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# **“We tried to get rid of the stereotype”: Media representations of multicultural festivals in Glasgow, Scotland**

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## **“We tried to get rid of the stereotype”: Media representations of multicultural festivals in Glasgow, Scotland**

Multicultural festivals are more than a form of leisure and entertainment for the general public – they are often used as tools to educate the wider population about the culture of ethnic minority groups, promoting understanding and increasing tolerance of diversity. It has been argued that the ways in which multicultural events are represented in the media may help to resist and/or overcome negative stereotypes. Media narratives both construct and represent society, and in so doing they play a powerful role in shaping societal perceptions. Here we focus on in-depth case studies of two multicultural festivals held in Glasgow, Scotland. We ask: how do media narratives around these events convey and communicate the meanings and values of the ethnic minority communities? We investigate whether the media coverage usefully counters negative stereotypes and assess its potential to transform individuals and society. We conclude the ability of the media to be a platform for disseminating positive messaging and educating their readers is limited. Through the event narratives the media portray a version of Glasgow itself, essentially revealing the city in terms of its people and its place rather than using the festivals as an opportunity to facilitate meaningful conversations about cultural diversity.

**Keywords:** multicultural events, diversity, media narratives, representation, Scotland

Word count: 8517

### **Introduction**

Media narratives both construct and represent society, and in so doing they play a powerful role in shaping societal perceptions. Indeed, Wetherell and Potter (1992, p. 84) note that ‘power develops through ‘normalisation’, through defining what is usual and habitual and to be expected’ and the media has a significant role to play in this process of normalisation. This is particularly important for people, places and/or situations we may have little or no personal experience of (Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006; Crew, 2019; Happer & Philo, 2013). The media (by which we mean traditional print media for the purposes of this paper) also wields power regarding what is told and how it is

told. What we read in the media is filtered through the lens of journalists and editors who determine: what is relevant; whose perspective is included and whose is excluded; and how to frame the narrative for consumption (Denzin, 1996; Thorbjørnsrud & Figenschou, 2014). This in turn can focus public interest and shape debate (Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006; Crew, 2019; Happer & Philo, 2013).

These media power relations are particularly significant for marginalised groups and communities, who are often subjected to a discourse of ‘othering’ that includes negative and/or reductive stereotypes (Allen & Bruce, 2017; Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006; Crew, 2019; Happer & Philo, 2013; Paxton et al., 2011; Thorbjørnsrud & Figenschou, 2014; Triandafyllidou, 2018). Marginalised groups are often powerless to influence the discourse and create new, alternative content and their voices are therefore ignored at best or silenced at worst; debates that are relevant to them are seldom covered (Allen & Bruce, 2017; Denzin, 1996). However, there is some evidence to suggest that the power of the media can be harnessed by event organisers as a platform for disseminating positive messaging that educates the readership (Walters & Ruwhiu, 2019; Walters & Shaheer, 2021). In a Western context, multicultural festivals are not merely a form of leisure and entertainment for the general public – they are often viewed as a means to educate the wider (usually white) population about the culture of ethnic minority groups living in the community, and thus are commonly used as tools to promote understanding and increase tolerance of diversity (Duffy et al., 2019). It has been argued that the ways in which events for ethnic minority (and Indigenous) peoples are represented in the media may help to perpetuate, maintain, resist or overcome marginalisation (Allen & Bruce, 2017; Walters & Jepson, 2019).

In this paper we focus on in-depth case studies of two multicultural festivals held in Glasgow, Scotland – Mela and the Govanhill International Festival and Carnival (GIFC), established in 1990 and 2017 respectively. In the pursuit of a more meaningful understanding of multicultural events as sites of empowerment, we ask: how do the media narratives around these events convey and communicate the meanings and values of the ethnic minority communities, and how have these representations changed over time? We investigate whether the media coverage usefully counters negative stereotypes and what its potential is to transform both individuals and society (Mackley-Crump & Zemke, 2019). In so doing, we respond to calls to better understand the role of festivals

in multicultural societies (Mair & Weber, 2019) and add to the methodological repertoire of leisure studies by highlighting the value of media discourses as a lens through which to facilitate this understanding.

### **Festivals and the media**

George et al. (2015) consider events to be texts that convey and interpret a community's social order in multiple ways. Accordingly, public event narratives can tell 'stories about who 'we' are [. . .] to ourselves through the concerts and other events, and to the media, which retells those stories to others' (Karlsen, 2007, p. 186). Indeed, festivals are often organised as media platforms to promote a particular narrative of a city or destination, suggesting a mutually beneficial relationship between festivals and the media. Such narratives can promote cities as diverse places with a cosmopolitan outlook and colourful, vibrant festivities - multicultural festivals frequently play a valuable role in operationalising these messages (Kavaratzis, 2004; Walters & Inch, 2018). As city event portfolios are developed, multicultural festivals are deemed important assets, as long as they contribute to positive place branding and avoid politicising issues of race, ethnicity and identity. This, of course, can be reductive and reinforce superficial understandings of diversity through rendering invisible the real, material issues facing the city's ethnic minority migrant and Indigenous communities. Nevertheless, multicultural festivals and events that are deeply rooted in place, especially those staged in neighbourhoods that have experienced territorial stigmatisation (Wacquant, 2007), can fulfil important community functions, internally and in relation to external perceptions.

