

## Glasgow 2014, the media and Scottish politics – the (post)imperial symbolism of the Commonwealth Games

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**Glasgow 2014, the media and Scottish politics – the (post)imperial symbolism of the Commonwealth Games**

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**Glasgow 2014, the media and Scottish politics – the (post)imperial symbolism of the Commonwealth Games**

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**Abstract**

This article critically examines print media discourses regarding the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games. The forthcoming analysis considers the political symbolism of the Commonwealth Games with regards to the interlinkages between the British Empire, sport and the global political status of the UK, with specific consideration given to the UK's declining global power as well as the interconnections between the 2014 Games and the Scottish independence referendum. Hechter's (1975) 'internal colonialism' thesis, which portrays Scotland's marginalised status within the UK, is drawn upon to critically explore the political symbolism of sport for Scottish nationalism, before discussion focuses upon the extent to which the modern Commonwealth is symptomatic of the UK's declining status as a global power. Finally,

the existence of these narrative tropes in print media coverage of the Commonwealth Games is examined, allowing for critical reflections on the continuing interconnections between the media, sport, nationalism and post-imperial global politics.

### **Keywords**

British Empire, media discourse, post-imperialism, nationalism, sport, Commonwealth Games

### **Introduction**

The link between empire and the UK's various 'nationalisms' has proved a valuable line of enquiry for those considering contemporary renditions of Britishness (Mycock, 2010). Advocates of the 'new imperial history' have recited a 'shared ... determination to demonstrate that it was [and is] impossible to separate the histories of Britain and its Empire because they were, politically and culturally, mutually constitutive of each other' (Vernon, 2016: 21). In fact, while asking the question: 'Why is it important that such a history of the British Empire should be written?', MacKenzie (2015: 115) argues that:

The reason is surely that it may well be in the history of ideas, of science, of religious encounters, of environmental issues, of all forms of cultural diffusion (and syncretism), that the true and longer-lasting legacy of the British Empire may reside.

We would add that one predominant legacy is the sporting practices that continue to be played throughout the former empire, a sporting diffusion that is reflected in the Commonwealth Games.

Accordingly, while academics have considered the British Empire and its global impact (Darwin, 1991; 1999; 2012; Devine, 1999; 2003; Ferguson, 2004; MacKenzie, 2008; 2015; Maguire, 1999; Mangan, 1992a), there is the potential to further consider the relationship between empire and the British home nations (Glassock, 2016; MacKenzie, 2008). Therefore, this article will critically examine print media discourses regarding the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games. In particular, the political symbolism of the event and the interlinkages between the British Empire, sport and the global political status of the UK will be considered, with specific attention given to the UK's status as a declining power. Given that Glasgow 2014 provided ample opportunities for the host nation to explicitly portray various constructions of the past, present and future of each 'nation', the games also facilitated the chance to examine the nature of these portrayals and the subsequent media reactions to such portrayals. Indeed,

‘to argue that Britain's political culture was influenced and modified by its empire is not simply to seek in the past an explanation for problems in the present. Nor is it an argument that is relevant only to the more modern period’ (Thompson, 2000: 194). Instead, this article will critically examine the emergent patterns within media coverage of the political symbolism of these events, situating this coverage within the context of a British state which is facing numerous constitutional dilemmas. To begin this analysis, a consideration of the British Empire’s role in the global diffusion of sport will be considered.

### **Sport and the British Empire**

Opening on 12 May 1911, the ‘Festival of Empire’, held at the newly constructed ‘Crystal Palace’ in London, England, served to commemorate the coronation of King George V via an array of exhibitions, pageants and inter-empire competitions. At the time, the festival reflected the breadth of the British Empire, with the inclusion of an inter-Empire sports championship encouraging participants from Australasia (Australia and New Zealand), Canada and South Africa (Moore, 1986). While the Festival highlighted the extent to which the symbolic rituals associated with the British crown could provide British imperial rule an outward symbol of superiority and legitimacy (Maguire, 1999; Mangan, 1992a; Moore, 1986; Stoddart, 1986, 1988), the global

diffusion of 'British' cultural codes were also maintained through British sporting practices (Mangan, 1992b), which, embroiled with ethnic-colonial characteristics, served to bind 'cousins of the tongue far more closely than any amount of diplomacy and trade convention' (Cambridge University Magazine, 1886: 21 cited in Mangan, 1992b: 5). As evident in the festival's sporting contests, sport provided an important spectacle to define national character as well as provide a source of national mythologising (Llewellyn, 2015).

Indeed, from the mid-nineteenth-century, sport occupied a prominent position in Britain and the empire, with athleticism forming an important part of the British public school system (Maguire, 1999; Mangan, 1992a). Maguire (2005: 10-11) highlights that 'In the diffusion of sport throughout the empire, the British, whatever their own ethnic origin, acted as the established group dealing with a range of outsider groups'. Certainly, whereas the global diffusion of British sporting practices could embryonically work to support nationalism within the British Empire, towards the end of the nineteenth-century, efforts were made to unify the empire under an 'Imperial Federation' that would secure economic, political and military ties between Britain and the dominions.<sup>1</sup> In fact, before De Coubertin's modern reincarnation of the Ancient Olympic Games, Dyreson (2015: 868) notes how the British Reverend, John Astley Cooper, worked to:

propos[e] ... a ‘Pan-Britannic Festival’ composed of many cultural elements but grounded especially in sporting contests [that] could serve as precisely the sort of institution that would make the twentieth-century world into a harmonious planet-wide civilization ruled by English speakers.

