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**'Team GB' or 'Team Scotland'? Media representations of 'Britishness' and 'Scottishness' at London 2012 and Glasgow 2014**

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**‘Team GB’ or ‘Team Scotland’? Media representations of ‘Britishness’ and ‘Scottishness’ at London 2012 and Glasgow 2014**

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**Abstract**

This article critically reflects upon media coverage of the 2012 London Olympic Games and the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games, scrutinising the emergent discursive constructions of ‘Britishness’ and ‘Scottishness’ through an examination of both London-based (English) and Scotland-based publications. Drawing upon Dayan and Katz’s (1992) portrayal of ‘media events’, the article explores how both events presented competing sites of symbolic struggle during a period of constitutional and political turmoil. Consideration is given to the existence of a ‘hegemonic Britishness’ in print media narratives of these events, as evident in the emergent connotations associated with ‘British nationalism’ and ‘Scottish separatism’.

## **Keywords**

media events, sports mega-events, nationalism, framing, London 2012, Glasgow 2014

## **Introduction**

This article critically reflects upon print media coverage of the 2012 London Olympic Games and the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games. Given the timing of the Scottish independence referendum in September 2014, the hosting of both the 2012 London Olympic Games and the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games coincided with a period of considerable political turmoil and reflection within the UK. In addition, the symbolic differences between the unitary ‘Team GB’, which represented the entirety of the United Kingdom (UK) at London 2012, and the separated representative teams for Scotland and England at Glasgow 2014, the examination of both London-based (English) and Scotland-based publications offered a valuable opportunity to examine the contrasting nature of media commentary associated with each nation.

To help aid our comparative analysis of both the English and Scottish press we draw upon Dayan and Katz’s (1992) ‘media events’ in order to consider how London 2012 and Glasgow 2014 presented competing sites of struggle over the meaning of “Britishness” and the British state (Hepp and Couldry, 2010; Skey et al. 2016). Specifically, we will elaborate upon criticisms which have referred to the hegemonic role of media events (Couldry, 2003; Hepp and Couldry, 2010; Scannell, 1995) as well

as those that consider whether the ‘machinery’ of the media event is ‘now at risk’ (Dayan, 2010: 28). This will be examined by exploring how the media event is constructed, framed and represented as a site of political contestation by newspaper journalists (Mihelj, 2008).

### **National media events**

In 1992, Danial Dayan and Elihu Katz examined how the mediated coverage of particular events worked to affirm collective attachments and reinstate group beliefs. These ““media events” were “high holidays of communication”” (Dayan and Katz, 1992: 1), significant for their global reach and political as well as social impacts. By propagating an image of social unification, and, in some instances, national solidarity, media events help to bring ‘together heterogeneous communities at a national or transnational level, marking a new era and/or re-establishing the status and power of the organizers as social actors’ (Dekavalla, 2012: 297). Implicit in this process is the role of journalists. Indeed, while ‘journalistic routines and newsworthiness values [are] consistent across the world’ (Dimitrova et al., 2005: 24), national newspapers remain tied to political and social issues that are predominantly aimed at a national audience. In addition, the close relationship between the media and sport has helped develop sporting spectacles that, for the host nation of major sporting events, presents a designated

opportunity for ‘the nation’ to appeal to its population and legitimise its existence (Tomlinson and Young, 2006).

Thus, whereas studies on nationalism and the media have highlighted the ‘collective’ opportunities surrounding particular events (Black, 2015; Poulton and Maguire, 2012), for Bauman (1993), the potential for televised media events to promote a sense of unity and provide any lasting sense of collective identification is undermined by the fact that such events can only temporarily unite otherwise disparate individuals. As explained in his ‘cloakroom community’ allegory, such events are transient and fleeting. Certainly, Bauman (2000) does not ignore the importance of the spectacle in drawing together ‘disparate individuals’, but, instead, argues that communities:

need a spectacle which appeals to similar interest dormant in otherwise disparate individuals and so bring them all together for a stretch of time when other interests – those which divide them instead of uniting – are temporarily laid aside, put on a slow burner or silenced altogether (p.200).

While such spectacle may be brief, Bauman’s (2000) comments direct attention to the variety of interests and investments that underscore collective experiences and occasions.

Given this, Skey et al. (2016) examined how the ‘investments’ made by both organisers and attendees of the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest allowed them to ‘move beyond simply noting’ how media events serve ‘as sites of symbolic struggle’ (p.3384). Indeed, to ‘effectively theorize ... [the] significance’ (Skey et al., 2016: 3384) of media events, Skey et al. (2016) emphasised the importance of exploring the *contrasting degrees of significance* given to ‘media events’ by particular groups. This provides a far more critical consideration of how media events work, and, in particular, how such events present opportunities for understandings of ‘the nation’ to be contested. The following section will serve to elaborate upon the relationship between media events, ‘the nation’ and the transformative potential of media events.

