Cross-Journal Special Edition: Race and Racism in Scotland

Guest Editors: Philomena de Lima, Meena Dhanda, Maureen McBride, Stephen Mullen, and Arun Sood

This Edinburgh University Press cross-journal special edition brings together a number of international scholars on the broad theme of 'Race and Racism in Scotland'. Spanning five journals and edited by Philomena de Lima, Meena Dhanda, Maureen McBride, Stephen Mullen, and Arun Sood, the special edition is published at an interesting juncture in Scottish history as the nation grapples with its place in an increasingly globalized world and continues to acknowledge its imperial legacies.

Scotland has long been mythologized as exceptional with regards to its historic connections with Empire and slavery, as well as related legacies in modern society such as racism which affect the experiences of racialized and minoritized ethnic groups. Since the logical comparison for Scotland is with neighbouring England, more overtly recognized as a historical imperial power, it has been all too easy to disregard the involvement of Scots across the British Empire as much less profound, especially in relation to Atlantic slavery. Myths of exceptionalism have similarly manifested in debates around the prevalence of racism in Scottish society. The popular Scottish phrase 'We're a' Jock Tamson's bairns' ('Jock Tamson' being a euphemism for God or a mythical father of the nation), or Burns's famous refrain 'A man's a man for a' that', infers that all residents of Scotland are equal no matter race, religion or background. These catechisms encapsulate perceived national ideals of egalitarianism and equality, although recent works have underlined the incongruence between booster narratives of Scotland's supposed anti-racist credentials and the realities demonstrated by race hate crime statistics.[1]

Recent historiographical advances have also underlined the disproportionate role that Scots played across many areas of the Atlantic world. The Scottish state did not have the capacity to establish major colonization schemes in the same manner as England before 1707, although Scots were present in both English and Dutch Atlantic empires.[2] The Company of Scotland (established 1695) and the unsuccessful attempt to colonize New Caledonia, at Darien on the Isthmus of Panama, being a prime example of such failure. The Darien

[1] Neil Davidson and Satnam Virdee, 'Introduction: Understanding Racism in Scotland', in Neil Davidson, Minna Liinpaa, Maureen McBride, Satnam Virdee, *No Problem Here: Understanding Racism in Scotland,* (Edinburgh, 2018), p.9.
[2] See, for example, Esther Mijers, 'Between Empires and Cultures: Scots in New Netherland and New York', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies,* 33/2 (2013), pp.165-195.

scheme's losses expedited negotiations for an incorporating Union and the Scottish and English parliaments were joined in 1707. This was an imperial construct: in return for surrendering sovereignty, Scots were provided with free access to what became known as the British Empire.[3] Scots were subsequently involved in various settler colonisation schemes, including via London based monopolies such as the Hudson Bay Company, as well as migrants to White settler societies Australia, Canada, New Zealand and elsewhere.[4] Importantly, however, the Union did not provide Scots with free trading access to India - which was governed under the East India Company (EIC) commercial monopoly up to 1813 - although many Scots took up various maritime, civil and military roles in the EIC.[5] This had significant implications. Whilst Scots were prevalent across many colonies in the British Empire, it was trading connections with North America and the Caribbean (that is, slave-based societies) that underpinned the economic development of Scotland, c.1760-1830.

The unique contours of Scotland's relationship with Atlantic slavery are now well known. There were very few recorded Scottish 'triangular trade' voyages in contrast to major English ports. However, whilst only c.31 Scottish voyages are recorded between 1706 and 1766, Scots also played a key role as surgeons on ships from English ports such as Liverpool.[6] Nevertheless, Scottish merchants and planters facilitated Atlantic commerce which centred around produce grown by enslaved people: tobacco, sugar and cotton. Scotland's Industrial Revolution (c.1778-1830) was a distinctly imperial phenomenon. From c.1740, Glasgow's colonial entrepreneurs, the 'tobacco lords' increased cash reserves and invested slavery-derived merchant capital into land, banking companies and industry.[7] After the American War of Independence (1775-1783), their mercantile successors, the 'sugar aristocracy' acquired major fortunes which were invested into the later 19th century in landed