Serving as a precursor to both the Olympic Games (first held in Athens, Greece in 1896) and the Empire Games (first held in Hamilton, Canada in 1930), Cooper’s attempt to consolidate the empire’s sporting linkages echoed later efforts to forge a unified British Empire Team for the Olympic Games. In the aftermath of Britain’s third place finish at the 1912 Stockholm Games, attempts were made ‘to necessitate the full mobilization of imperial subjects from across the entire reaches of the British Empire’ (Llewellyn, 2015: 776). Echoing calls for an ‘Imperial Federation’, efforts to establish a British Empire team during this period emphasize the importance of sport in allowing ‘imperial subjects’ to be viewed ‘as fellow “Britons” and the Empire as an extension of the British-state rather than as a collection of separate and distinct communities’ (Llewellyn, 2015: 776). Instead, however, the decline of the British Empire would see this ‘collection of separate and distinct communities’ undergo a level of formal recognition as equal member states of the ‘Commonwealth of Nations’.

### **From Empire to Commonwealth**



Accordingly, while the ‘sweeping imperial, political and social challenges’ of the early twentieth-century served to ‘elevat[e] fears of national decadence and decline’ (Llewellyn, 2015: 766), the passing of the Balfour Declaration in 1926 formally recognised the dominions as associated members of the Commonwealth of Nations (Marshall, 2001). Four years later, Cooper’s dream of a pan-Britannic sporting competition was eventually realized in the establishment of the Empire Games, first held in 1930 in Hamilton, Canada.

Following the Second World War, ‘[t]he Commonwealth was advanced as a successor and embraced the old territories of empire, revolving around Britain and its revived monarchy’ (Preston, 2014: 25). The British government, led by Clement Atlee’s Labour party, established the ‘Commonwealth Relations Office’ in 1947 in order to advance the economic, political and cultural relationships between Commonwealth nations as the UK began to embrace further decolonialisation of its former territories during the post-war period.

However, since the establishment of the European Economic Community in 1951 (later, the European Union), UK political interest in the Commonwealth has slowly dwindled (Preston, 2014). Indeed, Commonwealth relations undertook diverging paths in the post-war period as new alliances were formed and the Commonwealth’s utility as an effective ‘global’ force was overshadowed by the Cold War. Set against the

dominance of the US, the UK administered a move away from ‘empire’ (reinterpreted as the Commonwealth of Nations) towards a pan-European position.

Consequently, whereas today the Commonwealth Games may reflect a ‘ritual of continuity’ that simply, and, perhaps, begrudgingly, serves to maintain ‘cultural linkages’; for the UK, the relevance of the Commonwealth, and the gradual reworking of empire as one of imperial possessions to Commonwealth family, traverses wider debates on the general reluctance of Britain to engage with its imperial history and its post-imperial identity crisis (English and Kenny, 2001; Yeandle, 2014). In view of the UK’s ‘[p]olitical, economic and cultural adjustment to the concurrent decline of its world-power status and the marked increase in immigration from what are now former colonies’, Buettner (2006: 8) highlights that, ‘the ongoing task of revising and debating the imperial past is an equally salient dimension that demands much closer scrutiny’.

Nevertheless, while ‘[i]n practical terms, the British in the years after the Second World War may have deemed their colonial possessions not “worth” the expense or too burdensome to maintain’, Levine (2007: 209) maintains that ‘the image of empire as epitomizing British power and glory nonetheless remained a strong undercurrent in national self-reckoning’. Indeed, the assertion that ‘the idea of empire remains palpable’ (Levine, 2007: 209), is one echoed by Burton (2001: 217), who notes that ‘disappearance rarely means erasure’, and by Ward’s (2004: 32) contention that ‘[i]f geographically the Empire ended, it continued to exist in the British imagination’.

Therefore, while empire remains a contentious topic in both public and intellectual debates, after the 2016 EU referendum – which resulted in the forthcoming withdrawal of the UK from the EU – politicians have touted the idea of an ‘Empire 2.0’, with such attempts geared towards refocusing attention on Commonwealth trading relationships (Adler-Nissen et al., 2017; Olusoga, 2017). Prominent anti-EU ‘Leave’ campaigner, Boris Johnson, argued that ‘[a]s we re-examine our relationship with the European Union, we have a vital opportunity to recast our immigration system in just this way. And the first place to start is with the Commonwealth’ (Mason, 2014). Even before the EU referendum, ‘Anglo-sphere’ relations were promoted as a cure for Britain’s post-imperial decline. Gamble (2012: 477) noted how:

Advocates of the Anglo-sphere argue that it is not too late for Britain (and Ireland) to turn their backs on Europe in favour of building a network commonwealth of the English-speaking peoples. This is a dream that has lasted more than one hundred years, but it has always foundered on the difficulties of reconciling different national interests and finding common institutions through which it can be expressed. It has an emotional pull for many British people that Europe seems unable to match.

