

## **Cinematic representations of Scottish national identity: *Sunshine on Leith* (2013), a case study**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Geographers are increasingly interested in how film functions as a ‘social cartography of meaning creation and identity formation’ at multiple sites and scales (Lukinbeal & Zimmerman 2006 p.315). Dexter Fletcher’s *Sunshine on Leith* (2013) provides a clear example of how film can be read as an indicator of the cultural, social and geo-political discourses of its era. Loosely under the guise of a romantic drama, *Sunshine on Leith* is a jukebox musical featuring songs by the Scottish band duo *The Proclaimers*. The narrative primarily centres on two soldiers, Davy and Ally and the emotional travails they encounter once they return home from Afghanistan (McLean 2013).

Predominantly engaging in close visual analysis at the site of the ‘text’ and the ‘reader’, this paper explores the sites and scales of *Sunshine on Leith*’s onscreen representation and its reception. This paper suggests that one way to better conceptualise national identity is through the concept of ‘modality’. It draws upon theories of nationalism to establish four modalities that compose collective identity, namely: shared narrative, landscape, ritual, and optimism. Emphasising the spatiality of these modalities within different sites and scales is crucial to a nuanced understanding of contemporary nationalist movements, particularly in the quickly evolving era of nationalism in the UK. Contemporary Scottish cinema is simultaneously local, national and international in its reception. By exploring how each of these specific socio-geographic scales produce different levels of meaning, the paper reflects on the multi-scaled nature of identity formation. This paper is guided by two research questions:

- 1) How does *Sunshine on Leith* (2013) use visual modalities of national identity to construct and contest representations of Scotland?
- 2) How does the reception of *Sunshine on Leith* (2013) reflect the geographic and multi-scaled nature of Scottish national identity?

## **BACKGROUND & METHODS**

The visual emphasis of geography stretches as far back as the discipline itself, encompassing the works of numerous researchers and academics drawn to ‘visual metaphors and techniques’ (Matless 1996 p.290). Although the earliest writing on film in a geographic context were produced in the 1950s, its fixation lay on encouraging geographers to shoot clips of landscapes in ‘as faithful manner as possible, such that the students could gain a sense of what it would be like to experience those places first hand’ (Knight 1957). Such attempts to ‘develop a clear picture of reality’ contributed to geography’s so-called ‘visual blind spot’; the primacy of visualisation in the production of geographical knowledge inhibited an epistemological reflection on the nature of visibility (Schlottmann 2009).

The fundamental element of this representational film geography is the binary relationship between the image, or its perception, and the object; between the ‘real,’ as in that which the camera has filmed, and the ‘reel,’ that which is shown on the screen. This ontology of representation dominated the discourse throughout the late twentieth century, seen as overtly as Benton’s (1995) paper titled ‘Will the Real/Reel Los Angeles Please Stand Up?’. Ushered in by works of film geographers such as Aitken and Dixon over the past decade, a new line of research that challenged this binary, primarily by arguing that it was based on the false assumption that the ‘real’ is ontologically stable (Dixon and Grimes 2004).

Among the most persisting lines of literature within film geography is the concept of ‘national cinema’; The Geographical Magazine evaluated how nations portrayed the cultural ‘customs and behaviours of the people’s everyday lives’ as early as the 1950s (Griffith 1953 p.443).

Development of this research followed a recognition that ‘film can be used to cognitively map the geopolitical imaginary’, subverting cinema’s necessary function as being merely ‘to portray’ (Jameson 1992 p.). Speaking about Bollywood’s influence on Indian national identity, Kao and Rozario argued that ‘while the diaspora utilises Bollywood in constructing its identity, the diaspora likewise informs Bollywood’s imagined spaces’ (2008 p.313). In this way, cinema and national identity were viewed as dynamic, fluid and interdependent systems that both construct and contest each other. As such, contemporary geographic research on national cinema shifted focus onto relations between the ‘production of spaces and the production of scales’ to deconstruct the power relations that contrive and constrain the political, racial and cultural elements of national identities (Aitken and Dixon 2006).