[3] Allan Macinnes, *Union and Empire: The Making of the United Kingdom in 1707*, (Cambridge University Press, 2007).
[4] Marjory Harper, *Adventurers & Exiles: The Great Scottish Exodus* (Profile Books, 2004); Marjory Harper, 'Exiles or entrepreneurs? Snapshots of the Scots in Canada', in Peter E. Rider, Heather McNabb (eds.), *Kingdom of the Mind: How the Scots Helped Make Canada* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), pp. 22-39; Suzanne Rigg, 'Scots in the Hudson's Bay Company, c. 1779–c. 1821', *Northern Scotland*, 2/1, (2011), pp.36-59; Angela McCarthy and J.M. MacKenzie (eds.), *Global Migrations: The Scottish Diaspora since 1600,* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016).
[5] Andrew Mackillop, 'A Union for Empire? Scotland, the English East India Company and the British Union', The *Scottish Historical Review*, 87/2 (Supplement) (2008), 116-134; *Human capital and empire: Scotland, Ireland, Wales and British imperialism in Asia, c.1690-c.1820,* (Manchester University Press, 2021).
[6] Mark Duffill, 'The Africa trade from the ports of Scotland, 1706–66', *Slavery & Abolition*, 25/3, (2004), 102-122; Suzanne Schwarz, 'Scottish Surgeons in the Liverpool Slave Trade in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries', in T.M. Devine (ed), *Recovering Scotland's Slavery Past*: *The Caribbean Connection*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp.145-166.
[7] T.M. Devine, *The Tobacco Lords: a study of the Tobacco Merchants of Glasgow and their Trading Activities, 1740-1790*, (John Donald, 1975).

estates and banking, as well as cotton mills and railways.[8] From the early 18th century, Scotland's industrial transformation had its origins in linen production, whilst slave-grown cotton underpinned the transition to cotton spinning and the rise of manufactories after 1778. The West Indies in general, and Jamaica in particular, were key export markets for Scottish produced textiles.[9] Thus, slave-grown produce was imported to Scotland to be spun by the manufacturing ranks into textiles that were re-exported to the slavery societies, a process that created large fortunes that stimulated and added to the wider commercial and industrial transformation. Indeed, it has been argued that Atlantic slavery and its commerce had a more significant effect upon the economic development of Scotland compared to England, Ireland or Wales.[10] Scotland's relationship with the British Empire, as well as the profits it accrued, reshaped the nation. Imperial profits percolated into Scottish rural and urban landscapes, and the legacies remain present today: in buildings, streets, statues, universities, items in museum collections.

Scots were also heavily involved across many islands of the British West Indies: as doctors, overseers, bookkeepers, merchants, planters and enslavers, acquiring slavery-derived fortunes which were repatriated to families and institutions which benefitted wider society.[11] One recent study estimated that Scots repatriated slavery-derived fortunes equivalent to £894m in modern values from the West Indies, especially Jamaica, between 1784 and 1858.[12] Robert Burns is the most famous Scot to be associated with eighteenth-century Jamaica, yet the reality is that he had no actual involvement with chattel slavery at all. However, it is now more widely known that Burns came close to following thousands of other Scots in sailing to Jamaica to work as a plantation 'book-keeper' (overseeing enslaved people in sugar cane fields). Struggling both economically and artistically, Burns booked three separate tickets for himself; on the *Nancy* from Greenock for Savanna-la-Mar on 10 August 1786; the *Bell* from