Johnson and Gamble's remarks allude to the previous efforts to amalgamate Britain and its former dominions, as evident in attempts to establish an Imperial Federation, and, for the Olympics, a competitive British Empire team. Nevertheless, the tendency to resort to former 'imperial' ties ('English-speaking peoples') and the 'emotional pull' that the Commonwealth, and, perhaps more noticeably, its 'white dominions' have for the UK when compared to Europe, remains a contentious topic when viewed in light of the contrasting results produced by the EU referendum.<sup>2</sup>

### **Sport, the Commonwealth and 'internal colonialism'**

Whilst the above discussion has outlined how ideas regarding the decline of the British Empire have shaped the Commonwealth and *vice versa*, in the following sections the connection between Scotland and empire will be considered in order to further examine the relationship between empire, the Commonwealth Games, Scottish independence and Scottish identity.

Indeed, the analogy of the declining Empire can also be applied to another major existential challenge for the British state – the growing support for Scottish independence. Drawing upon the arguments of Hechter's (1975) 'internal colonialism' thesis, Mycock (2012) argued that contemporary Scottish nationalism is at least in part influenced by a 'post-colonial narrative' of Scottish independence. The 'post-colonial'

representation of an imagined independent Scottish state is argued to have been subtly promoted by the SNP, within which the ‘idea that the UK remains a product of English “internal colonialism” persists’ (Mycock, 2012: 60).

Hechter’s (1975) stance emphasises the existence of ‘core’ and ‘peripheral’ regions resulting from Western imperialist and capitalist expansion, and their importance for the growth of nationalist movements. Hechter’s (1975) conceptualisation of the inclusion of the ‘Celtic periphery’ within the UK as a form of ‘internal colonialism’ thus casts Scotland as a socioeconomic ‘periphery’ within the British state. Here, peripheral regions in the UK, such as Scotland, were assimilated into the political and economic system of the unified state, before becoming centrally involved in the next phase of imperialism on a global scale. However, discontent with inequality resulted in the growth of a collective movement in the peripheral population based on the solidarity offered by nationalist feelings (Hechter, 1975) and by differentiating between the ‘core’ and ‘peripheral’ population with reference to cultural, ethnic and other social markers. Hechter therefore places more emphasis on the ‘cultural division of labour’ as a stimulus for nationalist agitation, as the peripheral population begins to react to its under-representation in positions of influence in the Scottish economy and polity by pursuing a sovereign state to redress this inequality.

In sum, historical evidence, such as the relatively slow economic development of Scottish society in comparison to that of England, the lack of diversification in the

Scottish economy, and the comparatively poor living standards in Scotland compared with England (Devine, 1999; Jackson, 2014), can all be used to support the arguments of Hechter regarding the importance of socioeconomic precursors to Scottish nationalist movements. Furthermore, the historic lack of representation of Scots in pre-Reform Westminster government and the political economy of Scotland support the claims of the ‘cultural division of labour’ within the UK.

Nevertheless, representations of Scotland as an ‘internal colony’ are somewhat undermined by their lack of acknowledgement of the economic and social benefits of Scotland’s status within the former British Empire (Devine, 1999; Harvie, 1998; Jackson, 2014; Tomlinson, 2014). Once political stability had been secured within the UK, Scotland’s economic development was accelerated significantly, and the country’s role as the ‘World’s Workshop’ (Devine, 1999) was a direct result of its status in the British Empire. While many have alluded to the fact that the decline of the British Empire has led to a ‘rekindling of the suppressed nationalisms’ within the British Isles, MacKenzie (1998: 231) notes that the establishment of a set of ‘world-wide connections and global loops’ meant that Empire ‘had just as much an effect upon the preservation and strengthening of the distinctive identities of the Scots and the other ethnicities of Greater Britain’. Accordingly, what is important to remember is that while Hechter’s conceptualisation of ‘internal colonialism’ acknowledges that the Celtic periphery became centrally involved in the process of British imperial expansion, any acceptance

of the mutually beneficial nature of the Union for Scotland and England undermines the strength of the ‘colonial’ representation of Scotland (Connell, 2004; Dalle Mulle, 2016; Evans, 1991; Mycock, 2012).

What is important, however, is that such sentiments are manifested in the domain of sport, with Scots suffering from a form of ‘repressed nationalism’ (Moorhouse, 1986), ideas of English superiority and Scottish inferiority in both a sporting and wider sense (Moorhouse, 1987), and the development of asymmetric migration flows of Scottish footballers to England given the greater career opportunities available (Moorhouse, 1987, 1994, 1995). This latter issue is developed upon in Miller, Lawrence, McKay and Rowe’s (2001) discussion of the impact of globalisation in sport, wherein the authors present their arguments regarding the ‘NICL’ (New International Division of Cultural Labour) by drawing upon the case of Scottish football within the UK, partially echoing the ‘internal colonialism’ thesis of Hechter (1975). Furthermore, the fact that Scotland possesses independent representative teams in sports such as football and rugby can be used to further portray ideas of Scotland as a ‘submerged nation’ or colony within the British state, given the scarcity of nations who lack sovereign statehood possessing this privilege afforded to Scotland in the sporting domain (Bairner, 1994; Blain et al., 1993; Jarvie and Walker, 1994; Moorhouse, 1987).

Individual sports also offer an opportunity for Scots to emphasise distinctive ideas of Scottish nationhood within the UK state, with additional media and public attention

paid to the performance of Scottish sportspeople in individual sports such as tennis, golf or Olympic sports (Blain et al., 1993; Whigham, 2014). Furthermore, in the case of the Commonwealth Games, the fact that the ‘home nations’ of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have separate representative teams competing in the event (Haynes and Boyle, 2008; Houlihan, 1997) further illustrates the potential to portray the existing British state as a collection of ‘internal colonies’, despite the aforementioned limitations of Hechter’s thesis. Sporting events such as Glasgow 2014 can therefore act as a lens through which the relative status of Scotland within the UK can be examined. Attention now turns to past literature which has explored the political symbolism of these events in light of the context of a divided UK state.