### **‘More conflicted than consensual’: Evaluating the hegemonic potential of media events**

In commenting upon the relationship between ‘the nation’, globalisation and media events, Mihelj (2008) offers a critical appraisal of Dayan and Katz (1992) by noting that when it is applied to the study of nationalism:

the main focus is on media rituals which *affirm* and *re-enact* existing national beliefs and attachments, and legitimate already established national institutions and balances of power. The fact that media events may also be involved in

processes of national identity transformation or deconstruction is largely ignored. (Mihelj, 2008: 472 [*italics added*])

Under such circumstances, Dayan and Katz's (1992) original thesis can be viewed as promoting 'the political status quo' by eschewing the transformative potential of media events for an analysis that supports 'hegemonic interests and the establishment' (Cottle, 2006: 418 see also Scannell, 1995). Instead, Cottle (2006) argues that:

some 'media events' ... can prove to be more conflicted than consensual, more politically uncertain than hegemonic, more differentiated than monopolistic, and more disruptive than integrative, as well as of longer duration and more media-propelled than Katz and Dayan's special case of 'media events' would seem to allow for. (p.418)<sup>i</sup>

Under such circumstances, global media networks encourage the rejection of any shared mediated experience through multimodal forms of media engagement (Dekavalla, 2012), upon which the reverent tones of media broadcasts (Dayan and Katz, 1985) are increasingly overshadowed by examples of disenchantment and the fragmentation of national and global audiences (Scannell, 1995). Scannell (1995) points to the ways in which certain media events can be contested by audiences, with dominant meanings re-

interpreted and contemporary audiences able to express their frustrations and disenchantment with particular occasions.

However, while Dayan and Katz (1992) recognise that ‘certain events have an intrinsically liberating function’ (p.20), such functions remain rooted in the ways in which the ‘media’ choose to represent new possibilities through which the nation could be ‘remodelled’ and its ‘members [...] reborn to a different world’ (p.165). To this extent, analyses of, and, discussions on, ‘media events’, can be divided between those who advocate for the hegemonic power of such events (Dayan and Katz, 1992; Phillips, 1999) and those that view these events as primarily ‘constructed’, and, as a consequence, open to interpretation and resistance (Couldry, 2003; Hepp and Couldry, 2010; Scannell, 1995). In order to explore this issue, attention needs to be paid to the role of journalists in both constructing and framing media events. It is to this we now turn.

### **Media events and the role of journalists**

During the reporting of media events, Dayan and Katz (1992) highlight how the role of the journalist is one that is positioned between the journalist’s suspension of criticality, for ‘respect, even awe’ and a desire to, on certain occasions, avoid disbelief in order to offer a critical appraisal (p.7).<sup>ii</sup> Indeed, while ‘journalists – sometimes reluctantly – put critical distance aside in favor of the reverent tones of presenters’ (Dayan and Katz’s,



1992: 19), for Dayan and Katz (1992) the role of the journalist remains indebted to the hegemonic authority of the ‘establishment’, a practice most notable when journalists are included in the travelling entourage of famous dignitaries.

As noted in the previous section, however, critiques can be levelled at the extent to which Dayan and Katz (1992) locate the journalist as ‘trapped in the rhetoric of reverential lubrication’ (p.193), indeed a position that results in the journalist relying on official and established control of the media event (Gilboa, 2002). Certainly, media events, and the journalists role within these events, are marked by hegemonic interests. For example, while journalist “embedding” in Gulf War II’ meant that ‘journalists were free to report what they could see from a front-line tank or helicopter, and, inside, to experience the morale of being a member of the crew’ such freedom was curtailed by ‘the obvious interest of Government’ who sought ‘to keep journalists on its side by playing up the threat, and the evil of the enemy, and minimizing our own losses (Katz and Liebes, 2007: 163).

Nonetheless, recent changes to media environments offer a more considered appraisal. Here, ‘the commercialization of the press and the rise of 24/7 news cycles’ has led some to argue that ‘journalists [... can now] push stories beyond the boundaries that politicians wish to go’ (Bennet and Livingstone, 2003: 360). One implication of this process, however, is that such reportage can work to denigrate news stories as unrelated and rumour-based stories take centre (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 1999).