Despite the prevalence of scholarship surrounding Scottish cinema from both film and political studies, little attention has been paid by film geography. Scottish film literature has traditionally focused on debunking ruralist and romantic depictions of Scotland, such as *Braveheart* (Gibson 1995), which were scrutinised for being ‘limited to narratives of fantasy, more often projected from outside the country rather than from within’ (McArthur 1982). The wave of cinematic responses to such representations ushered the arrival of New Scottish Cinema, introduced by Douglas Petrie in 2000. New Scottish Cinema was viewed as a devolved cinema that, like the devolved Scottish parliament, took a measure of control away from the power of London-based British film funding and established its own national identity (Petrie 2000). Yet as academic discussion progressed, researchers began challenging the label of New Scottish Cinema as not capturing the entire output of contemporary Scottish cinema; ‘the films produced are too

complex and contradictory to allow for a clear definition of Scottish cinema to be carved out' (Neely 2008 p.4).

Emerging in current research is the sense that the flourishing of academic analysis of Scottish cinema since the millennium has become rather narrow, revolving around relatively few key films and filmmakers (Brown 2011). In addition, such investigations have generally been limited to representations at the national level, concealing the multiplicity of interpretations to films at the international and local scaled. This paper adds to the increasing diversity of Scottish films currently found in the literature and, in doing so, hopefully sheds light on the multitude of ways in which Scottish cinema can be used to construct and re-construct national identity.

Geographic research of national identity has been diverse and often problematic, not least because national identity has its own elusive, multi-faceted and evolving definition. This paper suggests that one way to better comprehend the geographic diversity of how national identity is constructed is by employing the concept of 'modality'. Unlike broader definitions of collective identity, national identity is entirely social in its construction (Anderson 1983), formed through certain commonalities in peoples' lived experiences. These lived norms — or 'modalities' — represent a variety of social elements from ethnicity, religion, culture, history, music and many more (Moaddell 2014). Conceptualising national identity as an amalgam of modalities captures the configurations of the homogeneous elements that may exist within a heterogeneous context (Smith 1998). In this way, the concept allows for a more nuanced approach to the geographically diverse subject of national identity. While Scottish national identity comprises a multitude of

modalities, this paper closely analyses four: shared political narrative, landscape, ritual and optimism.

## **ANALYSIS PART I: MODALITIES OF NATIONAL IDENTITY**

### **Shared Narrative**

*Sunshine on Leith* tracks three romantic relationships within a working class family in Leith, a district of Edinburgh. One particular relationship, between Davy and Yvonne, can be read as an allegorical narrative of Scotland and its position within the Union. On his first night home from his military duty in Afghanistan, Davy is introduced by his sister to her English friend and colleague Yvonne at a pub. Upon discovering that Yvonne is English, Davy assumes a comedically long pause with a visible look of disdain on his face, followed by an exasperated, ‘...English?!’. The dialogue and acting during this scene serves to reinforce the often hostile but humorous attitudes between Scotland and England. However, their subsequent onscreen partnership offers more than an opportunity for amusing interactions. Later in the night, Yvonne raises a shot of tequila and challenges Davy with the simple words “Are you in?”. His swift reply, “Oh, I’m in.” can be read both as a literal intent to join Yvonne in getting drunk and as figurative of the union between Scotland and England. Again, the notion of ‘union’ is symbolically affirmed when Davy and Yvonne first kiss and embrace atop Carlton Hill in the following scene. While not only offering a panoramic backdrop of Edinburgh for this scene, Carlton Hill is also a historic icon of Scotland’s nationalist movement, mostly recently as the venue of the 2004 ‘Declaration of Calton Hill’ which outlined the demands for a future Scottish republic.

