratives can help shape our aspirations, and therefore our realities, and the need for positive and diverse stories was seen as central. It was argued however that the traditional Scot's narratives of fairness and equality have led to complacency and become a facade behind which discrimination continues, in many places, unchallenged. Therefore, stories recognising the realities of discrimination and disadvantage need to be heard if we are to understand and tackle them.

There were many warnings about becoming too fixated on what it is to be Scottish. It was suggested that within the context of globalisation national identities need to account for the interconnectedness that comes with this. However, there was no general agreement that being Scottish, whatever that was, was inevitably at odds with being a global citizen. Indeed, given the international focus of much of the Scot's egalitarian narrative, it could be argued that such interconnectedness has been central to concepts of 'Scottishness' for some centuries.

Given the diversity of people's identities in terms of, for example geography, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, disability, age and faith and the interaction of these and other factors within any individual, the assertion that any search for a national identity would be 'extremely difficult' is perhaps an understatement. The view that any such search for a 'monolithic' identity inevitably serves to mask such diversity seems rational. The search for common aspects of Scottishness however did lead to a hope this could be based upon a recognition of our 'common humanity', and a shared aspiration that we can learn to embrace and celebrate diversity. Clearly this is not a million miles from the Scot's egalitarian myth which was central to the debate, the difference being that, in order to fulfil this aspiration, the definition of equality within the narrative needs to expand beyond social class to include all equalities groups.

Beyond this it was felt it was vital that such narratives are not used to hide the reality of deep and divisive disadvantage and discrimination. It was felt that Scotland should focus on making equality a reality for all groups through breaking down discrimination and delivering equal representation in our political, legal and educational establishments, by tackling discrimination in work places generally, and in celebrating and promoting equality and diversity.

Is Scotland worth coming Home to?



Is Scotland worth coming Home to?

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