

"Not just haggis and tartan", *Holyrood Magazine October 2005*

Jacqi Kelly discovers that despite the platitudes, the welcome mat isn't always out in Scotland.

Scots might nod to a culture based on getting the kettle on and the biscuits out whenever a visitor pops round. But when it comes to accepting migrants into Scotland it's not always as simple as throwing open the front door and welcoming everyone in.

While 26 year old Valentina Puddu now considers herself settled in Scotland, her vivid recollections of her first four years in Edinburgh put into context her feeling that Scottish people did not welcome her with open arms. Aged 14 and newly arrived from Sardinia, Puddu was placed in a remedial class to learn English from scratch: "After three months of being sent to a special school, which they called a Mongol school, I began to speak some broken English. The other pupils thought I had been lying about my language skills and became really nasty, spitting on me, bullying me, harassing me. They tried to beat me up and I was really confused. I felt really lonely."

In the end, these experiences forced her to shy away from her Italian roots and adopt a stand-offish attitude towards other Italians living in Scotland. While she associates more with other émigrés now and embraces her heritage, she shunned any part of that which would make her different from other people in school: "in my fear of not being accepted I didn't want any contact whatsoever with Italians. I didn't want to be cast aside so I rejected everything to do with my culture. It caused huge fights with my Dad as I was growing up. I would always say we're not in Italy now - nobody does that here".

Other cultures have always played a role in Scottish life - through thick and thin - during the Miner's strike of 1984, UK miners were on the receiving end of aid in the form of donations from Bosnian miners who, through their trade union, each sent wages from one day's work each month to their comrades. Migration has played an important role in shaping Scotland which also has a rich culture of inward migration, with the example of Ireland held aloft by those who prefer to view their ancestry with glasses tinted green or, sometimes, orange by nostalgia. But the net has been cast further than that.

It's known that Africans have lived in Scotland since the early 16th Century, attached to the descending Roman army, and that Flemish settlers have also been recorded as having a presence in Scotland since that time. Migration has played an integral role in Scotland's economic and social development and even today its main cities have growing Bangladeshi, Australian, Indian and Chinese communities - to name but a few.

Both Fife and Edinburgh also have significant Polish communities, made up from the "new Poles" who have been attracted to Scotland recently and those generations who have remained in Scotland since the post-war intake. One such couple is Andrew Sobic and his wife, Maritia Kopystynska-Kopic, who run a family owned hotel, Adria, in the heart of Edinburgh. Both born in Scotland to Polish parents, they struggle with a series of exasperated gestures and cultural references when explaining their origins although both talk with pride about their Scottish and Polish roots. Maria says that

having been born here she can't say she's Polish but that the Eastern European culture has a definite presence in her life. She highlights Easter and Christmas as examples of the times when this is most prevalent and is fluent in Polish. When she returns to Poland to visit her family she is assumed to be a born and bred Pole although she insists, throwing up her hands with a laugh, that day-to-day life is "very British".

Andrew goes further than this. Although he says that there is a "huge chunk" of him that is undeniably and staunchly Polish, when teaching in Australia, he regularly sported a kilt and dons the Scottish national dress to family weddings back in his family hometown. When meeting with former schoolmates at a recent reunion though, he was remembered to his surprise as Andy - "the militant Pole". He says simply that he is a "Scottish Pole" and Maritia illustrates the point by describing how, over the years they have adopted language to express themselves more effectively. "It's a kind of Scottish-Polish language. We didn't have Polish words for some things here so when we were talking to the older people we used a combination. Like Chipcharnia for chip shop". Their children too share in their Polish culture, raised on a diet that combined a British diet at home and Polish cuisine when visiting their grandparents.

Treasury statistics show that inward migration has also grown due to expansion of the European Union. In the first quarter of this year, over 40,000 new Europeans have registered in a scheme for workers from states incorporated by expansion and rough estimates put the number of Poles at 10,000 with many of these settling in Scotland. Andrew says that he and Maritia are hearing Polish voices from the new intake every evening when they walk through the streets of Edinburgh. The UK has also taken in a steady number of refugees and asylum seekers, though the number of applications has dropped, and many of those are housed in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Fife.

In an old school building in Glasgow's west end, a multi-cultural centre provides a safe haven for immigrants who have often come from a hostile environment. Most prominent are the Kurdish and Pakistani groups although many more nationalities use the facility and a cacophony of different languages can be heard throughout the building as an elderly Pakistani man walks around handing out boiled sweets. The centre acts as both a social space and a vital necessity for those using it. While many of the older men seem to meet merely to chat, one Kurdish woman, here to see an interpreter, waits for assistance with the translation of legal documents.

