

Anti-racist Scotland claim 'built on a myth'

Nation is not more tolerant and open than England, experts to warn MSPs

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THE idea that the Brexit vote showed Scotland was more open and tolerant than England is a "misleading fantasy" that masks the country's racism problem, MSPs are being warned.

The authors of a new academic book looking at "Scottish exceptionalism" will present their findings to Holyrood's Cross-Party Group on Tackling Islamophobia tomorrow.

"No Problem Here: Understanding Racism in Scotland" says the Remain majority north of the Border on Brexit had given the exceptionalism myth a "new lease of life".

The vote is routinely cited as evidence Scotland is inherently more welcoming to migrants.

However, the book warns against such self-flattery and says a better Scotland "will only be built by confronting the evil of racism rather than pretending it does not exist".

Editor and author Neil Davidson, a sociology lecturer at Glasgow University specialising in Scottish national-

ism, said there were three reasons for the idea of less racism in Scotland.

Anti-Irish prejudice was classed as sectarianism rather than racism, while a small ethnic minority population in Scotland (4 per cent) mean the problem of racism is less conspicuous than elsewhere in the UK.

"Finally, the movements for devolution and independence have involved the idea that Scotland is 'culturally' different from England, and that part of this difference involves the Scots being more 'welcoming', 'tolerant' and so on," he said.

"These are misleading fantasies, which ignore the historical experience of Irish Catholics and the contemporary experience of Muslims, Roma and other BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) groups."

Fellow author Carol Young, senior policy officer for the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights, added: "There's a perception that Scotland has less of a problem with racism than



other areas of the UK, perhaps best summed up by the phrase 'we're all Jock Tamson's bairns'. But regardless of popular opinion, the statistics suggest otherwise."

Scottish Government figures show racial crime is the most commonly reported hate crime. In 2016-17 there were 3,349 charges, the lowest total since 2003-04, but still 64 a week.

Labour MSP Anas Sarwar, chairman of the cross-party group, said: "We should never allow our national pride to blind us to the fact that good and bad people live everywhere.

"In recent years we have seen the rise of Scottish exceptionalism – the idea that somehow just because we are Scottish and live in Scotland, that we're less intolerant than our neighbours. It is not talking Scotland down to expose this myth."

SNP MSP Ivan McKee, deputy convener of the group, said: "We have never shied away from the fact that Scotland is no more immune from Islamophobia and racism than anywhere else and that this serious problem must be tackled head-on."

A Scottish Government spokesman said: "We are resolved to do everything that it takes to ensure that Scotland is a place where there is zero tolerance of racism in any form."

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