Multicultural events are regularly created and/or supported by local governments in order to demonstrate a welcoming, inclusive community, and provide an opportunity to encounter diversity in a safe environment (Duffy et al., 2019). Indeed, in Australia one of the most commonly employed anti-racism strategies used by local governments is the hosting of cultural festivals (Nelson, 2015). However, these events often also have deeper significance: they may be valued by members of Indigenous or ethnic minority communities as a means of maintaining intergenerational cultural links and identity, enhancing a sense of belonging and community, or resisting and challenging prevailing discourses and representations of their culture (Hassanli et al.,

2019, 2020; Mason 2015; Walters et al., 2021). Media coverage of multicultural events may thus be used as a platform to reinforce this messaging, educating the wider public about the nuances of different cultures and highlighting the contribution of ethnic minority groups to society (Walters & Shaheer, 2021). It can also function as a way of raising issues faced by marginalised groups, and/or help normalise diversity (Chen et al., 2018; Walters & Ruwhiu, 2019). There is a small but growing body of literature exploring how festivals in, by or for ethnic minority and Indigenous peoples are represented by the media, although to date the findings have been mixed.

In Canada, Indigenous peoples had an opportunity to raise public awareness of issues they were facing through media coverage of the 2017 World Indigenous Nations Games and the North American Indigenous Games. However, Chen et al. (2018) found that the media used their power to silence the more radical voices, questioning the legitimacy of the Canadian settler state. In New Zealand, Walters and Ruwhiu (2019) reported on 14 years of media coverage of the Māori festival of Puaka Matariki. Over the years, the articles became more in-depth and increasingly portrayed Māori worldview and incorporated Māori language, carrying a positive tone that disrupted typically negative media narratives and, indeed, allowed Māori to (re)gain control over how they were represented. In contrast, Walters and Shaheer (2021) found that media coverage of multicultural events in New Zealand was limited, thereby reducing its potential function as a platform to raise awareness of diversity and foster acceptance. They argued that ‘the media is complicit in maintaining stereotypes...[and] the opportunity that events provide for the media to help overcome discrimination, counter negative well-being and effect social change is currently being squandered’ (Walters & Shaheer, 2021, p. 211). Our paper seeks to build on this emerging body of work at the nexus of events and media, extending it into a new social, cultural and political context.

### **Research context: Mela and the Govanhill International Festival and Carnival**

Our case selections are both multicultural festivals held in Glasgow, Scotland. They originated from contrasting social and political contexts, which is reflected in the findings and warrants discussion here. The first, Mela, is the largest cultural event in the city. It began in 1990 as a small indoor celebration event at Tramway in the city’s Southside, as part of Glasgow’s year as the

European City of Culture. At the time, it was one of 1400 free ‘public entertainment’ events that received local government funding as part of a drive to demonstrate Glasgow’s renaissance as a post-industrial European city and position itself as a cultural destination for tourists and residents alike (Myerscough, 1991, p.15). It now attracts approximately 45,000 people each year to Kelvingrove Park in the city’s West End. Mela is based on the traditions of the Indian subcontinent; the word means ‘to meet’ in Sanskrit and the event has come to represent a meeting of people from a diverse range of cultures – not just South Asian (Glasgow Life, 2018). In 2019, the Scottish-Asian Creative Artists’ Network (ScrAN) were appointed as the new organisers of Mela, in association with Glasgow Life (an arms-length local government body), and introduced a new vision: they sought to make the festival a platform for activism through arts and culture, deliberately focusing on an exploration of the Scottish-Asian and British-Asian experience (BBC UK News, 2019).

The second festival, Govanhill International Festival and Carnival (GIFC) is strongly place-based, focused on Glasgow’s most ethnically diverse neighbourhood (Govanhill Community Development Trust, 2021a). Govanhill has a population of approximately 15,000 and a 2020 survey identified at least 88 languages and dialects spoken by those living and working in the neighbourhood (Govanhill Community Development Trust, 2021b). In recent years, media narratives have continually ‘demonised’ the area, particularly the Roma community (Clark, 2014; Mackay, 2018; Mullen, 2018), and the rationale behind the festival’s inception in 2017 was to generate awareness, understanding and tolerance of difference. Indeed, the festival website states explicitly that it, ‘is an anti-racist festival that celebrates the contribution immigrants have made to the diversity, culture, community and the rich history of the area of Govanhill’ (Govanhill Baths, 2021).

## **Methods**

### ***Data collection***

In March 2021, media articles about both festivals since their inception were sourced from three major daily Glasgow newspapers using Factiva, a global news database. The *Daily Record* is a

conservative Scottish national tabloid (average circulation 83,074 per issue), *The Herald* is a national broadsheet that also covers ‘local’ stories and the *Evening Times*<sup>1</sup> is a local broadsheet – all are published in Glasgow (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2021; Mullen, 2018). The search resulted in a total of 169 ‘meaningful’ articles about Mela and 10 articles about the Govanhill International Festival and Carnival (Table 1). ‘Meaningful’ in this context is defined as being something other than a simple listing of the date/time of the festival, that the article contained some descriptive elements within the text.

<b>Newspaper name</b>	<b>Mela</b>	<b>GIFC</b>
<i>Daily Record</i> (national)	2	0
<i>The Herald</i> (Glasgow)	49	1
<i>Evening Times</i> (Glasgow)	118	9
<b>Total articles</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>10</b>

Table 1. Number of ‘meaningful’ media articles about Mela and Govanhill International Festival and Carnival found in the three major Glasgow daily newspapers 1990-2020.