As is evident in the current political climate, the negotiations of this complex dynamic onscreen cannot be wholly positive. While Davy and Yvonne grow closer together throughout the film, their relationship takes a turn during the fight scene at Davy’s parents’ anniversary party. After Davy’s sister turns down a marriage proposal, a mass brawl develops and Yvonne, horrified by Davy’s aggression, flees the party. This moment can also be read as a personification of stereotypes and markers of ‘difference’ between the two nations. Scotland is often represented as

the ‘wild, aggressive and untamed’ northern neighbour of the English and is repeatedly used as a divisive technique in national rhetoric (Mupotsa & Kreutzfeldt 2016). Projecting such characterisations onto the couple works to problematise their relationship and thus explore complex national relations at more personal and accessible level.

This encounter is followed up with another discussion between Davy and Yvonne later in the film. Yvonne, searching for a confirmation of Davy’s commitment to their relationship, asked him if he would ever move to England to stay with her:

I wanna know if you'd come with me. To England?!

Does it matter where?

Well, aye, if it's England.

*Sunshine on Leith* 2013 (1:21:22)

The perceived ambivalence between the two nations yet again manifests itself in this short conversation. While the language of the exchange has comedic intentions, it nevertheless brings up recurring themes within Scottish literature of, in the words of Robert Louis Stevenson, ‘England as a perilously unhomely land’ (1904 p.2). Yvonne’s resultant disillusionment with Davy leads her to make plans to leave Scotland and return home. Davy’s dramatic interception of her departure outside the train station forms the final climatic scene of the entire film. After he confesses his love for Yvonne, she again asks him of his loyalty to her, to which he replies ‘I don't mind [moving to England] ... Actually, I would mind. But I'd still come.’ This final line of dialogue epitomises the broad contemporary themes of Union to which the two characters are assimilated. Embracing difference and working past the disagreements in the pursuit of something ‘greater than themselves’ can largely be considered a central tenet of the Unionist message. As Davy and Yvonne kiss during their reconciliation, the camera angle places the couple in the centre of the frame with a Union flag of a distant Edinburgh building waving directly above them. Purposeful or not, this final image *re-emphasises* the narrative of Scottish identity in relation to its position within the Union.

## **Landscape**

Traditional cinematic representations of Scottish landscapes have not escaped the institutional gaze of Hollywood, often offering an idealised collective identity without contradictions (Carazo 2015). Promulgated by the wave of ‘Scottish’ international successes of the mid-1990s, most notably *Braveheart* (Gibson 1995), such depictions of landscape have been primarily and predictably embedded in romanticised imagery. Mediating the highland mountains, lush forests and rugged coastline in part also reflected the romantic gaze of Hollywood’s touristic industries, further reifying a global imaginary of Scottish landscape to be an attractive destination of travel and exploration (Tzanelli 2014).

Despite the persistence of such depictions — seen as recently as in Pixar’s *Brave* (2012), for example — the proliferation of Scottish cinema post-devolution added a wave of representational complexity to the nation’s landscapes. Independent cinema — epitomised by *Trainspotting* (1995), *Shallow Grave* (1994), and *Breaking the Waves* (1996)— displayed images of Scotland far removed from the stereotypes to which the audience were accustomed. More specifically, narratives within Scottish cinema experienced a shift in locus from the fantasised, rural landscape to the realist, urban landscape (Iglesias Díaz 2013).

Fig. 1 Screen capture of *Sunshine on Leith* (0:03:18)



*Sunshine on Leith* contests both the traditional and contemporary forms of Scottish cinematic landscape. By projecting traditional romantic cinematic techniques onto the contemporary Scottish 'urban' environment, the film synthesises a novel representation of Scotland that both embraces and rejects cultural form. *Sunshine on Leith's* intent on addressing the stereotypes associated with the Scottish urban landscape is affirmed as early as the film's title sequence. Figure 1 shows the titles appearing above an aerial shot of Edinburgh, taken during what is best described as the 'magic hour' — the stretch of time directly after sunrise or before sunset during which the sun casts golden hues of soft, warm light (Buder 2016). This cinematographic technique, pioneered by Hollywood filmmaker Terrence Malick, has long-standing links with the classic romantic drama genre: 'the sky has light, but there is no actual sun. It [gives] some kind of magic look, a beauty and romanticism' (Mahrer 2014). Further to this 'magic look', Figure 1 also captures Edinburgh Castle at the top left of the frame. Displaying such an iconic landmark that epitomises Scottishness again reinforces the notion that national identity is located and