---

[8] T.M. Devine, 'An Eighteenth-Century Business Elite: Glasgow West India Merchants, 1740-1815', *The Scottish Historical Review,* (1978), pp.40-67; Anthony Cooke, 'An Elite Revisited: Glasgow West India Merchants, 1783–1877', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 32/2 (2012), 127–65; Stephen Mullen, *The Glasgow Sugar Aristocracy: Scotland and Caribbean Slavery, 1775-1838* (University of London Press, 2022).
[9] Christopher A. Whatley, *The Industrial Revolution in Scotland,* (Cambridge, 1997), p.41; *Scottish Society, 1707-1830: Beyond Jacobitism, Towards Industrialisation*, (Manchester, 2000), pp.220-1. Anthony Cooke, *The Rise and Fall of the Scottish Cotton Industry, 1778-1914,* (Manchester, 2010).
[10] T.M. Devine, 'Did Slavery make Scotia Great?: A Question Revisited', in T.M. Devine, (ed.), *Recovering Scotland's Slavery Past*: *The Caribbean Connection*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp.225-245, pp.246-7.
[11] Douglas Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World, 1750-1820,* (Manchester, 2005); Nicholas Draper, 'Scotland and Colonial Slave-ownership: The Evidence of the Slave Compensation records', in T.M. Devine (ed). *Recovering Scotland's Slavery Past: The Caribbean Connection,* (Edinburgh,, 2015), pp.166-187; S. Karly Kehoe, 'From the Caribbean to the Scottish Highlands: Charitable Enterprise in the Age of Improvement, c.1750-1820', *Rural History,* 27/1, (2015), 1-23.
[12] Mullen, *Sugar Aristocracy*, p.243.

Greenock for Port Morant at the end of September 1786; and the *Roselle* from Leith to Kingston on 23 December 1786. Interestingly, it was not Burns's moral opposition to chattel slavery that led to his decision to stay in Scotland, but rather the increasing popularity of the *Kilmarnock edition of Poems, Chiefly in The Scottish Dialect*.

The articles in this cross-journal special issue interrogate—and sometimes upend—cherished narratives around nationhood and national heroes. In this period of reckoning, it is inevitable that Scotland's national poet, Robert Burns, should come under further scrutiny; particularly as he lived in a society shaped by colonial entanglements of various kinds. In this special issue, Shara McCallum reflects on the conception of her 2021 poetry collection *No Ruined Stone*, which imagines Burns's Jamaican descendants through a chorus of intergenerational voices. Drawing on the symbolic power of Burns as a national figure, McCallum tells a 'story of Scotland that remains unsettled and unsettling, bound up in the participation of many Scots in West Indian slavery and colonialism.' Just as McCallum intervenes on the 'omissions and silences' of history, Clark McGinn's essay also tells the largely untold story of black residents in Ayrshire during Burns's lifetime who have remained invisible in much historical writing about the period.

At the point Scotland's connections with Empire and slavery were most profound, various enlightenment thinkers were also theorizing over racialized hierarchies in Scotland and elsewhere.[13] This dynamic is interrogated in four important contributions to the *Journal of Scottish Philosophy.* Brad Bow's 'Becoming White in the American Enlightenment' identifies the roots of the 'fragility of whiteness' in the borrowings made by Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Samuel Stanhope Smith, and Benjamin Rush from Scottish Enlightenment. They shored up white hegemony whilst "advancing the transatlantic abolitionist movement" in evidently contradictory moves. Franklin argued for Anglifying colonial America, both to strengthen the market for British imperial interests and "for doubling the white population of colonial America every twenty years". Cheap white labour was preferrable to chattel slaves for economic reasons. Franklin's goal of whitening America was strengthened by Hume's racist note attached to his essay 'Of National Characters', wherein he infamously wrote: "I am apt to suspect the negroes to be naturally inferior to the whites", not unlike Jefferson's observation of "the real distinctions which nature has made" between 'the blacks' and 'the whites'. Smith chose to efface these differences by pursuit of

[13] For example, see Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress,* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

racial ‘progress’ aimed at creating “a white complexion”. Rush went the furthest in the direction of abolition. Influenced by the moral sentimentalism of Francis Hutcheson and Adam Smith, Rush argued that slavery is “foreign to the human mind’’. Even so, he felt compelled to theorise that white complexions were turned black by a medieval form of leprosy. Abolition became necessary to “cure this disease of the skin in negroes”. White superiority on account of colour was mistaken according to Rush, because blackness was “a disease that could be cured”. But the cultural hegemony of whiteness remained unquestioned. Thus, the legacy of American Enlightenment thinkers provided white Americans ‘with different ways to be racist by the turn of the nineteenth century’, and despite the nineteenth-century rejection of racial theories, continued to fuel anxieties about the future of whiteness.