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with one GIFC and two Mela event programmers. Questions focused on their experiences of the festival, their goals and objectives, relationship with the media, the issues their communities faced and the relevance of the festival for overcoming these. With permission, the interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed verbatim and anonymised. The interviewees were all current event programmers, and we acknowledge that this is a limitation for the Mela data as we were unable to gain a first-hand historical perspective from the event programmers who were responsible for establishing the event. Ethics approval was gained for this study.

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<sup>1</sup> The *Evening Times* was rebranded as *Glasgow Times* in December 2019 - both names are used in the presentation of the findings as appropriate.



## ***Data analysis***

Inductive thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006) was carried out to identify changes in the nature of the media narratives over time. This is an iterative, flexible process that is suitable for investigating complex social phenomena such as this. The empirical material is first read through to gain familiarity then, across repeated readings, initial codes (extracts of data) are identified and organised into groupings that share a common theme. These basic themes are then collapsed into progressively broader, higher-order and more abstract themes over more phases of analysis. The final phase of analysis sees the researchers returning to the initial codes and extracts that comprise each higher-order theme to check for coherence and internal homogeneity (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In this instance, our focus was on how the articles represented the festivals - specifically, whether they included narratives around meanings and values of the ethnic minority communities, reinforced notions of 'the other', or assisted the event programmers' aims of normalising diversity and overcoming racial stereotypes. The analysis covered the headlines, accompanying images and article text. The researchers worked both independently and collaboratively across the phases of analysis, as a form of investigator triangulation (Decrop, 2004). While two of the researchers carried out the thematic analysis, the third acted as a 'critical outsider', discussing and assessing the interpretation of the data and providing another perspective as the analysis progressed (Lofland et al., 2006).

## **Findings**

We believed (not unreasonably, in our view) that the nature and *raison d'être* of both the Mela and GIFC events provided the media with an opportunity to educate and inform the newspapers' readership about the different cultures of the diverse range of *ethnic minority communities* living in Glasgow, as with the Puaka Matariki festival in New Zealand (Walters & Ruwhiu, 2019). The media narratives examined in our research instead essentially framed the narrative around *Glasgow* through the lens of these two multicultural events, largely ignoring the voices of ethnic minority communities and debates relevant to them (Chen et al., 2018; Walters & Shaheer, 2021). Two

themes were identified in the media narratives – representations of the ‘people’, and representations of the ‘place’ (Figure 1). Each will be discussed in turn, and illustrated with excerpts from the articles. We finish the findings with a section devoted to ‘bringing it all together’.