### **Glasgow 2014 – the (post)imperial symbolism of the Commonwealth Games**

The political symbolism of the Commonwealth Games movement can be argued to be analogous to a number of broader political developments relating to: a) the decline of the British Empire; b) the power dynamics of the Commonwealth as a contemporary geo-political entity; and c) the constitutional dilemmas facing the United Kingdom during recent years. To this end, the forthcoming section considers these respective topics in turn by reviewing existing academic literature on these issues.



Firstly, the evolving title of the event now referred to as the Commonwealth Games aptly illustrates the declining power of the British Empire, and the arguably sluggish responses of British governments to embrace the post-imperial and post-colonial era for the British state. Originally entitled the 'British Empire Games' for the inaugural event in 1930, the subsequent revisions to the titles of the 'British Empire and Commonwealth Games' (1950), the 'British Commonwealth Games' (1970) and the current 'Commonwealth Games' moniker (1978) has been argued to be symbolic of the shifting power relations between the countries which constitute the Commonwealth (Dawson, 2006, 2014; Muda, 1998; Ryan, 2014; Stoddart, 1986). In particular, the removal of the phrases 'Empire' then 'British' from the title reflects the rapid decolonialisation within the British Empire in the post-1945 period. Indeed, Holt (1989) argues that the Games were partially conceived as part of the formalised decolonialisation process which followed the Statute of Westminster in 1920. The Games maintained cultural links between the ex-Empire and the Commonwealth nations during a period of economic, political and constitutional turmoil for the British Empire.

However, despite these attempts to maintain positive cultural links through events such as the Games, the evolving power dynamics within the post-imperial Commonwealth continued to be asymmetric, dysfunctional and hierarchical in nature. Whilst the apartheid regime of South Africa undoubtedly impacted upon the

Games more significantly in practice due to the impact of apartheid-related boycotts (Dheenshaw, 1994; Jeffreys, 2012; Nauright, 1997), another emergent issue of the Games movement is arguably more instructive regarding the asymmetric nature of political relations within the Commonwealth: the dominance of the 'white dominions). In the post-apartheid era, the focus of the internal politics of the Commonwealth Games movement turned to the dominance of 'white dominion' nations (namely Australia, Canada, England, New Zealand, Scotland, and Wales) in terms of the hosting of the Games, given that the only past incidence of the Games taking place outside these countries was Kingston, Jamaica in 1966 (Dawson, 2014; Dheenshaw, 1994). Furthermore, the most recent iteration of the Games outside of the 'white dominions', Delhi 2010, was afflicted by a number of Orientalist and negative portrayals of the event's organization (Mishra, 2012; Osborne et al., 2016). This inability to sufficiently redress the historical power imbalances within the Commonwealth has therefore led some analysts to question the success of the Games as part of the decolonialisation process, with Dheenshaw (1994: 2) commenting that, as a result of this failure:

the countries of the Commonwealth serve no strategic military or geographic purpose, and little economic purpose. They try to serve a political purpose, although one wonders what the former colonies of a spend nineteenth century

world power can do in the rapidly changing realpolitik of the late twentieth century.

The ‘rapidly changing realpolitik’ of the Commonwealth in the late twentieth century, as alluded to by Dheenshaw, has extended to the constitutional dilemmas of the United Kingdom itself within the twenty-first century in the form of the Scottish independence referendum of 2014 and the referendum on EU membership in 2016. Although the latter of these referenda has received no attention to date in relation to the Commonwealth Games, the political interconnections between the Glasgow 2014 Games and Scottish independence has been a topic of some academic reflection. In particular, the potential for political exploitation of the Games ‘feel-good factor’ by pro-independence and pro-union campaigners keen to advance their visions for the future constitutional status of Scotland has been explored by various commentators, despite broad academic agreement on the questionable and/or minor impact of any such politicisation on the eventual referendum outcome (Jarvie, 2017; Mole, 2014; Whigham, 2017).

Harris and Skillen’s (2016) work has also considered the potential politicisation of the 2014 Games within media coverage of the event, critically exploring the media’s portrayal of the relationship between the Games and the referendum. In particular, their analysis highlights the contradictory political symbolism evident within media discourse

of the event, echoing the arguments of others regarding the dualistic symbolism of the 2012 and 2014 Games (Iorwerth et al., 2014; McDowell and Skillen, 2017; Polley, 2014). To this end, Harris and Skillen (2016: 92) remark:

The referendum debate was ever-present in much of the discussion around Scottish sport and offered opportune sites for political capital to be gained. The media... would also at times actively look for an angle whereby they could weave the issue of independence into narratives of sporting success.

This article therefore builds upon the above arguments regarding the media discourse by scrutinising the contrasting narratives which emerged in the media coverage of Glasgow 2014, whilst broadening the scope of this analysis by considering the Scottish independence referendum as only one issue, albeit important, within a wider process of evolution for the British state in its post-imperial decline. Attention now turns to the methodological procedures which inform the forthcoming discussion.