experienced through symbolic sites. Such depiction of the urban landscape as Figure 1 is not a lone case. The film repeatedly presents this style of shot throughout the film, typically during climatic, pivotal or establishing moments of the narrative. Figure 2. shows thumbnails of every ‘landscape’ shot in the film, again exhibiting the ‘magic hour’ hour characteristics and showcasing the city’s well-known sites, such as Carlton Hill, The National Portrait Gallery and Waverley Bridge.

Fig. 2 Screen captures of *Sunshine on Leith* (Fletcher 2013)



The stylistic departure of *Sunshine on Leith*'s approach to the urban landscape is most evident when comparing to similar shots from its contemporaries. Figure 3 displays the typical establishing shot found in Danny Boyle's *Trainspotting*, also set in Edinburgh. While the shot heavily features the same limestone buildings that are bound to the Scottish capital, the colours

appear more bleak and the tones more muted. The perspective of the shot is from ground-level, further adding a realism and banality to the scene compared to the spectacular aerial expositions of Edinburgh throughout *Sunshine on Leith*. From this example, it becomes apparent that *Sunshine on Leith* has made deliberate stylistic choices in its cinematography to heighten its sense of romanticism and separate itself from the archetypal form of New Scottish Cinema.

Fig. 3 Screen capture of *Trainspotting* (Boyle 1995)



### **Ritual**

National identity is not simply produced; it is performed and practised through rituals — ‘all those distinctive customs, mores, styles and ways of acting and feeling that are shared by the members of a community’ (Smith 1991 p.14). As such, interpreting how rituals can construct and reconstruct meaning in *Sunshine on Leith* further adds context to the complex process of identity formation. *Sunshine on Leith* re-contextualises and re-visualises rituals associated with ‘tartanry’ — specifically militarism and festival — to promote a representation of Scotland that is both progressive and proud of its tradition.

Tartanry is the discursive set of practices within Scotland that can be dated to the 1820s and its adoption during the Romantic revivalist period. During this era, the emergent Scottish tourism industry employed tartanry as a reduction of legitimate Scottish cultural traditions by distorting, tokenising and attaching them to fabricated histories (Gillan 1995). While the reinvention of these customs led to the mass popularisation and dispersion of Scottish culture, contemporary Scottish cinema has scrutinised these types of representations.

*Sunshine on Leith* subverts these contemporary attitudes by drawing upon themes of militarism through the image itself. Militarism has had a long-established link with Scottish identity; Tom Nairn states that Scottish militarism is ‘far more strident than anything found in comparable levels of culture in England’ (2003 p.56). Reinforced by films such as *Braveheart*, the courageous hero who emerges to claim the right to liberty is central to notions of Scottishness (Morgan 2003). The imagery of war comprises the opening sequence of *Sunshine on Leith*, setting a distinct militaristic tone from the very beginning. Rather than appeal to the exclusive definition of Scottish militarism as a tartan-clad, liberty-charged William Wallis-esque figure, *Sunshine on Leith* features its two central male characters as British troops sitting in the back of a patrol tank in Afghanistan. Coupled with the eerily rousing version of ‘Sky Takes the Soul’ the first scene lends an immediate grittiness which runs through the film — indeed, Davy and Ally’s struggle to settle back into the mundanity of civilian life forms its remainder — again departing from traditional representations of Scottish militarism. By drawing upon themes of Scottish tartan military iconography and placing it in a present-day setting, *Sunshine on Leith* re-contextualises and re-visualises ritual, thus negotiating its performance of national identity.