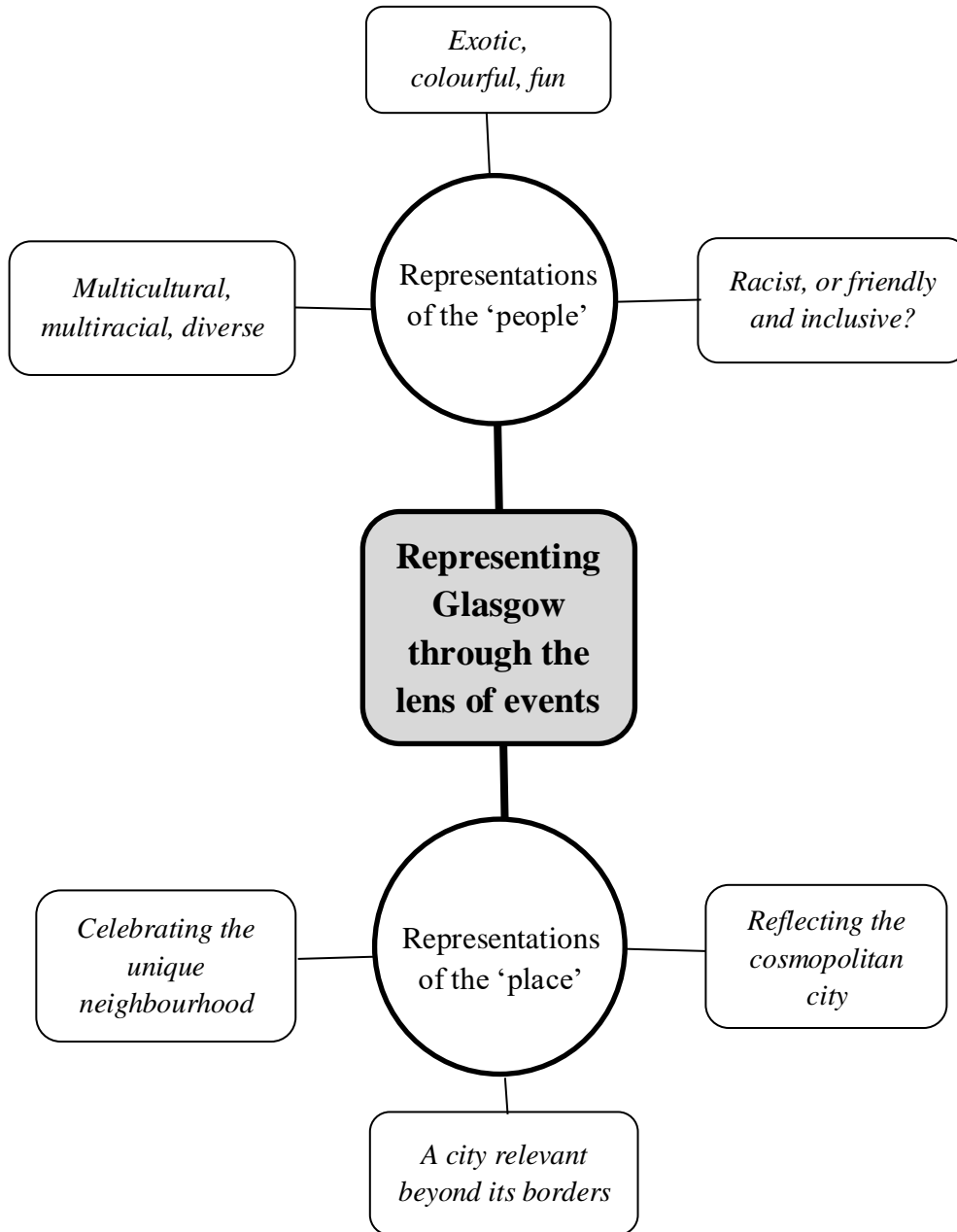


Figure 1: Thematic network derived from the inductive analysis of Mela and Govanhill International Festival and Carnival event media narratives in Glasgow, Scotland.

## *Representations of the 'people'*

Glasgow's people were represented through Mela and GIFC narratives in three ways: (1) as multicultural, multiracial and diverse; (2) as exotic, colourful and fun; and (3) as racist – or friendly and inclusive.

### *Multicultural, multiracial, diverse*

Interestingly, there was no coverage of Mela for the first 7 years of its existence (in the newspapers we looked at), but narratives from 1997-2000 highlighted the event's focus on Asian and Indian sub-continent cultures (albeit without elaborating any further on what these were) while also listing other ethnic minority cultural 'attractions' that would be performing, as this excerpt from 2000 illustrates:

... the Millennium Mela at Queen's Park presents artists and performers from the Indian sub-continent. They will perform alongside African, Spanish and Irish artists all resident in Glasgow to provide a heady cultural mix... (Alice Mackenzie, *The Herald*, 26 July 2000)

In 2001 there was a subtle but enduring shift in the discourse, with media narratives repeatedly positioning Mela as the generic embodiment of the multicultural, multiracial and diverse nature of Glasgow's population, a 'festival of diversity', if you like:

The annual Mela festival in Kelvingrove Park on July 27 will highlight Glasgow's multi-cultural makeup in a flamboyant reflection of the city's diversity. ('Mela', *Evening Times*, 20 June 2003)

Sponsored by O2, Glasgow Mela celebrates Glasgow's multi-cultural and multi-racial diversity and is based on the traditions and customs of the Indian sub-continent... Councillor Stephen Curran, a board member of Culture and Sport Glasgow, said: "...The Mela is a true reflection of Glasgow's cultural history and once again it promises to be a showcase of our diversity." (Catriona Stewart, *Evening Times*, 29 April 2010)

In our interview with Mela's new event programmers, one mentioned their discomfort with this – and their active resistance to it:

When we got there, we were a little bit confused because the Mela actually, according to the guidelines we were given, we had to cater for African, Chinese, Indian, Pakistani – there was a whole line of stuff. And I actually refused because I don't know Chinese culture. I don't know African culture. How can I programme for it? I only know my culture [...] If I'm going to speak a bit strongly, I actually felt it was a bit unfair to have any organisation say "ok we need something diverse let's just put everything into the one programme and that's us". I wasn't very comfortable with that. Every culture has its thing. Every culture has its beauty, something to say. You can't just have them all talking on top of each other, you need to give them their space.

They spoke of the need to overcome cultural stereotyping, and their determination to showcase the depth and breadth of South Asian culture within the Mela programming:

First of all we tried to get rid of the stereotype [...] the Mela has always been very Punjab oriented. The Punjab area is Northern India. It's got its own language and its own type of music. And it's always been very Punjab-oriented. [...] There's more to the Mela than just the North of India.

While this may at first glance appear to contradict their concerns noted above about homogenisation through the directive to incorporate multiple cultures under the umbrella of Mela, there is a subtle difference in focus. The cultural breadth of Mela had increased over the years, from a celebration of South Asian cultures to the amalgamation of seemingly all other ethnic minority cultures living in Glasgow – African, Latin American, European. The new programmers sought a refocusing of Mela on South Asian culture, but one that demonstrated the depth of such culture far beyond the (stereotypical) Punjab orientation – a deliberate narrowing down to one geographic area while at the same time broadening to distinguish individual cultures within that area. They noted that while the event had been run well for the previous 15 years, 'the education part was lacking' and some of the wider organising team were oblivious to the cultural nuances in dance, or of the daily challenges faced by the community. Given that this team had been

responsible for the press releases, it is perhaps unsurprising that there was little in the way of meaningful cultural information or coverage of issues of specific relevance to Glasgow's South Asian community.