Consequently, in view of Sonnevand's (2017) assertion that 'we need to foreground "event" as a key concept of journalism studies' (p.4), and with the above critiques of media events in mind, this article will examine the position of journalists as important intermediaries, and valuable constructors of, wider debates regarding 'Britishness' during London 2012 and Glasgow 2014. Moreover, rather than re-establishing the 'unquestionably hegemonic' acceptance of media events (Dayan and Katz, 1992: 7), both London 2012 and Glasgow 2014 will be examined as sites of contested political arrangement and national identity construction. Specifically, were present divisions 'temporarily laid aside, put on a slow burner or silenced altogether' (Bauman, 2000: 200)? Or, did each event present the opportunity to rectify political uncertainties and unite the UK under an overarching sense of 'Britishness', undeterred by its constituent nationalisms (Dayan and Katz, 1992; Phillips, 1999)?

In answer to these questions, this paper conducted an analysis of the English and Scottish national press in order to consider how both London 2012 and Glasgow 2014 were contested, debated and discussed in view of the extensive levels of public, political and media scrutiny that each media event received. This will be framed within a wider consideration of the contemporary dynamics of the political union between the constituent nations of the UK, as well as the multifarious forms of national identities expressed within the various regions of the 'nation-state'.

## **Method**

Despite the growing influence of social media forms within contemporary society, the ‘traditional’ print media retain a central (although arguably diminishing) role in the dissemination of information relating to major societal, political and sporting issues to the British public. Furthermore, politicians on both sides of the Scottish constitutional debate made regular use of the print and electronic press to disseminate their particular political messages and debate points (Dekavalla, 2016; Mullen, 2014).

With this in mind, both tabloid and broadsheet newspapers from England (the *Daily Mail*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mirror*) and Scotland (*Herald* and *The Scotsman*), including Sunday editions, were selected for analysis. The selection of newspapers was shaped by an explicit desire to reflect contrasting political stances, in terms of editorial positions regarding Scottish independence and wider political ideology. With regards to the England-based newspapers sampled, all of these publications espoused a pro-union constitutional stance, despite their contrasting political editorial stances at the centre-left (i.e. *The Guardian*, *The Mirror* and *The Independent*), the centre-right (i.e. *The Daily Telegraph*) and the right (i.e. *Daily Mail*).

In the Scottish context, the *Herald* was selected as an example of a left-of centre editorial position, whereas *The Scotsman* is reflective of a centre-right political stance (Hutchison, 2008; Dekavalla, 2016). Furthermore, the inclusion of the *Herald* in the

sample also allowed for the inclusion of its Sunday edition, the *Sunday Herald*, which was the only ‘national newspaper’ which explicitly supported Scottish independence (Dekavalla, 2016). Therefore, the *Herald* was purposefully selected over other the major left-of-centre Scottish newspaper, the *Daily Record*, to facilitate the inclusion of a pro-independence editorial stance, given the non-committal constitutional stance of the *Daily Record* and its Sunday edition, *The Sunday Mail* (Dekavalla, 2016).

Whilst the exclusion of the *Daily Record* precludes the opportunity to further explore the impact of their non-committal editorial stance on their representations of Scottishness and Britishness during these ‘media events’, it is worth briefly noting that this stance can be attributed to commercial considerations and the potential risk of alienating a significant proportion of their readership by adopting either pro-union or pro-independence position (Dekavalla, 2015, 2016). Indeed, a similar non-aligned stance was adopted by the *Daily Record*’s direct tabloid competitor *The Scottish Sun* which suggests that the commercial implications of the respective publications editorial positions may be worth further analysis in future academic studies. Nonetheless, such an analysis was deemed outwith the scope of the current analysis with its emphasis on representations of Scottishness and Britishness, rather than the commercial factors of chosen editorial and constitutional positions.

Taking the above into consideration, both the printed press and associated news websites were used to collate relevant articles, throughout the period of London 2012

(26<sup>th</sup> July to 13<sup>th</sup> August 2012) and Glasgow 2014 (1<sup>st</sup> July to 5<sup>th</sup> August 2014). From this corpus, articles relating to ‘Britain’, ‘Britishness’, ‘Anglo-Scottish relations’ and the ‘Scottish independence referendum’ were selected for consideration. This consideration involved analysing each article in order to identify discursive patterns within each article. By paying attention to the role of journalists in framing both events, a variety of opinions and evaluations were identified. To help organise identified patterns, highlighted sections were subject to thematic organisation conducted under a process of open and axial coding. Open coding allowed for relevant sections (words, sentences, paragraphs) of each article to be highlighted and axial coding ensured that these sections were brought together for further evaluation (Black, 2016a; 2017). It was during this second stage that comparisons between the coverage of both events could be synthesised. Importantly, this synthesis allowed for a closer analysis of how each nation sought to frame both events. Maintaining this comparative emphasis, the following sections will now elaborate upon these findings.