She explains that her husband, an Iraqi Kurd was killed before she came here. A former Maths teacher, she is now committed solely to the care of her 15 year old daughter, whom, she hopes, will go on to study law at Glasgow University. She says that, for the most part, she enjoys living in Glasgow and that, with a few exceptions, people are friendly. But it is still a reality that words like "paki" are still occasionally thrown her way and Christine Grahame MSP recently revealed that, according to her analysis of Executive figures, racist incidents have increased by 70 per cent in the last five years. A leaflet rack in the centre confirms that racism is very much a reality for ethnic minorities with bundles of pamphlets on how to deal with racist attacks.

Nina Giles, Director of Edinburgh and Lothians Racial Equality Council (ELREC) is angry at the complacency that surrounds attitudes towards race. And she says that this is not confined to asylum seekers and refugees: "The level of discrimination people experience in Scotland affects even people born and raised here. This has not

been adequately addressed yet. We are under the illusion that we should welcome and we have Fresh Talent. But what preparation is there to support people coming into this country?" She sees the key as being a new and more radical approach to tackling racism in Scotland: "multiculturalism is good, but we need anti-racism".

Giles feels that the media has a role to play in creating antagonistic attitudes towards refugees and Mile Gazik, a former mayor of Banja Luka agrees with her. He says that, although he has had no problems personally during his time in Scotland there is a lack of understanding about the plight of refugees: "Scottish people know little or nothing about refugees and their problems and of the dangers and persecutions in that country. They usually think that refugees came here to get some benefit from Scottish people and I think also the media here presents a very bad image of refugees. They usually write about refugees that they are bad, but it's important to look at the real picture".

However, his experiences of life as a refugee in Scotland have been overwhelmingly positive. He came to Scotland with his wife and son in 1986 having left Bosnia when war broke out, arriving with only a bag of clothes in London's Heathrow airport. With no idea which part of the country he would end up in. He was taken to North Berwick and says that the reception he received there made his past easier to bear. "I wanted to stay in my city because I was born there and I loved my city. I built up the city as its mayor". As a Catholic married to a Muslim, a major player in the Trade Union and a prominent politician he was forced to leave the country when the Serbs took over and the safety of his son was in question: "They took all the boys and put them on the front to fight - of course we couldn't see that happen to our child".

Unable to return after his job, pension and flat had been taken away, he came to Scotland and said that he found similarities between Scotland and pre-war Bosnia and Scotland in terms of their hospitality he received here and suffered relatively little. Giles though, makes the point that there's a difference between those who are "visibly different" and those who are not: "When people see a visibly different face, they don't care if you were born here, if you are an asylum seeker or a refugee or have been here all your life."

Gazik feels that his greatest challenge has been having to live off income support, unable to find a job in Scotland due to his language difficulties and, he believes, his age. A big come-down for a man who once bore so much responsibility in his hometown and earned a substantial living. He now volunteers to help other refugees settle in Scotland and is part of an adult learner's project in Edinburgh. He sees the irony in the fact that while some Brits may complain about being "swamped" by refugees, the Brits are now doing the same thing in places like the Adriatic Coast. Giles too, whose family hails from Hong Kong points to the UK's colonial past. Scotland played its own part in the colonisation of much of the world.

While Jack McConnell may relish in Scotland's close ties with Malawi, the fact remains that these only exist in the first place because Scotland played a prominent role in the colonisation of many countries. Modern day nationalists might condemn what they regard as a colonisation of Scotland by the English, but three Scottish regiments served in Australia during the colonial period and three of the first six governors of New South Wales were Scots. Some might like to tell themselves that the Scots were merely "led on" by the English. But Scotland was richly rewarded with the spoils of

other colonial jewels right across the empire and continues today to benefit from other countries with many villages in Spain housing small communities of Brits who have snapped up holiday homes. The Middle East too is plotted with plantations of Western workers flown in to extract the oil from those countries.

While we may argue that British activity in those countries are ultimately contributing to the local economies and that this is a good thing, if Scots are going to continue the historical trend of leaving their birthplace to find a better deal elsewhere, at the same time as "helping" other countries in process, then we need to accept that the same applies to those coming here. Economic prosperity is not just a happy by-product of inward migration but, as the Fresh Talent shows, a demographic and economic necessity. And Scotland would surely be a greyer and more boring place without the cultural and social influences that migration brings.