In a similar manner, the GIFC was represented in media narratives as a celebration of 'a uniquely diverse part of Glasgow' (Holly Lennon, *Evening Times*, 10 August 2017). However, one brief article did mention 'celebrating the contribution immigrants make to the diversity, culture and community of the area' (Catriona Stewart, *Evening Times*, 17 August 2020). This illustrates a nuanced difference in representation from that of the Mela media coverage, which seems to effectively position the homogenous multicultural 'Other' as an attraction and source of entertainment. This GIFC narrative explicitly recognises and acknowledges 'immigrants' as a group, and rather than being 'on show' the article draws attention to their (albeit unspecified) contribution to their Glasgow neighbourhood – perhaps as a response to the typically negative portrayals of Govanhill and its residents (Mullen, 2018). These distinctions reflect both the different contexts in which the events were established, and the different perspectives the media has chosen to take in representing them – which may in turn be related to the level of interest and engagement the journalists have with the events, and how they experience them.

### *Exotic, colourful, fun*

As we have suggested, the media narratives of Mela, and to a slightly lesser extent GIFC, represented the people of Glasgow as multicultural, multiracial and diverse. There was arguably an opportunity for the media to elaborate on this, to provide in-depth coverage of different cultures as a form of education for their readership rather than treating them as homogenous. However, those performing at the event were frequently 'Othered' through the use of such stereotypical and reductive descriptors as 'exotic', 'colourful' and 'fun', as were the food and other items being sold at stalls:

Glasgow erupted into a sea of colour and sound as the annual Mela took over Kelvingrove Park on Sunday...Visitor's [sic] were welcomed by Japanese drummers before their senses were seduced by the sight of Greek and Brazilian dancers and some sensational aromas from the food stalls. (Lesley Quinn, *Evening Times*, 21 June 2010)

Kelvingrove Park will be transformed into a whirl of colour and music with the launch of this year's Mela...This new, large open space will allow people to savour a feast of exotic food while enjoying live performances on offer across the whole park. (Catriona Stewart, *Evening Times*, 9 May 2012)

Kelvingrove Park exploded with colour as the annual Mela got under way...Exotic food stalls, a marketplace and kids' zone were created inside the park for the family fun day. (Holly Lennon, *Evening Times*, 3 July 2017)

These excerpts also illustrate how representations of Glasgow's people as the exotic and colourful 'other' have been used in the creation and staging of a certain affective urban atmosphere. Mela in particular has thus contributed to a positive destination personality and image (Papadimitriou et al., 2015), and we will return to this point in more depth below. We identified less of this type of representation in the GIFC narratives, perhaps because some of the journalists were more aware of the need to deal sensitively with an area that has been stigmatised previously.

#### *Racist? Or friendly and inclusive?*

In contrast to England where there has been public discussion about racism, Scotland has been relatively silent on the issue; the political narrative of egalitarianism suggests racism is absent. This is a powerful myth, as racism in Scotland is deeply entrenched and problematic (Bradley, 2006; Davidson et al., 2018; Ross et al., 2008). We identified two distinct tones in the media narratives around their acknowledgement of racism. Mela articles largely avoided direct mention of the issue, instead focusing on the positive messaging of multiculturalism and diversity as we have already demonstrated. Nevertheless, in coverage of the 2002 Cultural Diversity celebrations one Mela article acknowledged a need to break down barriers which implied the existence of tensions in the city:

The Mela is an important event in breaking down barriers and will play a big part in the Cultural Diversity 2002 celebrations. During the preparations every community in Glasgow has had the opportunity to contribute, and the result will reflect the rich diversity of the city. Mela co-ordinator Caralin Montgomery said: "One of the aims of the project is to create an understanding and/or acceptance of the different cultures that prevail in our

city, offering a unique opportunity for these many diverse communities to come together.” The project also seeks to transcend not only racial but also religious, cultural and generational barriers that exist in the city, through music, dance and other art forms. (‘Enjoy City of Cultures’, *Evening Times*, 18 July 2002)

Two notable ‘outreach’ programmes were incorporated into Mela over the years. The first, in 2011, was the inclusion of performances by school groups, and the second was the ‘Mela on Your Doorstep’ initiative in 2015, whereby a ‘taster’ version of Mela was taken into other neighbourhoods. Media articles represented these as beneficial for the promotion of tolerance (and thus, by inference, for overcoming racism), noting the importance of knowledge about other cultures, and the opportunity to encounter them:

[One entertainer said] “Children are so open to experiencing different cultures and this celebration provides a wonderful opportunity to learn a little more about Indian traditions and customs, something which can only help to promote cultural diversity across Scotland.” (Catriona Stewart, *Evening Times*, 13 June 2011)

Glasgow is a city which benefits from having so many people from different nationalities, backgrounds and cultures living and working together. The Mela is a way to rejoice in that fact and share food, music, dance and shopping. It is a window into other ways of life and with knowledge comes understanding and tolerance. (Vivienne Nicoll, *Evening Times*, 15 June 2015)

We therefore see that media representations of the Mela broached the notion of racism obliquely, seldom acknowledging its presence but nevertheless suggesting that there was a need to understand other cultures and be welcoming of them. However, amongst these veiled references to racism was scattered a somewhat contradictory ‘Glasgow as welcoming and inclusive of all cultures’ discourse, particularly after 2015 when the notion of ‘friendliness’ was oft-repeated:

[City Councillor] Siddique added: “The Glasgow Mela is a celebration of the city’s incredibly rich and diverse communities and provides an outstanding opportunity for

everyone to come together and celebrate our pride in our shared cultures. Over the last 25 years, we've seen many positive changes in our great city and the Glasgow Mela is an expression, through art and culture, of our city's incredible friendliness and inclusion.” (Tristan Stewart-Robertson, *Daily Record*, 8 April 2015)

We now turn our attention to the media coverage of the GIFC which, in contrast, openly mentioned racism as problematic. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the negative media coverage of the area which is frequently race-based (Mullen, 2018). From the very first media article in 2017 the GIFC was positioned as an anti-racist event, and a way of promoting unity by bringing people together to celebrate diversity. The article focused on guest speaker Jeremy Corbyn (UK Labour Party Leader and Leader of the Opposition) and his speech about peace, unity, human rights and the impact of racism and other forms of discrimination at the Glastonbury music festival the previous week. It also highlighted other anti-racist rock and reggae music festivals happening in Glasgow that weekend. Less than a month later, an article noted that racist graffiti had been scrawled on the walls of Govanhill Baths, a community hub, and on phone boxes in the area, and linked this to the announcement of the upcoming GIFC.