### **British ‘nationalism’ and Scottish ‘separatism’ at London 2012 and Glasgow 2014**

It has been noted elsewhere that in English newspaper coverage of the 2012 London Olympic Games, representations of ‘Britain’ would frequently reveal wider tensions in the political and cultural framing of Britain, most notably in the over-reliance of an English-centric depiction of Britain and in representations of Britain’s past (Black,

2016b). Furthermore, the potential for conflation between notions of Britishness and Englishness have been frequently identified in past analyses of English identity, with an inability to articulate a distinction between the symbolism of Britishness and Englishness often precluding the expression of a distinctive English identity (Colls, 2002; Groom, 2006; Kumar, 2003). Following this, further tensions were also evident in the apparent marginalization of Britain's home nations and in the lack of attention that was afforded to the forthcoming Scottish independence referendum.

With regards to the former, Craig (2011) has noted that 'the Scots' view of England and the English are complex and vary enormously. The range of views testifies to one important fact about the Scots – England matters very much to them. Yet Scotland barely registers on the English horizon' (p.282). Craig's (2011) analysis was afforded particular credence in comparisons between the English and Scottish coverage, where, in contrast to English reports, the Scottish press was well attuned to dominant perceptions of Britain and the differences between themselves and England. In one example, anger towards the marginalization of Scotland's contribution to Team GB's victory over New Zealand in the women's football, was clearly evoked by McCall (2012):

The British Olympic Association might have heralded this victory over New Zealand with a press release entitled 'England women on their way' but Scots

Kim Little and Ifeoma Dieke were both central to a gritty display in the opening event of the 2012 Games at Cardiff's Millennium Stadium. (pg.2)

In fact, when Scottish nationalism was asserted this would often be derided and frequently belittled within the English press. The *Daily Mail* (2012) noted that 'Our sporting heroes, who wrapped themselves so passionately in the Union Flag, came from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – silencing the nationalists and proving irrefutably that we are stronger united' (pg.14). Here, the *Daily Mail* (2012) followed a similar trend to that seen in British media reports of Northern Ireland (Billig, 1995). Indeed, while Britain's sporting success was believed to have silenced 'the nationalists', Billig (1995) has noted that:

In describing political events in Northern Ireland, the British media typically use the term 'nationalist' to describe those who seek to abolish the border between the United Kingdom and Eire, especially if they advocate violence in the pursuit of these aims. (p.48)

Such distinctions were also apparent in coverage of the Glasgow Games, with specific reference made to the label of 'separatists' in *The Telegraph* (2014):

It is also a marvellous antidote to separatism. Alex Salmond hoped to turn the Games into a giant PR campaign for Scottish independence. But the moment that the Red Arrows flew past or the Queen delivered her address, it was immediately apparent that Britishness does not reduce Scottishness, but complements and deepens it. The opening parade of nations ... invited the question of separatists: what value really is there in going it alone?

Although supportive comments regarding British symbolism from a pro-union correspondent in a right-leaning newspaper are unsurprising, they serve to illuminate one aspect of the rhetoric of the Scottish independence referendum campaign period – the stigmatisation of Scottish nationalism. In particular, the use of the phrase ‘separatists’ or ‘Nats’ became increasingly prevalent in the pro-union press, normally in conjunction with dismissive comments on Scottish nationalists and independence supporters:

Quite what last night’s opening of the 20th Commonwealth Games in Glasgow means for that referendum campaign, on the other hand, is anyone’s guess. As the fireworks lit up the night sky above a tearful Celtic Park, every Scot – from frothing separatist to sepia-tinted defender of the Union – could go home feeling proud and emboldened. (Hardman, 2014)



However, what is equally apparent is that the expression of British nationalism was not deemed to be problematic or hypocritical within the pro-union press, seemingly ignoring conentions that British nationalism and Scottish nationalism acted as contrasting forces throughout the constitutional debate.

Rather, with regards to the London 2012, attempts by the former Scottish First Minister, Alex Salmond, to garner support for Scottish independence were openly criticised in English reports. In one example, Parsons (2012b) argued that ‘Alex Salmond no longer looked like the cat who got the fried Mars bar’ (pg.10). Indeed, Parsons’s (2012b) reference to the deep-fried Mars Bar (a chocolate bar fried in batter) drew upon popular accounts that this ‘delicacy’ originated in Scotland and was attributable to depictions of Scotland that accentuated its unhealthy eating habits. As can be seen from these remarks, however, it has also become a source of negative cultural appropriation for Scotland. Certainly, while the item has since become a novelty (Brocklehurst, 2012), such examples reveal how accounts of ironic humour and condensation were used by Parsons (2012b) to frame Scotland’s former First Minister. The stigmatisation that Parson’s (2012b) ‘fried Mars bar’ remarks afforded to Salmond, served to ‘create a distance between “them” and “us”’ (Tyler, 2008: 23) by using their descriptions of Scottish (and Welsh) nationalism and Alex Salmond as a discursive attempt to assert English authority. In such isntances, Parsons’s (2012) comments

highlighted how the very unity of the ‘United’ Kingdom was undermined by Scottish attempts to pursue independence.