## Optimism

While perhaps the least conspicuous modality onscreen, optimism remains a significant feature of how *Sunshine in Leith* represents Scottish collective identity. The ‘nation’ as an organising principle is interminably intertwined with optimism — both in the sense that it is systematically organises people’s aspirations and that it binds together people (Mupotsa & Kreutzfeldt 2016). In addition, scholars have argued that the success of nationalistic movements rely on the propagation of an optimistic rhetoric; it enables a vision for the future that is bright and one to aspire towards (Berlant 2011). This section argues that *Sunshine on Leith* presents lines of optimism that expose a well-established theme in Scottish literature known as Caledonian Antisyzygy. First coined by Gregory Smith in 1919, Caledonian Antisyzygy refers to the ‘idea of dueling polarities within one entity’ that has found fictional expression throughout contemporary and traditional Scottish literature. Writings by Scots on their national psyche often point to this ‘conflict between the rational and romantic, canny and reckless, moralistic and violent’ — a split personality on a national dimension (Craig 1999).

This fractured sense of identity can be seen in *Sunshine on Leith* through the aspirations of the film’s central characters. The opening musical number of the film features its two male leads performing an energetic rendition of *The Proclaimers*’ ‘I’m on my way, from misery to happiness today’. As they dance through the summer streets of Edinburgh, greeting passers by with warmth and charm, Ally and Davy establish a positive and hopeful tone for the future as they return from their duty in Afghanistan. However, the first lines of dialogue between the two characters anticipate potential conflicts of aspiration as an emerging theme of the narrative:

Smell that Davy? That's the future!

That's the brewery.

What's up with you?

Dunno, it always feels weird coming back. We're home Davy! You gotta enjoy it!

*Sunshine on Leith* 2013 (0:03:54)

Davy's quick dismissal of Ally's eagerness to embrace their future within civilian life highlights the difference between two friends' attitudes towards the future and serves set up the premise for the rest of the film. Moreover, a brief conversation between Ally and his girlfriend, Liz, reveals the tensions and contradictions of optimism that are prevalent among Scottish literary figures' identities. Discussing the numerous possibilities for Ally's post- military duty hairstyle leads Liz to affectionally use the oft-quoted Shakespearean idiom, 'The world is your oyster'. Ally immediately responds, 'I hate oysters, it's just snot on a shell'. In one swift reply, Ally dismantles both a famous literary quote and the optimism to which it is figuratively bound. This short exchange of dialogue captures the essence of a Scottish nation internally grappling with many different, contradictory and conflictory ideas of their future.

Caledonian Antisyzygy is also found in Davy's character during his and Yvonne's first romantic evening atop Carlton Hill. Davy sings with Yvonne, 'We tend to view this nation through the condensation on a dirty glass'. These lyrics from the famous *The Proclaimers*' song 'Misty Blue' serve to recognise Scotland's historic diversity in reflective and optimistic perspectives. These three short exchanges among three different relationships in the film support the argument that *Sunshine on Leith* directly deals with Scotland as a land of diverse, contradictory and conflictory

ideas about the future. By drawing upon themes of Caledonian Antisyzygy, *Sunshine on Leith* contests representations of Scotland as formed by unifarious processes; rather it promotes the diversity of voices and perspectives that comprise collective identity.

## **ANALYSIS PART II: RECEPTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY**

### **The local scale**

The title is often the very first point at which an audience ‘receives’ a film. The ability to derive certain meanings from *Sunshine on Leith*’s title is wholly dependant on the site and scale of its reception. In the case of Edinburgh, these three words advance a particular geographic, social, and cultural context that pervades their viewing experience. Firstly, the title includes the locus of the film’s narrative — the northern district of Leith, Edinburgh. Outside of the city — and most definitely outside of Scotland — Leith is a relatively little-known location. Secondly, ‘Leith’ elicits a certain socio-economic meaning that may be deduced by local audiences when reading the title. Formerly a centre for shipbuilding and other porting activities, Leith is historically a site of industrial decline and mass post-war depopulation; a local audience is more likely to connote Leith’s struggling economic past with the film. Thirdly, *Sunshine on Leith* is an overt reference to the 1988 album released by *The Proclaimers*, who were born and raised in the aforementioned district of Edinburgh. Relating this title to the Scottish band’s album imbues the film with a layer of cultural context. By inferring the film’s genre as a musical, whilst also carrying forward the star personas of *The Proclaimers*, whose regional reputation is expressively nationalistic, the title can be read as politically-charged. These three different layers of meaning that local audiences can draw simply from the film’s title illustrate how discretely knowledge is situated and received at different scales.