## **Methodology**

Following previous studies, which have explored the relationship between nationalism/national identity and the media (Black, 2016a; 2016b), this article critically

analyzed online newspaper discourses in order to explore the media's discursive construction of the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games (Bignell, 1997). The use of online newspaper articles offered an adequate sample from which analyses of, and, discussions on, the wider social, cultural and political impact of the games could be assessed. As evident in the above discussion, this analysis was not necessarily concerned with the Games themselves, but, instead, sought to explore wider connections between Scotland, the British Empire, the Commonwealth and the Scottish independence referendum.

Therefore, articles were selected throughout the duration of the Games (23 July – 4 August 2014). These sampling dates facilitated the opportunity to focus upon the prevalent media narratives which emerged as the Games progressed, thus prioritising the immediate coverage of the Games period rather than the media coverage of the pre-Games preparations or the later reflections of the post-Games legacy. It was decided that the sample would include English, primarily London-based publications, and Scottish newspapers. Indeed, the distinction between the English, Scottish and British press is one that echoes the UK's multi-national arrangement. For example, *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, the *Daily Mirror*, the *Daily Mail* and *The Daily Telegraph* are produced in London (England) but are sold throughout the UK. Nevertheless, the *Daily Mirror*, the *Daily Mail* and *The Daily Telegraph* all produce 'Scottish editions', which are subsequently sold in Scotland. The *Daily Record* is based in Glasgow and is a

Scottish tabloid newspaper. Equally, *The Herald* is also based in Glasgow and is a Scottish broadsheet newspaper. As a result, the inclusion of each newspaper ensured a representative sample was provided.<sup>3</sup>

Selected articles were subjected to repeated re-readings and from this relevant themes were identified. Corresponding with the article's focus on the relationship between Scotland and Britain, and, in particular, the relationship between the British Empire and the Commonwealth/Commonwealth Games, two key themes were identified from the sample. These themes broadly covered issues pertaining to the contemporary relevance of the Commonwealth and its relation to the British Empire as well as the relationship between the, then, forthcoming Scottish independence referendum and the Commonwealth. In both cases, these themes alluded to broader distinctions between Scottishness and Britishness, and, more notably, to the ways in which references to the British Empire were used to support, or, equally, deride, calls for Scottish independence. The following sections will serve to elaborate upon these themes via references to the data. After this, the discussion and conclusion will provide wider clarification and explanation on the significance of these themes.

### **Glasgow 2014 and contrasting portrayals of the Commonwealth**

Despite the strong degree of concurrence within academic reflections upon the problematic status of the Commonwealth within contemporary global politics, media representations of the importance of the Commonwealth and the legacy of the British Empire during the period of the 2014 Games demonstrated that such conclusions did not necessarily apply across the board. Indeed, representations of the Commonwealth and the British Empire within the predominantly Conservative-supporting, right-leaning press tended to reflect upon the continuing legacy of the British Empire in positive terms. For example, *The Daily Telegraph's* (2014) reflection upon the opening ceremony of the 2014 Games argued that the ceremony:

put on display the wondrous wealth and diversity of this organisation of countries. No other post-imperial power has played such a positive role in the life of its former colonies as Britain has done. While France, Belgium and Portugal disentangled themselves from empire in an often violent manner that left behind decades of resentment and tension, Britain has successfully positioned itself as a friend and partner in progress. ... Is the Commonwealth, therefore, not an example of turning the legacy of something that could be painful – colonisation – into something that has enriched the lives of everyone involved?

This sepia-tinted reflection upon the nature of the Commonwealth and British imperialism was again evident in the arguments of the Conservative-supporting *Daily Telegraph*. Here, Brown's (2014) reflections upon the success of the Glasgow Games contended that the event 'reflected, ultimately, the continued relevance of the Commonwealth itself. No mere relic of empire, it was conceived in 1949 as a body of equal partnership in which former masters and servants could be reconciled' (*The Daily Telegraph*, 2014). Given the oft-cited preference of certain political commentators in the right-leaning press to promote the possibilities of enhanced trade and diplomatic relations with other Commonwealth countries following Britain's withdrawal from the European Union (EU), contrasting the somewhat more recalcitrant approach towards the trading arrangements with Britain's geographic neighbours in the EU, the contention evident here that the Commonwealth retained its political relevance is arguably unsurprising.

Indeed, from the opposite end of the political spectrum, the analysis of the Games from the Labour-aligned *Daily Mirror*, was reflected in Routledge's (2014) scathing account of the contemporary relevance of the event and the Commonwealth more broadly:

I don't remember any previous Commonwealth Games being given this kind of treatment. In fact, I don't remember any previous Games, because they weren't



regarded as important. That's because they're not. The Commonwealth itself is a busted flush, a meaningless relic of Empire. Many member countries don't even pay lip service to its core values of freedom, democracy and the rule of law. In some, being gay isn't just illegal – you can get the death penalty. Yet the Games are still paraded as “friendly” every four years. This is a triumph of hype over experience. (*Daily Mirror*, 2014)

This position was equally evident in his colleague, O'Sullivan (2014), whose review of the opening ceremony highlighted the role of the BBC in sustaining a narrative about the relevance of the Commonwealth Games movement:

If you've ever wondered what the Olympics would be like without America, Europe, China and Russia... tune into BBC1's 23-hour-a-day coverage of the Commonwealth Games. And there you have it. The dear old Beeb's manic enthusiasm for a sporting event that celebrates British imperialism smacks of one outmoded institution desperately trying to prop up another. (*Daily Mirror*, 2014)