Jim [administrator at the Baths] said: “It can be scary, although we have faced it before... We have all different nationalities using the Baths so it's unpleasant for us to have people walking in here past [the graffiti]... This won't stop us. It only makes us more determined to hold our event and make it a success in order to stand against this.”

In 2019, the week after the third edition of the GIFC, Catriona Stewart (the *Evening Times* journalist who had covered the GIFC since its inception) wrote of her experiences hosting a panel to launch a book festival that was part of the GIFC. The topic of the panel was ‘Govanhill: More United than Divided?’ and she detailed the racist backlash and threats the event had sparked.

The difference in these media narratives illustrates the importance of their place-based context and can be seen as reflecting two dominant narratives regarding racism in Scotland. The Mela narratives align with the notion that, in contrast with England, Scotland is a more progressive and egalitarian society, making it particularly welcoming for migrants and racialised minorities. The



GIFC narratives resonate strongly with the assertion that, following a history of Scotland's involvement in colonialism and slavery, 'everyday racism remains a deeply structuring force distorting the lives of those we know as the "black and brown Scots"' (Davidson et al., 2018, p. 10).

### *Representations of the 'place'*

The second theme we identified in our analysis was the representation of Glasgow as a place, on three interrelated scales: (a) the neighbourhoods and their unique characteristics; (b) the cosmopolitan city; and (c) the relevance of the city beyond its borders.

#### *Celebrating the unique neighbourhood*

In contrast with the more generalised association of Mela with the whole of Glasgow, GIFC is presented as a festival strongly rooted in the neighbourhood of Govanhill, in a way that is crucial to its purpose and identity. Indeed, as discussed in the previous section, the media articles regularly associate the festival with a 'diverse' neighbourhood whose characteristics make it distinctive to the rest of the city. The festival contributes to the emergence of a positive representation of an area which has long been associated with negative discourses:

For an area much beleaguered and blighted, a week dedicated to celebrating the highlights of Govanhill, the hard work of its volunteers, the lesser known positives and the spirit of the place should be something that every single resident can be proud of and enjoy [...] it must be possible to accept there is good in the area as well as bad. (Catriona Stewart, *Evening Times*, 13 August 2019)

This excerpt echoes the findings of Walters and Shaheer (2021), whereby media narratives of marginalised groups may appear at first glance to be countering negative stereotypes but in fact first draw attention to the negative and thus serve to reinforce the stigmatising discourses. This depiction foregrounds the dominant (negative) narratives that have been associated with Govanhill. Over the past decade, the neighbourhood has been associated with hosting large numbers of newly-arrived migrants (and in particular members of the Roma community) and for being at the centre of discourses linked to the racial stigmatisation of these new populations. Over

time, this process has led to a ‘territorial stigmatisation’ of the neighbourhood, through which Govanhill is perceived as a problem place symbolising a Scottish version of the ghetto (Mullen, 2018). This was recognised by the GIFC organisers who explicitly linked this to the festival objective:

Govanhill has a reputation – an unfair reputation – and there are still people on shouty Facebook groups, UKIP [far right populist political party] type – who seem to think there was a golden age and the immigrants have ruined it, type of thing. [...] So it’s important that way. It’s a demonstration – not in terms of demonstrating against something – we’re demonstrating that this is Govanhill [...]. It’s colourful, it’s noisy, it’s diverse, you know.

In contrast, Mela media narratives do not represent such a strong connection with a particular neighbourhood – it is as if the location does not matter. Indeed, the festival has moved over the years from the original location in Tramway, a performing arts venue located in Glasgow’s Southside, to an outdoor area in the same neighbourhood (Queen’s Park) in 1997. It relocated to Kelvingrove Park, in the city’s upmarket West End, in 2002 where it has remained. These successive relocations have gradually moved the festival away from where most of the South Asian community live – thus reflecting the event’s role in conveying the image of the cosmopolitan Glasgow that the city’s leaders wish to project.