These concerns about the unity of the UK were echoed in Lord McConnell’s appeal for a temporary halt to independence referendum campaigning during the Glasgow Games (BBC, 2014). Whilst it has been argued elsewhere that Lord McConnell’s intervention may not have been wholly altruistic in nature and instead may have been a calculated pre-emption of potential political framing of the Games by pro-independence campaigners (Whigham, 2017a, 2017b), his intervention was in the end mostly successful in depoliticising the event. Indeed, the potential impact of a Games-related ‘feel-good factor’ boosting the pro-independence vote was neutered by the political manoeuvring of concerned pro-union political actors (Whigham, 2017a, 2017b; Harris and Skillen, 2016; Jarvie, 2017), thus precluding the opportunity to derive political capital from a successful Games. Accordingly, while both pro-independence and pro-union parties predominantly emphasised an apolitical approach to the Games, political comments related to the Games from SNP politicians such as Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon drew opprobrium from politicians from pro-union campaigners (Boffey, 2014; Johnson, 2014; Wade, 2014):

Salmond had promised to steer clear of questions of independence for the duration of the Games, and despite an interview on Wednesday in which he did

nothing of the sort, he was true to his word during the ceremony ... Fears of nationalist ill will among the crowds, too, proved very wide of the mark, with the English delegation receiving a huge cheer. (Addley, 2014)

Addley's (2014) remarks serve to highlight two interpretations regarding the potential impact of the Games for the referendum. Firstly, concerns raised about the possibility of negativity towards English athletes and visitors underlined the centrality of "civic nationalism" in the contemporary rhetoric of the SNP (Leith and Soule 2011; Mycock, 2012). Secondly, the complex symbolism of the Games with its celebration of the Commonwealth and the historical vestiges of the British Empire were combined with the temporary separation between Scotland and the other Home Nations within the Commonwealth (Harris and Skillen, 2016; Haynes and Boyle, 2008; Jarvie, 2017; Ochman, 2013). This demonstrated the futility of drawing any naive conclusions with respect to the potential impact of the Games on Scottish national pride or self-confidence.

In fact, despite the reactions from certain pro-union campaigners to the comments of Salmond and Sturgeon on the Games, the general consensus in the media accepted that political exploitation of the event from both sides of the constitutional debate was minimal, with Brown's (2014) reflecting that '[f]or 11 days, Alex Salmond had stuck fast to his "self-denying ordinance" not to use the Commonwealths for the

Scottish National Party's gain ahead of next month's referendum on independence'. This links to Ochman's (2013) observations of the SNP's position on the symbolism of the London 2012 Olympics, which highlighted Alex Salmond's attempts to distinguish the success of Scottish athletes as 'Scolympians', rather than members of 'Team GB'. According to Hardman (2014), the negative reaction to this politicisation of sporting events marked the card of pro-independence politicians in advance of the Glasgow 2014 Games:

...there was absolutely no mention of it [the independence referendum] yesterday... Mr Salmond, who has not forgotten what a prize clot he looked after whipping out the Saltire in the Royal Box at Wimbledon last year, kept his welcome speech short, gracious and sombre.

Harris and Skillen's (2016) reflection on the interconnection between sport and the referendum places similar emphasis on the nature of these political interventions regarding the Olympics, contending that '[w]ith the referendum looming ever closer, it was clear that competing claims for these medal winners was going to become an ever-present issue' (pg.84). This again highlights the potentially dualistic symbolism of major sporting events such as the Olympics and the Commonwealth Games, given their

associations with both Britishness and Scottishness (Ewen, 2012; Jarvie, 2017; Mole, 2014; Thomas and Antony, 2015).

### **Hegemonic Britishness at London 2012 and Glasgow 2014**

Contrary to Durkheimian approaches that seek to view national events as integrative devices (Dayan and Katz, 1992), the above examples reveal how national events are embedded in power relations and discursive constructions that seek to accentuate, but, also, undermine certain groups. Moreover, during periods of social transformation, national events can often reveal processes of construction and/or (re)construction in the national image (Mihelj, 2008; Poulton and Maguire, 2012). In the sporting domain, the use of personal pronouns such as 'we' and 'us' in British media representations of English internationals (Maguire 1999) and the co-option of British symbolism such as the 'God Save The Queen' national anthem at English internationals (Bairner, 1994; Whigham, 2014) is evident of the afore-mentioned conflation between Britishness and Englishness. Indeed, for Scotland, the London Olympic Games provided a context in which old alliances could be questioned and identities debated. In fact, while Boyle and Haynes (2014) noted that the Olympic Games 'revealed a temporary suspension in the pressing debate on Scottish independence, with hegemonic Britishness and the symbolic flying of the Union Jack more in evident across the UK than had been witnessed in recent decades' (p.91), media representations of the political symbolism of the Glasgow

Games illustrated that pro-union campaigners could equally use the event to reinforce the interconnections between the Games and notions of contemporary Britishness.

