

FRANCESCA SOBANDE and LAYLA-ROXANNE HILL. *Black Oot Here: Black Lives in Scotland*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. Pp. 248. \$75.00 (cloth). doi: 10.1017/jbr.2023.135

Historians often praise recovery work—works that revise, reconsider, and shine a light on the stories of people who have been left out of the historical record purposely or otherwise. Francesca Sobande and Layla-Roxanne Hill's *Black Oot Here: Black Lives in Scotland* is a recovery work in a similar vein to Peter Fryer's *Staying Power: The History of Black People in England* (2010) or John Belchem's *Before the Windrush: Race Relations in 20th Century Liverpool* (2014). But it is also *not* the same kind of recovery work that readers are likely accustomed to: "When writing our book, we did not do so to *prove* the existence of anti-Black racism, nor to prove the existence of Black people in Scotland" (2). Rather, throughout the text, Sobande and Hill illustrate that the audience for this book is not those who need confirmation of Black people's presence in Scotland, but those interested in Black subjectivity. In this way, Sobande and Hill move beyond recovering the historical and contemporary presence of Black people and anti-Black racism to identify the systemic reasons for the persistent erasure of Black people there. In this way, Sobande and Hill's text is similar to works like Jacqueline Nassy Brown's *Dropping Anchor; Setting Sail: Geographies of Race in Black Liverpool* (2005) and Beverly Bryan, Stella Dadzie, and Suzanne Scafe's *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* (2018); works that focus on systems of marginalization and how Black people survive them.

Sobande and Hill organize *Black Oot Here* around somewhat disconnected studies on Scottish exceptionalism in historical and cultural education, Black women's lives and multiculturalism, and media discussions of race and Black people. Chapter 2, on Scottish exceptionalism, however, stands out. The fields of Black British history and studies have struggled with what being British means: Who is British and why? Is Britishness only a designation of legal status or does it denote imperial citizenship? Is it cultural? More often than not, however, the defining feature of Britishness has been England and Englishness. For this reason, Sobande and Hill spend the bulk of the text analyzing how the focus on England—thus ignoring the rest of the British Isles—has let Scotland off the hook for its participation in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its own historical and contemporary expressions of anti-Black racism. Crucially, Sobande and Hill overcome a thin historical record about the lives of Black people in Scotland by addressing the attendant erasure of Black people, almost in their entirety, from Scottish educational curricula. Ultimately, Sobande and Hill paint a clear picture of the ways in which histories of race and anti-Black racism have been exported from Scotland, becoming defining features of England, North America, the overseas empire, or the past, but never contemporary Scotland.

Sobande and Hill's most interesting primary material is also the most limited. They created an open-ended online survey that received fifty-four responses from people ages 18–77 and conducted some oral interviews. Although it is a small sample size, Sobande and Hill use these responses to the best effect in chapter 2 to demonstrate how the erasure of Black people from national curricula has affected their respondents' relationship to Scotland and Scottishness. In this chapter, they also outline why such recovery work seems perpetually necessary in the Scottish—and one might argue, the English—context. The purposeful whitening of Scottish national history has created a vacuum through which stories about Black people in the past and present can be disappeared continuously.

Recovery work is difficult, and where Sobande and Hill struggle are those points at which the limits of traditional archives, the gatekeeping of higher education and academic language, social understandings of history, and the realities of the recent pandemic meet. Sobande and Hill do not deeply entrench *Black Oot Here* in traditional scholarly material—historical or otherwise—which unfortunately undermines their ability to draw strong links between the oral interviews and specific instances of anti-Black racism. Similarly, they spend more time explaining to the reader *why* they have conducted their research in a particular manner

(the global COVID-19 pandemic) than they do presenting that research clearly and thoroughly. This is most evident in the fact that the introduction and chapter on Scottish exceptionalism take up nearly two-thirds of the book, while the next two chapters, which are focused on multiculturalism and media, do not receive the same level of attention.

Readers will likely leave *Black Oot Here* with many questions unanswered because although Sobande and Hill identify numerous gaps in scholarly attention, they directly address very few. It might have been easier to write a book on the historical erasure of Black people in education alone, potentially providing a Scottish counterpart to Kehinde Andrew's *Resisting Racism: Race, Inequality, and the Black Supplementary School Movement* (2013), for example. In fact, it would have been easier to write a book that elucidated why there are so many studies focused on England (among them, those mentioned above), but the lives of Black people in Scotland have not received nearly the same attention. But these were not Sobande and Hill's goals: "We view *Black Oot Here* as neither a starting point nor summary of considerations and conversations concerning Black people's lives (t)here" (196). Many scholars want to be first to address an issue or want to write the definitive text, but Sobande and Hill have succeeded in "oscillating between the then, here, and now, and the yet to be" (196). This is an intermediary book: Sobande and Hill take stock of both the people and scholarly material that preceded its creation and the moment of its creation to look forward. If, a decade from now, the fields of Black British histories and studies no longer write of Afro-Scots as a footnote or brief paragraph, it will be in large part because of contributions like *Black Oot Here*. This is a book that begs for more research, more perspectives, and new considerations; that looks to chart many pathways into the future of studies on Black lives in Scotland. And most importantly, this is a book full of deep consideration for the many Black people in, from, and connected to Scotland, and for that alone it is worth serious discussion.

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