Nevertheless, the rooting of Mela in ‘neighbourhood’ is not completely absent. As noted earlier, from 2015 to 2017 the new Mela on Your Doorstep programme aimed to reconnect the festival with local communities spread out in the city’s neighbourhoods. This initiative led Mela to regain visibility in the Southside neighbourhoods where the event started (thanks to events located, for example, in Tramway), while extending its reach to new (largely white) areas of the city such as Barmulloch in the Northeast. However, unlike media coverage of GIFC this connection to local neighbourhoods is not represented as a way to empower the ethnic minority communities on show. Rather, it is promoted as a more accessible way for residents to discover the culture of ‘others’:

Harinder Berman, 60, producer of the Glasgow Mela, said: “The whole point of today is to give local people something different on their doorstep. Some of these people have not seen these cultures and it is valuable to share the diversity. It is a good way of allowing

people to find out what other cultures are like.” (‘What a song and dance as the Mela goes on the move’, *Evening Times*, 20 April 2015)

### *Reflecting the cosmopolitan city*

In media coverage, both festivals were represented as a reflection of, and a tool to promote, the image of a city that has become increasingly cosmopolitan. The notion of cosmopolitanism is nebulous and complex, but at its core refers both to a community that has citizens from around the world, and one where all are citizens in a single community – in short, one that values cultural diversity but encourages a broader recognition and acceptance of shared humanity (Kleingeld & Brown, 2019). While most of the focus of the GIFC media narratives was on the rooting of the festival in the specific neighbourhood of Govanhill, there were nevertheless some suggestions that the festival was representative of the city as a whole (for example, the *Herald* headline ‘City’s piping-hot celebration of global cultures’ on 21 August 2017).

It was in the Mela media narratives where this relationship between the festival and the cosmopolitan city was strongest. Over the years, this link was made thanks to consistent assertions which reflected the nature of cosmopolitanism and contributed to distinguishing the city from its competitors (McGillivray, 2019; Papadimitriou et al., 2015). First, many articles framed Mela in terms of its cultural diversity, as we have already seen. This relationship between Mela and the city was used to promote cosmopolitanism as an element which contributed to the quality of life in the city, and a sense of pride amongst its residents:

It will be fun, creative and cosmopolitan, providing the perfect medium for sharing and enjoying all the cultures which make Glasgow such a vibrant place in which to live. (McFadden, *Evening Times*, 26 July 2001)

Adults and children alike will revel in this showcase for all the city's ethnic groups, and bear out Glasgow's reputation as a city which values everyone's cultural heritage. (‘Enjoy City of Cultures’, *Evening Times*, 18 July 2002)

By 2007, a subtle shift in the Mela narrative was identified, towards an emphasis on similarities across cultures and the minimising of difference:

Glasgow is a city rich in diversity and the Mela is a celebration of all that binds us together. (Nicoll, *Evening Times*, 30 May 2007)

[An attendee said] "...The festival is a very good way to bring people from all backgrounds together. It sends out the message that, although people are different, we are all still part of a larger community." ('Making a Mela of it', *The Herald*, 18 June 2007)

Thus, particularly through the media discourses surrounding Mela, we see not only continuous references to the 'cultural diversity' element of cosmopolitanism, but also a sense of pride implicit in the representation of 'shared culture' (Kleingeld & Brown, 2019). This narrative, whether accurate or merely rhetorical, seemed to sit uncomfortably with the discourses of racism identified in the media narratives and discussed earlier in this paper.

#### *A city relevant beyond its borders*

While exposing the rooting of both festivals in the local spaces of the city, we also identified the ways in which the media utilised the festivals to frame narratives that connected the city with broader movements, and thus convey a sense of its relevance beyond its borders. First, the coverage of both festivals compared them to similar events held in other UK cities. For example, GIFC was promoted as the Scottish equivalent of London's popular Notting Hill Carnival, established in the 1960s largely in response to racial attacks in the city. In the early years of media coverage of Mela, the festival was situated in relation to other events of the same type in Edinburgh and Bradford, noting that the Glasgow Mela could aspire to grow to 'rival' them both.

Second, narratives surrounding Mela and GIFC were used to frame Glasgow as relevant on the global stage, but in differing ways. Mela was depicted first and foremost in relation to a global artistic community. It was represented as an event with the power to attract artists from around the world, showcased a diverse range of global music and performance genres, and created an atmosphere that portrayed Glasgow as a truly global city:

[Mela] will be filled with some of the biggest names in urban, Banghra and Bollywood music [...] performers brought a touch of Bollywood, Scottish Highland and Colombian dancing to Glasgow today (Catriona Stewart, *Evening Times*, 9 May 2012)

We are looking forward to an incredible event and to welcoming global artists to Glasgow to join local talent in entertaining the crowds (Victoria Brennan, *Evening Times*, 21 May 2016)

For the GIFC, references were first and foremost linked with global political activism (and especially anti-racist movements), from Rock Against Racism to Black Lives Matter. These global connections were used to legitimise the need to organise an event in Glasgow which linked to an anti-racism agenda. This was illustrated by the promotion of the festival as a local interpretation of events that had already taken place elsewhere (e.g. Notting Hill Carnival, Rock Against Racism), as well as acknowledgement of the importance of broader global anti-racism movements:

We didn't want to cancel such an important event, especially at this current time with the Black Lives Matter protests. We are actually launching the festival with a special Black Lives Matter Mural that has been created by our youth club over the past few weeks (Stacey Mullen, *Evening Times*, 21 August 2020).

The connection to this body of references appeared all the more important as Govanhill was promoted as a particularly relevant area for the expression of issues linked to race relations, multiculturalism and migration in the UK.