Equally unsurprising is the contrasting position evident in reflections on the Commonwealth from media sources aligned with the left and centre-left of the British political spectrum, with their analysis of the symbolism of the Commonwealth and

Empire framed within narrative tropes of a postcolonial and apologist nature. Reflecting upon the Glasgow Games closing ceremony, the *Daily Record* (2014b) highlighted the associations between the event and the contemporaneous commemorations of the 100-year anniversary of the start of the First World War:

These Games have surely inspired all generations with a new national mood of self-confidence and optimism... But first the Commonwealth nations that partied together last night will gather again today for a much more sober affair. Glasgow Cathedral will be the setting for the UK's main commemoration of the outbreak of World War One. It is fitting that leaders of the Commonwealth will be in attendance to remember a tragedy that demonstrated the importance of the nations of the world coming together in friendship.

Indeed, the relevance of the war commemorations was echoed by Torrance (2014) in the left-leaning *The Herald*, who noted that:

the First World War was both the product of imperialism and the beginning of its end... Fitting, therefore, that between the Games' closing ceremony last night and this morning's service sporting euphoria gives way to historical commemoration

of lives lost not just in Scotland and the UK, but across the globe. (*The Herald*, 2014)

Torrance's (2014) reference to both the First World War and its ties to imperialism highlight another important implication. For him:

Glasgow hosting both events is also significant, for the city of the Commonwealth Games was also a city largely built on slavery and Imperial trade. That isn't something many Scots are keen to recognise let alone commemorate, which is unfortunate for the UK has generally been willing to face up to darker chapters in its history. (Torrance, *The Herald*, 2014)

Accordingly, whereas Gilroy's (2005) 'postcolonial melancholia' highlights the ambiguities surrounding Britain's imperial past, it also reveals the ways in which certain memories from the past are remembered, whilst others are actively forgotten. Moreover, while referring to 'Britain', many of Gilroy's assessments are undergirded by the ambivalence surrounding *England's* relation to empire and its impact upon a distinct sense of English identity separate from Britain (Black, 2016b). Consequently, in Scotland, and as mentioned in Torrance's (2014) remarks, various academics have alluded to the lack of attention that has been afforded to Scotland's role in empire

(Devine, 2003). In fact, according to Thompson (2008: 51), the Scots ‘were the first peoples of the British Isles to take on an imperial mentality and possibly the longest to sustain one’. Whereas Thompson’s (2008) remarks can be tempered by the numerous accounts that have highlighted Britain’s post-imperial decline and its impact upon ‘England’ (Black, 2016b; Kumar, 2003), Scotland’s prominent role in Britain’s colonial territories (Devine, 2003) – via Scottish involvement in the civil service, military, British Raj and East India Company (Meer, 2015) – highlights an attempt by Torrance (2014) to evoke this past in relation to both the First World War and the Glasgow’s hosting of the Games.

### **Glasgow 2014 and the Scottish independence referendum**

*The Daily Telegraph*’s editorial on the Games’ opening ceremony also made reference to another existential challenge to the British state, the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. The editorial stance of the right-leaning title again framed the history and status of the Commonwealth and British Empire in an overwhelming positive light, arguing that the symbolism of the Games illustrates the futility of Scottish independence:

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 – from giant India to tiny Norfolk Island – invited the question of separatists: what value really is there in going it alone? The Commonwealth is a product of the British experiment in multicultural democracy, and stands as a glowing example of the benefits of co-operation. (*The Daily Telegraph*, 2014)

Given the overwhelming support for the maintenance of Union in the British and Scottish print media (Dekavalla, 2016), the dismissive tone towards the prospect of Scottish independence is unsurprising. Nonetheless, the citing of other independent Commonwealth nations to question the value of Scotland ‘going it alone’ is somewhat contradictory and ironic, given that in the very next sentence the ‘benefits of co-operation’ within the Commonwealth are highlighted. Furthermore, it is significant that the nations of India and Norfolk Island are selected to illustrate this argument: it is unsurprising that alternative Commonwealth nations such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand were omitted, given their comparative post-imperial success which could in fact support the central arguments of Scottish nationalists.

Indeed, whilst Hardman's (2014) review of the opening ceremony in the right-leaning *Daily Mail* equally attempted to highlight the success and ongoing influence of the Commonwealth as a geo-political organization comprised of 'two billion people of every faith from 71 nations and territories across every continent', the tone of the article was again clearly dismissive about the prospect of Scottish independence:

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. ... These Games also split the UK into its component parts. So, there is no 'Team GB'. Scottish athletes compete against the English under the Saltire. It's an arrangement which Alex Salmond and his Scottish National Party hope to formalise forever come September's referendum. (*Daily Mail*, 2014)

The contrasting positions evident in the left-wing press resisted the temptation to reproduce a white-washed historiography of the Commonwealth's origins, whilst critically reflecting upon the frequency of such representations within contemporary notions of Britishness and Scottishness. Indeed, Addley's (2014) comments on the links between the Games' opening ceremony and the forthcoming Scottish

independence referendum adopted a more circumspect tone with regards to the legacy of the Empire:

Nor are local people the only ones with an eye on September's referendum. Outside Celtic Park was a gathering of perhaps 100 Tamils, protesting at the inclusion of 'genocidal Sri Lanka' in the event. 'Referendum for independence is a right of every nation,' read many of their placards. The resonance of a group of nations, many of them former British colonies, gathering in a country that will shortly vote on whether to leave the UK is not considerable (sic). (*The Guardian*, 2014)

The emergent narratives regarding the nature of the Commonwealth and the British Empire in the left-wing press were clearly more apologist in tone in comparison to their counterparts aligned with the centre-right and right-wing, with a greater tendency to highlight the negative legacy of Empire in relation to slavery, racial oppression, economic exploitation, human rights and power imbalances (Addley, 2014; McKenna, 2014; Ralston, 2014; Torrance, 2014). Furthermore, the position of the left-wing press on the symbolism of the Games and the Commonwealth in relation to the Scottish independence referendum also illustrated a more balanced tone by highlighting the dualistic symbolism of the Games:

One of the abiding realities of baggy events like the Commonwealth Games is that you can find in them any kind of symbolism you want. Yes-voting nationalists will no doubt in the days and weeks before the 18 September referendum cast the Games as evidence that Scotland – "the world's 14th wealthiest country" – can do things successfully its own way. Unionists – naysayers – will find in them evidence that strength lies in brotherhood, interdependence and diversity. (Adams, *The Observer*, 2014)

This position thus reflects the arguments of other academics regarding the dualistic symbolism of major sporting events such as the Olympics and the Commonwealth Games (Iorwerth et al., 2014; Jarvie, 2017; McDowell and Skillen, 2017; Mole, 2014; Polley, 2014), illustrating that any attempts to use the symbolism of the independence of other Commonwealth nations for political gain would ultimately constitute a zero-sum game for political campaigners. Indeed, the Commonwealth Games were generally contended to represent a campaign break in the referendum debate, with agreement in numerous print media reflections that explicit politicisation of the Games was avoided (Adams, 2014; Addley, 2014; Daily Record, 2014a; Hardman, 2014). What is apparent, however, is that this level of ambivalence regarding the Games and their symbolic potential was not just dependent upon the ways in which the Games could be



manipulated to further political ends, but also in the ways in which these motivations were reflected in, and, in some instances, supported by, discourses on the British Empire.

## **Conclusions**

As highlighted in the above examples, the ties between sport and politics remain widely cited and brought to bear in the ways in which sporting mega-events are reported and framed. Indeed, the 2014 Glasgow Games illustrated the relationship between such events and a range of political and sociocultural issues which demand further academic analysis, including the impact on displaced local populations (Gray and Mooney, 2011; Gray and Porter, 2015; Paton et al., 2012), LGBTI and human rights (Harris and Skillen, 2016; Jarvie, 2017), and public health outcomes (Clark and Kearns, 2015, 2016; Matheson, 2010; McCartney et al., 2012; Stewart and Rayner, 2016).

In terms of our own emphasis on the links between the 2014 Games and media portrayals of the contemporary Commonwealth, the event occupied an unusual place within the wider constitutional arrangement of the UK, offering Scotland a unique opportunity for ‘nation-building’ (Gorokhov, 2015). That is, while Scotland has been referred to as a stateless nation (McCrone, 1992), the hosting of the Games and the associated opportunities for Scotland to nationally represent itself, were evidently

embroiled with issues pertaining to the Scottish independence referendum and the historical legacy of the British Empire. Therefore, in this final discussion we would like to expand upon the wider entanglements surrounding Scotland, the British Empire, the Commonwealth and the press' coverage of the Glasgow Games.

Notably, the British Empire proved a salient discourse in newspaper articles pertaining to the Commonwealth, its contemporary relevance and the contemporaneous Scottish independence referendum campaigns. Whereas academics have highlighted the propensity for contemporary depictions of empire to exist in 'heritage mode'; indeed, 'a tale of adventures, victories and general exotica' (Preston, 2014: 20), we contest that the British Empire provided a discursive potential that was used to both support and critique competing interests. This presented two important conclusions.

First, despite disparities in both the left- and right-wing press, references to empire did not fall neatly on a positive or negative dichotomy. There was no overriding tendency to either promote the legacy of the British Empire, or, alternatively, deride the empire and the effects of Western imperialism on postcolonial societies, many of whom were competing at the Games. Instead, discussions on Scottish/British identity and Scottish independence reflected a multidirectional approach to the British Empire that served to frame: (a) the campaigning of pro-independence politicians; (b) commemorations of the First World War; (c) the lack of recognition for empire in Scotland; and (d) the contemporary relevance of the Games and the Commonwealth, as

constituent topics relating to Britain's post-imperial decline and its legacy. In each instance, the British Empire was brought to light as a form of orientation, from which contrasting political assessments could be made (Black, in print).

Second, underscoring this multidirectionality was a sense of ambiguity regarding empire. Elsewhere, Meer (2015) has highlighted the ambiguity with which members of the Scottish Parliament refer to empire. Equally, for the English and Scottish press, references to Britain's imperial past were used to bolster contrasting opinions. Indeed, this sense of ambiguity has been identified in other contexts. For example, Littler (2005: 10) highlights how the 'incorporation of symbols of "the Commonwealth" and migrant communities' during the 2003 Golden Jubilee 'might [have] variously signif[ied] both progressive multiculturalism and the perpetuation of imperial discourses'. Such incorporation breaks down any exact or deterministic interpretation, from which references to the past follow a linear path which clearly distinguishes between 'what happened then' and 'what happens now'. Instead, this linearity is undermined in favor of a multidirectionality in which the incorporation of the former British Empire has been 'reworked ... with the Commonwealth as a species of somewhat *ambiguous* consolation' (Preston, 2014: 26 [italics added]). It is this ambiguous use of 'empire', in newspaper discourses, which points to underlying concerns in the *ways* in which constructions of the 'nation' draw upon *their* past.