In response to the film, MarketingEdinburgh.com, the city's official tourist board, released an online document called 'Sunshine on Leith: Movie Map', which advertised tours of Edinburgh tagged by various locations from the film. Tourist production is made possible through film consumption because film pervades the location with meaning. Ateljevic writes about how cinematic messages are already part of tourist circuits, because they tend to draw upon existing consumer experiences that circulate in the realm of contemporary culture (2000). Thus, this literal cartography of imaginary sites provides an opportunity to analyse the interdependencies between the imagined and lived world.

The Movie Map introduces the themed tour with the summary below:

Get with the beat and revisit the feel good factor of Sunshine on Leith. Sunshine on Leith is a jubilant, heartfelt musical about the power of home, the hearth, family and love. Edinburgh and Leith look stunning in this new feel good movie - from the dramatic city skyline and historic Old Town to the cobbled streets and cosy, village atmosphere of Leith. This movie map has been designed to show the locations used in the film, as well as to provide inspiration to explore all that Edinburgh and Leith have to offer.

*Sunshine on Leith* Movie Map (2013)

The language in this short paragraph can shed light on the nature of the local tourism industry's relationship with cinema and its representations of Scottish identity. The first sentence tells the reader to 'revisit the feel-good factor' in the film. The use of the word 'revisit' has implications

for how one views the relationship between lived, imagined and mediated experiences. ‘Re-visiting’ entails that the reader first ‘visited’ the locations through the screen, yet the dynamic between mediated and lived experiences assumes a certain ontological accuracy of which film geographers are increasingly dismissive. Furthermore, the tourist board subtly attaches the emotions of the ‘feel-good’ film to the geography of the city. Presuming that one can feel an emotion through the viewing experience of a particular space again reinforces the notion that mediated worlds have a potential emotional tangibility. This blurring between what the audience assumes is ‘real’ or not is also exhibited in the map itself. ‘Landmark 08’ describes the location as ‘Grassmarket - a Hibs pub.’ referring to the pub scene in *Sunshine on Leith* where Ally announces to Davy that he is planning to propose to Liz (with a subsequent rendition of The Proclaimers’ ‘Let’s Get Married’). The Hibs pub, a site with distinct links to Edinburgh, rather than other Scottish towns, provide a unique opportunity to showcase the spatial specificity of the film. It is therefore meaningful to note that this pub scene, as well as a majority of *Sunshine on Leith*, was actually shot on a set in Glasgow due to budget and logistical reasons. MarketingEdinburgh.com selected the Grassmarket location not based on any productional links to the film; rather, it sufficiently represented the images inspired in the film. By publicising the scene to have taken place at ‘Landmark 08’, Edinburgh’s tourist board imparts its own geographic imaginary onto the city, thus shaping and re-shaping tourists’ representations of Scottish — and more specifically Edinburghian — identity.

### **The national scale**

*Sunshine on Leith* was released to UK audiences in October 2013, almost a year before the 2014 Scottish Independence referendum and during a time where defining Scotland’s national identity

was entering popular discourse. This section argues that national critical reviews of *Sunshine on Leith* were pervaded with contemporary discourses of Scottish nationalism and the 2014 independence debates by which it was framed. Domestic critiques of the film, both north and south of the border, use techniques of difference or to highlight the political and geographic divisions regarding Scottish independence.

Craig Mclean, writing for the London-based Telegraph, concludes his review with:

I felt sentimental about my homeland... But more than that, I was moved and entertained, and uplifted, too. Sunshine on Leith is a feel-good triumph. My wife (crying a bit) and children (laughing a lot) agreed. And they're English.