One such example was evident in the ‘Red Arrows’ fly-past at the Glasgow Games Opening Ceremony and its associated symbolism. Here, a dispute emerged regarding the colours being trailed by the jets during the display:

there was a difficulty over the fact that the Red Arrows display team used red, white and blue vapour trails for their fly-past ... rather than merely the blue and white of Scotland’s Saltire ... Our nation’s flag may well be an objectionable symbol to the Nats – many of them refer to it as the Butcher’s Apron – but unless and until they win the referendum, they’ll just have to put up with it, I’m pleased to say. (Cochrane, 2014)

Accordingly, the arguments made by pro-independence campaigners regarding the symbolism of the ‘Red Arrows’ display, were considered by Addley (2014), who noted, ‘Was it significant that, contrary to the promises of the ceremony programme, the smoke trailed by the nine Hawk aircraft was not blue and white alone, but red, white and blue? *These are days where such things matter.*’ ([italics added]).

Furthermore, while Spiers (2012) argued that the London Games represented ‘an astounding success story for Scottish and British sport’, he also noted that: ‘there is

currently a complex cultural and political game being played out between these Olympics, Scotland's First Minister Alex Salmond, and the theme of 2014 and Scottish independence' (pg.20). Both Addley's (2014) and Spiers's (2012) comments can be read alongside wider concerns regarding the disillusionment and lack of confidence in the central Westminster government. Echoing accounts of British decline, Porter (2014) has noted that:

To sympathise with the Scottish independence movement, yet at the same time ardently hope that the UK remains intact is an odd position to take, but there is some consistency if you look at Westminster's political decline ... I'm not the only one who has lost faith in Westminster, and that can be felt just as keenly in London as in Edinburgh.

However, the sense that 'Scotland' could leave the Union with Britain was echoed in Hassan's (2012) remarks on the need 'to junk the stories of decline and disappointment, and find a new northern song' (pg.26).

To this end, attempts were clearly made within the Scottish press to highlight Scotland's growing separation from the British state. Indeed, such disillusionment with the Westminster system may reflect broader processes of functional democratisation; in which the granting of devolved legislature and executive powers across the UK have led

to greater insecurity and anxiety regarding a coherently stable British identity and culture. However, closer examination of the above examples revealed an underlying shift in *how* the British state was being perceived; that is, primarily as an entity that was unrepresentative of Scottish interests (Macwhirter, 2012). The symbolism of Britishness is therefore of heightened interest when reflecting on the contemporary relationship between Scottishness and a 'Britishness' which is often seen as tarnished with Anglicised associations.

Consequently, despite the Opening Ceremony's rather positive portrayal of Britain, it was clear that the Britain being performed 'bore little relation to the social reality of the UK under the Coalition' (Macwhirter, 2012: 34). In fact, for Macwhirter (2012), the myths surrounding this portrayal had a far more unfavourable effect:

And though Danny Boyle's Britain is a myth, it remains a potent one. It was what persuaded Scots to meekly hand over Scotland's oil to the British state, in a gesture of almost wilful altruism, in the 1960s and 1970s. (pg.34)

Notably, Macwhirter's (2012) remarks did not reflect any apparent longing for the past (Boym, 2001) but instead revealed an implicit criticism of the 'British myth' and its effects upon Scottish national sovereignty. More specifically, Macwhirter's (2012) comments elucidate upon what Hassan (2013) has referred to as a change in 'the way



the British state and government is seen in Scotland'. Echoing the above comments on 'nationalists', Hassan (2013) makes the distinction that, in the past, referring to the British state 'marked you as a dangerous left-wing nationalist', today, 'it has entered wider popular usage and behind this lies a shift in how it is understood'. Here:

The British state has come to be seen increasingly as a problem for Scotland: in how it governs for a small elite and an unrepresentative corner of the UK in a way which harms Scotland's national interests (along with a majority of the people of the UK). (Hassan, 2013)

As a result, for the Scottish press, both the Jubilee and the London Olympic Games provided a wider context in which Scottish interests in the Union could be debated. Barnes (2012b) argued that 'This extraordinary political backdrop to the Games in London has been a running thread over the last two remarkable weeks of spectacle and drama', indeed 'the images have placed the question of Scotland's status in the United Kingdom far more graphically than any politician's speech' (pg. 2). Certainly, while the London Olympics provided a 'political legacy' for Scottish involvement in the Union, it also proved 'to be a watershed moment in the complex debate about national identity that lies at the heart of Scotland's independence referendum' (Scotland on Sunday, 2012). As a result, despite the Opening Ceremony's

theatrical portrayal of 'Great Britain', MacDonald (2012) argued that 'Scotland and Great Britain still have questions to address that cannot be answered by an opening ceremony, however brilliant and barmy' (pg.36).