### ***Bringing it all together...***

In the case of Mela, while the rhetoric of 'celebrating diversity' was consistently strong throughout the 24 years of media coverage, we argue that its use was reminiscent of a destination marketing strategy promoting Glasgow to internal and external stakeholders (Rosemberg, 2000). In the early years this narrative portrayed a city breaking down barriers and promoting tolerance, and this evolved gradually into an example of the success of this action, showcasing Glasgow as an attractive place to live in due to its status as a global, cosmopolitan, multicultural city. The avoidance of politicising issues of race, ethnicity and identity cemented Mela's role as part of an event portfolio contributing to positive place branding (Kavaratzis, 2004; McGillivray, 2019; Papadimitriou et al., 2015). However, in doing so, Mela media narratives tended to perpetuate stereotypes and perform 'othering'. So, even though South Asian and related cultures were praised

for the degree of diversity, authenticity and colour that they brought to Glasgow, they remained mostly an exotic feature – an attraction and form of entertainment that residents and visitors were invited to experience vicariously on one day of the year. Similarly, while the media narratives of the GIFC highlighted deficits such as crime, racism, squalor and particular negative characteristics of the Roma community, they also emphasised strengths based on tolerance, diversity and living together with difference.

We now return to our observation of the amount of media coverage each event received. The lack of coverage of Mela from 1990-1997 was perhaps a reflection of its small size in those early years but, given it was specially created as part of the European City of Culture celebrations, highlighting the power of the media (editors and journalists) to decide what is ‘newsworthy’ (Denzin, 1996; Thorbjørnsrud & Figenschou, 2014). The GIFC similarly received relatively scant meaningful media coverage, with just 10 articles since its inception in 2017. Some may argue that this simply reflects the more localised, place-based context of the event in comparison with Mela. Indeed, a cursory search of all Glasgow newspapers reveals higher coverage in the local *Glasgow South & Eastwood Extra* weekly newspaper, with 2-3 articles per year from 2017-2019. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, we pursue this argument for a moment to demonstrate a key point. While the negative gaze of the media on Govanhill has been highlighted by others (see for example Clark, 2014; Mullens, 2018), it was unclear whether this was only in the local press. We were curious about whether the major daily newspapers covered negative stories about Govanhill, and carried out a search using the term ‘Govanhill’ in the Factiva database. We found 885 articles across the 3 newspapers from 2017 to 2020 (84 in the *Daily Record*, 111 in *The Herald* and 690 in the *Evening Times*). The media *does*, therefore, provide coverage of local activities in Govanhill, but it is weighted towards negative stories such as crime, child sexual exploitation, drug use, racism, housing issues and social concerns – the implications of which we discuss below.

## **Conclusion**

The title of our paper deliberately foregrounds the aspirations of the organisers of the two multicultural events in our study, as this forms the foundation for our examination into the capacity of the media to help or hinder this goal to counter negative stereotypes. It was this potential to

transform both individuals and society that we sought to explore (Mackley-Crump & Zemke, 2019; Mair & Weber, 2019). However, our analysis demonstrates that the role of media as an agent for change is limited in the case of the GIFC and Mela. We find the media has used these events to represent *Glasgow*, rather than representing the *ethnic minority communities* themselves and helping ‘get rid of the stereotype’. Research from New Zealand has found that while the media narratives may seem to promote the ‘normalisation’ of diversity at first glance, this is largely superficial, with journalists foregrounding – and thus drawing attention to – (negative) stereotypes (Allen & Bruce, 2017; Walters & Shaheer, 2021). Media representation of Mela and GIFC similarly constructs difference through the marking of ethnic difference. Furthermore, the limited amount of coverage of these ‘good news’ events in the media does little to overcome the tide of ‘bad news’ in terms of the volume of messaging. Like Chen et al. (2018), we believe that multicultural events provide valuable potential platforms for the media to engage in meaningful ways with these communities, bringing both encouraging and uplifting stories, and community issues and concerns, to the attention of the wider Glasgow community. This is currently not the case, with our findings aligning with Allen and Bruce’s (2017) assertion that mainstream media *represents*, rather than *dialogues with*, ethnic minority communities.

Our findings therefore point to the complex role of multicultural festivals in influencing discussions about ethnic minority communities and their rooting in specific places. The impact of these festivals is not one-dimensional: they can both perpetrate *and* challenge existing stereotypes (Walters & Jepson, 2019). This is not just linked to the promotion of ‘negative’ or ‘positive’ discourses of ethnic minorities. As the media narratives examined in this research show, even supposedly ‘positive’ discourses can contribute to a process of ‘othering’ if they are superficial and formulated through the lens of exoticism (Staszak, 2009) or draw attention to negative stereotypes. Our research therefore has implications for both the media and event organisers, if the latter’s aspiration to ‘get rid of stereotypes’ is to be fully realised. The first is that organisers of multicultural events need to recognise the capacity of the media to be an ally, and the second is that the media needs to understand that how they represent such events has implications for the communities.

The key to effecting change lies in creating a genuine dialogue between the media and the communities about whom they write, and this is particularly important where journalists do not come from, or have lived experience of, those communities (Allen & Bruce, 2017). We believe the organisers of multicultural events have the potential to form a natural conduit between the two. This may take the form of event organisers providing story angles to journalists that foreground interesting aspects of life and culture that are on display at the events. For example, rather than describing food and dance as merely ‘exotic, colourful and fun’, the media could be encouraged to print stories about the meanings and significance of different foods and dances. This then suggests a valuable avenue for future work: recruiting event organisers and journalists to work together to co-create meaningful representations of multicultural events that deliberately seek to challenge and disrupt negative stereotypes, and in so doing, create a new definition of what is ‘usual and habitual and to be expected’ (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p.84).

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