Contra Billig (1995), what we see in the above examples, therefore, is an underlying sense of ambiguity which challenges any clear connection between the nation's past and 'our national community'. As can be seen from the findings depicted here, this history is used as a multidirectional narrative to help frame contrasting perspectives as well as provide alternative appraisals (Adams, 2014). Indeed, narratives of the past are not clear-cut, and, in media coverage, their use can reveal a number of important distinctions in the ways in which 'the nation' is constructed and framed (Black, 2015; Black, 2016b; Black, in print). The inherent ambiguity evident within these narratives is equally evident in the nature of the emergent discourses regarding the Commonwealth Games and the constitutional questions facing the Scottish nation and, in turn, the British state. Whilst some academic reflections on the Games sought to highlight the potential for the media to politicise the event to support the pro-independence and/or pro-union referendum campaigns (Harris and Skillen, 2016; Jarvie, 2017; Ochman, 2013), the Janus-faced symbolism of the Games' simultaneous association with Scottishness and Britishness thus undermined the potential for unambiguous or uncontested narratives regarding the political implications of the event. Therefore, whilst choreographed displays such as the opening ceremony of the Games can incorporate a range of symbolic illustrations of Scotland's history, heritage and character, it is possible to view and portray this symbolism through a multitude of contrasting lenses, underlining the multidirectionality of such events.

Moreover, this does not suggest that references to the British Empire are endlessly fluid or haphazardly used to promote particular positions (Zerubavel, 1995). Rather, the notion of a multidirectional and ambiguous account suggests that references to the British Empire were given some form of ‘direction’, and, therefore, as previously noted, were functionally used as a constitutive feature in contrasting reports. In fact, whether commenting upon: (a) the relative, yet, debatable, ease in which Britain negotiated the departure from its former colonies (*The Daily Telegraph*, 2014); (b) the ways in which the Games were presented as a lingering reminder of Britain’s imperial past (O’Sullivan, 2014); (c) the role performed by the Commonwealth during the First World War (*Daily Record*, 2014b; Torrance, 2014); (d) Glasgow’s position in the slave trade (Torrance, 2014); or (e) the ongoing campaign for the rights of postcolonial societies (Addley, 2014), debates on Scottish/British identity, Scottish independence and Commonwealth belonging, were rendered, debated and reflected upon through the lens of the former British Empire. What is apparent, therefore, is that when considered in relation to the historical legacy of former ‘global networks’, ambiguities between ‘the national’ and the ‘global’ – and this ‘global’ can be a former imperial system (the British Empire) or a union of member states (Commonwealth of Nations) – serve to emphasise the nation’s ‘continuing traction’ (Vernon, 2016: 24) in debates regarding the sustainability of the UK’s constitutional arrangement.

Indeed, given the aforementioned touting of an 'Empire 2.0' strategy by the UK involving the development of stronger trading relationships with Commonwealth nations following the UK's withdrawal from the EU (Adler-Nissen et al., 2017; Olusoga, 2017), the importance of reconsidering the nature of contemporary narratives of the legacy of Empire and the status of the modern Commonwealth has arguably gained pertinence. As has been noted elsewhere, the inability of the UK to fully acknowledge that the legacy of the British Empire is predominantly viewed in a negative light by politicians and citizens of Commonwealth nations continues to create a barrier for successfully developing relationships within the Commonwealth (Murphy, 2011; Srinivisan, 2007; Yeandle, 2014). Whilst scholars from Commonwealth nations have illustrated that successful acknowledgement of the arguments of post-colonial and post-imperial theorists regarding the negative implications and connotations of the Empire can facilitate a more critical appraisal of the Empire's legacy, the continued perpetuation of rose-tinted reflections on the British Empire, as evident within the domains of British politics and media journalism, suggests that a similarly critical engagement with the negative aspects of Britain's imperial history is lacking.

Indeed, although some of the more thoughtful media reflections on the Games offered some evidence of a critical appraisal of the imperial symbolism of the event, such examples were relatively scarce. It can therefore be argued that any attempts to establish an 'Empire 2.0', which places Commonwealth nations on an equal footing

within future political and economic relations, will require significant efforts to redress the continued perpetuation of whitewashed representations of the UK's imperial legacy.

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<sup>1</sup> Malcolm (2012: 77) highlights how Cricket 'provide[d] an excellent example of the way in which cricket was taken to a new cultural environment by British colonizers, was embraced by a colonized people, and was subsequently a vehicle for the assertion of a separate and distinct "national" identity'.

<sup>2</sup> England and Wales both voted to leave the EU, while Scotland and Northern Ireland opted to remain.

<sup>3</sup> With regard to Northern Ireland and Wales, both the Belfast Telegraph and the Western Mail are considered to be respective 'national' newspapers. Bearing in mind that this study sought to focus on the relationship between Scotland, the UK and the 2014 Glasgow Games, it was decided that the inclusion of Scottish publications would suffice in providing an adequate sample.