Certainly, such questions were afforded greater attention in coverage of Glasgow 2014. Here, the possibility to frame the 2014 Games as an illustration of the mutually beneficial nature of Scotland's status was demonstrated elsewhere in pro-union media reflections on the Games. However, such representations of the event were equally challenged by correspondents who were more sympathetic to the cause of Scottish independence. The dualistic political symbolism of the Glasgow Games, as evident in the contrasting media portrayals of the event's impact on contemporary notions of Britishness and Scottishness, became clear in national sentiments that were often demonstrated through the valorisation of individual Scottish performances over other British successes in the Scottish media and general public (Blain, Boyle and O'Donnell, 1993; Whigham, 2014).

While the above examples serve to highlight how depictions of Britishness were largely curtailed by the ways in which its constitutive nationalisms were afforded adequate attention, a factor which has held a particular point of discord in depictions of 'Britain' (Reicher and Hopkins, 2001), Ismer (2011) has noted how social conflicts within the nation can often lead to a 'growing need for unifying moments' (p.560). Here, it was clear that some sections of the press sought to highlight how the Olympic

Games provided a ‘unifying moment’ for Britain (Ismer, 2011), paying particular attention to the shared sense of unity that being British provided the home nations. In reference to the Olympic Games, Parsons (2012a) stated that ‘for two weeks, we are not English, Scottish, Welsh or Irish – we are British, and that beautiful old flag belongs to all of us’ (pg.14 see also *The Guardian*, 2012). Similar sentiments were evoked elsewhere. Lott (2012) argued that ‘the Games ... brought home something ... that has lately become counter-intuitive: that we are, truly, a United Kingdom, not just a drifting set of disparate nations making their own way’ (Lott, 2012: 42). Despite Lott (2012) neglecting those ‘Britons’ in Northern Ireland, the belief that the games represented a ‘truly ... United Kingdom’ was a feeling that was underscored by its ‘collective, unitary consciousness’ (pg.42). When set against the sense of confusion that pervaded newspaper concerns regarding British identity (Taylor, 2012; Riddell, 2012), the above examples served to remind the British of their sense of unity and purported pride (Dayan and Katz, 1992; Ismer, 2011). In doing so, the Olympic Games served as a potent reminder of ‘the capabilities of this odd little island and its people’ (Lott, 2012: 42).

Elsewhere, examples of British unity were bolstered by a shared sense of British identification. Indeed, the suggestion that Britain was ‘bigger and better when all its parts are joined together’, was echoed in accounts that stressed Scotland and England’s continuing interdependence. Hamilton (2012) noted:

we are already a fusion of different identities. That is the inevitable consequence of our history. ... There are two paths here – one is to become obsessed about purity of identity, the other to relax and enjoy the inevitable cross-currents of an interdependent world. My overwhelming sense here is that Scots, like most others around the globe, have already chosen that second path. (pg.17).

Similarly, Macwhirter (2012) added:

The United Kingdom, as the name suggests, was created by the Union of the Crowns in 1603, not the Treaty of Union in 1707, and that won't change just because the Scottish Parliament acquires economic powers. The difference is that for 300 years, Scotland existed as a nation without a state. If and when Scotland achieves statehood, Scots may legitimately regard themselves as part of a kind of 'continuity' Britain. (pg.34)

Here, it is evident that Britain's multinational history revealed a number of contradictions with regards to the post-imperial construction of Britain. Evidently, while 'the national "we" invoked by celebratory media events can accommodate many competing and even incompatible definitions of national identity' (Mihelj, 2008: 477),

the mediated coverage of such events can also reveal moments of cross-national interdependence.

### **Discussion and concluding thoughts**

It is evident from the above examples that both London 2012 and Glasgow 2014 maintained a political and cultural significance, as noted by Macwhirter (2012):

I'm not saying sport will determine, or even greatly influence, the outcome of the independence referendum in 2014. However, it would be foolish to dismiss the Olympic effect. *Even I* felt a sense of emotional solidarity with the multi-talented and multicultural UK team. (pg.34 [italics added])

Macwhirter's (2012) remarks illustrate the sense of ambivalence that pervaded Scottish coverage of London 2012 ('Even I') and which was echoed in accounts that sought to highlight Britain's shared cultural and social institutions (Barnes, 2012a). Such assessments stand in contrast to debates that polarise analyses along an either/or distinction (Nairn, 2013). While Barnes (2012b) argued that 'it isn't just Unionists who can claim to be both Scottish and British' (pg.2) and whereas Freedland (2012) noted that 'Alex Salmond cannot easily claim the union has lost its emotional pull, not after he's seen the ease with which so many Britons, including Scots, draped themselves in

its once terminally unfashionable colours' (pg.32), it is clear that such accounts point more towards the Janus-faced symbolism that embodied discussions on Britain, and, which, for the most part, served to characterise London 2012 (Whigham, 2017b).