Deborah Boyle’s ‘Elizabeth Hamilton on Race, Religion, and Human Nature’ examines whether Hamilton’s egalitarianism on gender extends to race. She ranks Christian and non-Christian groups hierarchically, but is this racist? The paper specifically asks: “does she see some groups as inferior to others?” After establishing the philosophical credentials of this novelist, whose writings on the human mind align with the tradition of Hume, Reid and other Scottish philosophers, the paper begins by characterising Hamilton as a ‘racist’ with ‘certainly objectionable, even repellent’ views, ‘from our vantage point’. But then, it pursues a complex argument noting historical shifts in the conceptualisation of race and colour to qualify this characterisation to finally conclude that “Hamilton’s views can reasonably be described as racist in the cultural sense of ‘racism’, if not in the biological sense”. To arrive at this conclusion the paper proposes a distinction in the idea of ‘racialism’ (belief in heritable differences) introduced by Kwame Anthony Appiah. It names two distinct strands of racialism - the biological and the cultural. These would result in two types of racism when combined with a belief in the hierarchy of groups identified on the basis of heritable differences. The question then addressed is whether Hamilton is a racialist, and if so, whether she is a biological racist or a cultural racist. Hamilton applies the term ‘race’ to castes in India, for example: Brahmins as “the race, which spring from the mouth of Brahma”, and also to Scottish clans and British Christians, suggesting a cultural rather than a biological conception of race. This reading is supported by the dearth of references to skin colour in her writings. However, her repeated references to ‘savages’ support reading her not merely as a cultural racialist, but also as a cultural racist. Her cultural racism is evident in several writings, specifically when she ranks religions hierarchically. Relative to Islam, she has praise for Hinduism based on her perception of its resemblance to Christianity, which is at the top of her ranking. Simultaneously she condemns Hinduism for “polytheism” and “the

grossest idolatry". Over time her views "seem to have become more negative towards non-Christian groups", thus undeniably marking her as a cultural racist.

Alan Bailey's 'Hume on Race and Slavery' is a forceful defence of Hume's universalist account of human nature in the face of criticisms launched by various scholars (Popkin, Immerwahr, Eze, Kendi) of the deeply racist assumptions in the notorious footnote to Hume's essay, 'Of National Characters' variously revised but retained in successive editions of the essay, all the way to the posthumous edition published after Hume's final corrections in 1777. There is no denying the opportunity Hume had to "withdraw the essay, delete the footnote, or revise his comments about the differing intellectual capabilities of the different kinds of men he claims can be found in the world". But what is the implication of the inferiority claim, "the highly prejudicial speculation" made in the footnote? The conclusion drawn in the paper after a meticulous exegetical exercise drawing on various methodological arguments from Hume's philosophical writings is that "Hume sees white Europeans and people of colour as separated by much less than they have in common". His core principles and explanations of the working of the human mind were "intended to apply to everyone irrespective of their biological sex or alleged race". Further, given that Hume was never a slave-holder or an owner of property worked by enslaved people, his comparison with Jefferson, made by antiracist scholars, is found to be misleading.

Finally, Robin Mills' 'Misunderstanding Monboddo on 'Race', Slavery and the Black Egyptian Origins of All Civilization' discusses the eccentric position within Scottish Enlightenment of Monboddo's ideas of race and slavery. Monboddo focussed on the achievements of black Africans against the racism of Hume's footnote. The essay draws upon the views expressed in his six-volume *Ancient Metaphysics* (1779-1799) to present "the first in-depth discussion of Monboddo's opinion, fixed by the mid-1780s, that black ancient Egypt [a racially segregated society] was the greatest civilization in human history, from which all other great civilizations owed their language, philosophy, arts, sciences and political arrangements". This was a direct challenge to Hume's claim in the 'notorious footnote' that no black-skinned men had ever achieved anything of significance. He considered the Buddha as the most significant black deity owing parentage to the Egyptian civilization and believed that the Egyptians "imported a religion, arts, and sciences into India". Monboddo's use of the term 'race' evolved into the sense of 'family lineages', a bit different from the eighteenth-century racial taxonomy of physical traits. 'Nation' related to "groups of families living under shared cultures and governments" and there is a hierarchy in the "races and families" contained in nations. A priestly class of a superior "race of men" was at the top of the