When set against the shifting nature of contemporary representations of Britishness and Scottishness, and with a Scottish political climate that has experienced growing support for Scottish independence and/or self-government, accounts of Glasgow 2014 revealed a number of important phenomena. Certainly, while the pro-union nature of the press often characterised pro-independence supporters in negative or dismissive terms – an echo of English reports during London 2012 – the strength of the support for Scottish independence demonstrates that such sentiments are no longer solely associated with a small minority of the Scottish electorate (Dekavalla, 2016; Mullen, 2014).

Indeed, this was particularly apparent in the political engagement of the newspaper journalists, a distinction that served to highlight the continuing importance of journalists in offering critical interpretations of media events. That is, while the concept of media events has undergone analytical expansion (Katz and Liebes, 2007), the above examples reveal how the journalists maintained a narrative function in the reporting of media events (Sonnevand, 2017), while also purporting a position of critical significance. As noted by Sonnevand (2017), 'Events need explanation in journalism' (pg.14), and, as a result, the role of the journalist cannot simply be that of

mere ‘priests’, torn between critical interpretation or cynical avoidance (Dayan and Katz, 1992). Instead, despite the emergence of 24/7 news coverage and the potential threat to journalism from unsolicited, citizen-based journalism, the above examples reveal how newspaper journalists, both in print and online, occupied a prominent position in the framing of both London 2012 and Glasgow 2014 as well as a level of engagement that alluded to specific national attachments, and, in particular, to potential differences in the ways in which both events reflected wider changes in discussions on ‘Britishness’ (Skey et al., 2016).

Accordingly, whereas the ‘media event’ can be perceived as an important opportunity to project a consistent and united perception of the nation (Dayan and Katz, 1992), these findings reveal a far more paradoxical account of the ways in which ‘media events’ are represented, responded to and engaged with. That is, while scepticism towards the future of Britain as well as its continuing economic, social and political problems undermined the collective potential of Britain and ‘Britishness’, these discourses revealed both the hegemonic, but, also, the resistive potential of media events. For example, concerns regarding Scotland’s place within the union (Barnes, 2012a; 2012b; Brown, 2014; Spiers, 2012) as well as those relating to its marginalisation in representations of Britain were discussed and contested in newspaper discourses (McCall, 2012; Parsons, 2012b) that sought to draw upon wider debates regarding the integrity of the British state (Macwhirter, 2012; Parsons, 2012a; Porter,

2014). This worked in accordance with the English press who continued to represent an English-British conflation, and, in certain instances, sought to undermine calls for Scottish independence (Parsons, 2012b).

Furthermore, while the union remained a contentious issue within the Scottish press' framing of Scottishness, similar examples were not expressed within the English press. That is, English coverage did not elicit any contention in defining Englishness as distinct from 'Britishness'. Echoing the Janus-faced symbolism that underscores sporting events, this highlights how 'different groups will not only hope to achieve particular objectives in relation to any media event but that varying levels of commitment to it will shape the manner in which the event is engaged with and responded to' (Skey et al., 2016: 3382-3383).

Certainly, as the ramifications of Britain's withdrawal from the European Union continue to develop, the constitutional debate in Scotland is likely to become reinvigorated in the coming years. As a result, the role of the media in framing contemporary notions of Britishness and Scottishness will therefore demand further scrutiny in these complicated and evolving political circumstances. Opportunities to debate and discuss British identity politics in view of a 'unified' British state system and the possibility of an independent Scotland demonstrate that, in many ways, the media continue to play an important role in framing political agendas during sporting



media events, as well as providing an opportunity to explore the continuing impact of the press with regards to the politicisation of major sporting events.

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## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> As an example, Cottle (2006) references the OJ Simpson trial; a ‘media event’ that ‘involve[d] deep conflictive undercurrents, whether those of “race”, class or gender’ (p.419).

<sup>ii</sup> It is important to note that Dayan and Katz (1992) draw a distinction between ‘broadcasters’ and ‘journalists’, with the latter being able to *potentially* offer a more cynical interpretation of media events. With regard to broadcasters, Dayan and Katz (1992) note that under the ‘glance’ of broadcasters, ‘The event is given absolute priority over all other programs; it is placed above all competing concerns and tightly protected from any interference with its political content, its temporal sequence, its tone, its mood.’ (pg.89).

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