Egyptian hereditary caste system. He praised the strict stratification of Egyptian society, in which an "extensive system of public education" was used to ensure "everyone did the role they were born to do". The admixture of races, Monboddo argued, led to social degeneration. India was admired for its caste system and needed "to be protected from European encroachment". Monboddo may have challenged Hume on colour racism, but he believed in the inherent superiority of some classes of men over others, and was no less a racist for that.

The system of chattel slavery was predicated upon such racial hierarchies in North America and the Caribbean, but also shaped modern British society which has had major implications for the lived experience of racialised minorities in Scotland.[14] The four contributions to *Northern Scotland* between them engage with the theme of **'**Race and Racism in Scotland' by interrogating aspects of Scotland's involvement in colonisation and enslavement and their enduring legacies, including with regards to racism towards the Gypsy /Travellers. Each of these contributions highlight why reckoning with the historical involvement of Scots in colonialism across diverse geographies is important: it not only develops counter narratives of the past, but also increases understanding of contemporary experiences of discrimination and racism across different Scottish regions. Richard Anderson's 'Two Kings: Empire, Abolition, and the University of Aberdeen's First African Student' addresses a historiographical gap in diasporic studies. It draws on a multigenerational microhistory of father (Thomas King a missionary and linguist in Sierra Leone) and son Nathanial in the 19th Century. The latter travelled to study medicine at Aberdeen University as one of a number of Scottish Universities which evolved as a medical training site for the imperial project. The articles provide detailed insights into how both their lives intersected with and were shaped by empire(s) and abolition. The role of contemporary British, including Scottish, universities as an aspect of the continuing colonisation project continues to be a terrain which is the subject of much debate and discussion.[15]

---

[14] For the nefarious racialised hierarchies in slavery societies across the Atlantic world, see Brooke N. Newman, *A dark inheritance: blood, race, and sex in colonial Jamaica* (Yale University Press, 2018); Sasha Turner, *Contested Bodies: Pregnancy, Childrearing, and Slavery in Jamaica* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017); Jennifer L. Morgan, *Reckoning with Slavery: Gender, Kinship, and Capitalism in the Early Black Atlantic*, (Duke University Press, 2021); Catherine Hall, *Lucky Valley: Edward Long and the History of Racial Capitalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2024). For an example of how one Scottish doctor envisaged race and practised racism in late 18th century Dominica, see Viccy Coltman, 'The Business of Race-making in the Torrid Zone: Dr Jonathan Troup's Illustrated Diary of Dominica, 1789–90', *The Scottish Historical Review,* 103/1(2024), pp.107-155.

[15] See, for example, Gurminder K. Bhambra, Dalia Gebrial and Kerem Nişancıoğlu, *Decolonising The University* (Pluto Press, 2018).

Matthew Lee's article 'Slavery, Colonialism and Civic Culture: The Development of Philanthropic Institutions in North East Scotland' makes an important contribution to scholarship by focusing on a granular account of regional impacts of capital accumulated through slavery (Caribbean) and colonialisation (South Asia) beyond the Scottish metropoles. Using a case study approach he examines the financial records of health care, poor relief and education providers in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries which benefited from the proceeds of enslavement and colonisation and contributed to a growing local social infrastructure addressing rural changes and which persists in the form of legacies that continue to be available through charitable foundations.

David Alston's note draws on an analysis of Northern Scottish newspaper reporting on Highland Gypsy /Travellers and the Vagrancy and Educations Acts in the mid to late nineteenth century. His analysis highlights the nature and extent of prejudice racism towards Gypsy/Travellers even among those who were sympathetic to this group and were against oppression . He notes the mixed often conflicting discourses of romanticization and prejudice and racism towards Gypsy/Travellers (which continues to the present) leading to actions such as the forceable removeable of children from their families to 'civilize them' a practice introduced in the USA since the mid-17th Century. The past and the present are closely connected : Gypsy/Travellers and their ways of living continues to be under threat and negatively impacted by racism , and the impacts of removal of children are yet to be addressed.

Rhona Ramsay and James MacPherson's contribution 'Fiddle, decolonization, and representing Gypsy/Traveller communities in the Clan Macpherson Museum' discusses the ways in which racism has impacted on the silencing of Gypsy/Traveller voices, experiences and material culture historically to the present focusing in particular on Museums. The article draws on an ongoing collaborative process which has included members of the Gypsy/Traveller communities in a re-interpretation of Jamie Macpherson's fiddle at the Clan Macpherson Museum . Through this process of re-centering Gypsy /Traveller voices they highlight the ways in which Museums can provide spaces to counter hegemonic interpretations of the past , as well as resist contemporary racisms that these communities continue to experience.

Scottish involvement with the British Empire endured well into the twentieth century. Scots were heavily involved in military and administrative roles during the decline of Empire, right up to Britain's removal from Hong Kong in 1997. Kaiyue He (a current PhD candidate in English Literature at the University of Glasgow) article for the *Innes Review,* entitled

Representations of Africa in Muriel Spark's Writings, underlines how one prominent Scottish writer experienced and envisaged Empire. Born in Scotland, writer Muriel Spark (1918-2006) stayed at several places in South Africa between 1937 and 1944, including Cape Town and Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), specifically Salisbury, Bulawayo, and Gwelo. On 13 August 1937, at the age of nineteen, Spark sailed on the Windsor Castle to Cape Town. She arrived in England in March 1944. This paper builds on existing critiques of Spark's problematic representations of Africa, which tend to focus on the writer's African-focused poems and stories. Kaiyue He extends this analysis to explore Spark's wider work, including how Africans were represented in overly simplistic terms and through the use of familiar colonial tropes. He argues that Spark's religious faith and her shared experience with white women, white missionaries, and Catholic writers, position her as speaking primarily for the colonists, thus reinforcing colonial hierarchies. As such, the article contributes to a growing understanding of Scottish involvement in colonialism by unravelling connections between race, religion, and literary culture.

Considering its origins in early eighteenth-century European and imperial geopolitics, the Union of 1707 has proven to be a remarkably resilient political construct that encompassed multiple continents in an imperial stranglehold for almost three centuries. In the post-colonial era, Scotland is now reflecting on that relationship as the internal dynamics of the Union are under threat like never before. Indeed, recent referendums have realigned Scotland's relationship with the European Union, within the United Kingdom, and with England, and shaped contemporary society in different ways. We are now over a generation since the Scottish devolution referendum in 1997 (which created the Scottish Parliament two years later), a decade after the Independence referendum in 2014 (which maintained Scotland's place in Great Britain), and eight years after the European Union membership referendum in 2016 (which removed Great Britain from the EU, although Scots voted to remain). Scottish voting patterns have contrasted sharply with England since 2010, when the Conservative party have been the principal governing party in the UK Parliament (although it remains to be seen to what extent there will be a Labour recovery in Scotland in the next general election). This contrast has facilitated ongoing 'othering' of England compared to Scotland, as the latter is often represented as more welcoming to migrants, and these debates have increased in the aftermath of Brexit in 2016.

Aubrey Westfall (Associate Professor of Political Science at Wheaton College, Massachusetts) article in *Scottish Affairs* speaks directly to these political developments and dynamics in Scottish society. Westfall provides an important analysis of levels of direct and

indirect prejudice in contemporary Scotland. Drawing on data from the 2021 Scottish Election Survey, this article explores the extent of prejudicial feelings towards immigrants and makes comparisons with results from other surveys in the UK. The findings from this study provide an important contribution to debates on the nature and extent of racism in Scotland. Westfall suggests that the Scottish political culture, represented through ideological positions such as pro-Remain in the Brexit debate, left-leaning support for Scottish independence, and elite-level support for immigration, is an important factor in understanding the lower rates of prejudice compared to elsewhere in the UK and abroad. Westfall argues that these findings emphasise the need for continued research on racial (and other) prejudice in Scotland.

The legacies of Empire and slavery are becoming increasingly controversial during an era in which British curatorial strategies, as well as statuary and memorialization practices, attract popular and media interest. Nevertheless, Scottish nationalist politicians have apparently adopted a proactive approach to addressing the legacies of Atlantic slavery. In 2022, Scottish National Party administrations in Glasgow and Edinburgh apologised for historic involvement with Atlantic slavery. This has been matched with studies led by national heritage organisations, *The National Trust for Scotland* and *Historic Environment Scotland*, assessing the effects of Empire and slavery on the development of Scotland's most prominent sites of special interest. These debates have percolated into Scottish museum strategies. In 2021, the Scottish Government commissioned the Museum Galleries Scotland consultation 'Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums' which aimed to facilitate better representation of Atlantic slavery in the nation's museum. Speaking in January 2024, Christina McKelvie, then SNP Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development, was quoted:

> These recommendations are a crucial step on the journey that Scotland is taking as a society and will continue to take, which will interrogate who we are as a nation, and accept the role that we have held in shaping the past. We are determined to acknowledge and learn from our past and the role Scotland played in the transatlantic slave trade. We need to be a forward-looking nation, but one that must reflect on the inequalities and injustices that have shaped, and continue to shape, our current world.[16]

This acknowledgement strategy contrasts sharply with the responses of some Conservative politicians in the British Parliament, such as the Common-Sense group (59 MPs and seven

[16] 'Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums steering group recommendations: Scottish Government Response', Available: https://www.gov.scot/publications/empire-slavery-scotlands-museums-steering-group-recommendations-scottish-government-response/pages/1/ Accessed: 24 April 2024.

peers) who authored an open letter claiming that 'History must neither be sanitised nor rewritten to suit "snowflake" preoccupations'.[17] However, it remains to be seen if the Scottish Government rhetoric around imperial legacies – which might be regarded as a cynical ploy to differentiate from the approaches of British unionist politicians – is met with action. In 2024, the Scottish Government refused the £5m funding requested by the 'Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums' (ESSM) Steering Group to develop a national museum of Empire and Slavery, instead allocating £200,000.[18]

Finally, this Edinburgh University Press cross-journal special edition underlines the importance of a cross-disciplinary approach (encompassing the Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities) in tracing the historic connections with Empire, slavery and colonialism in a single analytical frame alongside studies of the contemporary experiences and impacts of racism in Scotland. As noted above, ideas of race and racism have come under scrutiny in the philosophies of the Scottish Enlightenment, as well as literary histories and cultural iconography. Nevertheless, there is a persistent dissonance between Scotland's political and public elites' pronouncements on Scotland's distinctiveness manifested in notions of 'civic inclusivity' and the ambivalent attitudes towards immigration among sections of the Scottish white population on the one hand, and the realities of everyday racisms on the other. Addressing the materiality of everyday racisms requires meaningful inter-disciplinary dialogue and collaborations between those focusing on contemporary race and racism, the histories of empire and colonisation, as well as contemporary migration and nation building /nationalism. The authors are to be commended for such innovative work at an important juncture in Scottish history.

[17] Stephen Mullen, & Ewan Gibbs, 'Scotland, Atlantic slavery and the Scottish National Party: From colonised to coloniser in the political imagination', *Nations and Nationalism,* 29/3 (2023), pp.922–938.
[18] 'Scottish government commits to better reflect colonial history in museums', Museums and Heritage, 23 January 2024. Available: https://advisor.museumsandheritage.com/news/scottish-government-commits-to-better-reflect-colonial-history-in-museums/#:~:text=McKelvie%20said%20the%20Scottish%20Government,%2C%20citing%20%E2%80%9Cbudgetary%20pressures%E2%80%9D Accessed : 24 April 2024.