Mclean (2013)

Mclean's astute, albeit humorous, implication asserts that his family members enjoyed the film despite being English, rather than because of being English. This demonstrates that the *Sunshine on Leith* contains distinctly nationalistic elements not only within the film but within its reception. Mclean's own 'sentimental' response further reinforces the notion a film's reception is affected by its site and scale. While lauding the film's cinematography and style, Durhams' *The Bubble* criticised the way in which Edinburgh was portrayed as a 'perfect place': "There is never a shot in the rain, or even with grey sky. Artistic licence? I think so!" (Ladds 2013). Making such a note about the film's representation of Scotland adds to the production of difference through associating the lack of poor weather as a fake representation.

In publications north of the border, the unashamed politicisation of *Sunshine on Leith* can be found as overtly as the *Scottish Herald's* headline for its review 'SUNSHINE ON LEITH GETS A STANDING OVATION WHILE DAILY MAIL READERS SUFFER RISING BLOOD PRESSURE' (Didcock, 2013). This single sentence succinctly emphasises the political divide between England and Scotland's respective attitudes towards Scottish independence. The 'Daily Mail reader' to which the Herald refers has become something of a phrase in its own right in the UK. The stereotypical *Daily Mail* reader is characterised as an insular, aspiring middle-class southern English conservative, stuck in the past and longing for the former imperial power of Great Britain over its territories (New World Encyclopaedia 2016). Such an inflammatory term epitomises the conflict between England and Scotland by tending to the tropes that elevate the sense of difference or Otherness between the two nations. *Sunshine on Leith's* critical reception cannot only be characterised as containing political and divisive rhetoric; rather, the exchange of meaning can be interpreted both ways. The phrase '*Sunshine on Leith*' began to be employed as a symbol of hope and optimism amongst patrons of the Scottish independence movement. The Edinburgh-based Scotsman discusses the Yes Campaign's momentum amongst younger voters: 'But with sufficient exposure to the infectious enthusiasm of positive young Scots appearing all over Scotland, even unresponsive Scots may feel a *Sunshine on Leith* moment stirring' (Walker 2014). This substitution in language shows that cinema is not only imbued with social and cultural meaning, but that films themselves have potential to (re)shape meaning.

### **The international scale**

While it is becoming increasingly difficult to separate out scales of representation, *Sunshine on Leith* received a distinctly international reception due to its worldwide premiere at the Toronto

International Film Festival (TIFF), the largest film festival in North America. Its debut on this global stage, along with an internationally focussed marketing campaign, brought in numerous reviews from both American and world critics who would have otherwise been unlikely to have watched the film. For the duration of TIFF, DNA Films abridged the title to merely *Sunshine*, with a probable apprehension that 'Leith' may confuse, and more urgently dissuade, potential North American festival members. This omission of the film narrative's locus is significant for very reasons discussed previously in the previous section on locality. Removing 'Leith' severs the ties between the audience and the socio-historic marker of the primarily working class, formerly docking district of Scotland's capital city. While this adaption for the global market may have increased accessibility and improved overseas viewing numbers, the decrease in social and cultural context undoubtedly affected the Scotland's representation at an international scale.

Reviewers often compare and contrast films with those already locked to the cultural canon in an attempt to give audiences a better sense of what to expect. A major recurring comparison made in every major American critical review alluded *Sunshine on Leith* with the 2010 Hollywood jukebox musical *Mamma Mia*, with several different American publications referring to the Scottish film as 'McMamma Mia' (Ladds, 2013). While associating *Sunshine on Leith* with *Mamma Mia* may help the audience gain an appreciation for the link on stylistic and generic grounds, it can be argued that the comparison works to diminish *Sunshine on Leith*'s cultural 'authenticity' and treat the film as 'mere entertainment'. *Mamma Mia* is the highest-grossing jukebox musical in history. Based off of songs written by the Swedish band *ABBA*, it features American and British actors on a Greek island. And while critical reviews often praise *Mamma Mia*'s enjoyment, they also recognise its cultural vapidness and lack of socio-geographical context

— after all, its narrative, cast and location are all from completely different geographies. *Sunshine on Leith*, however, features a narrative, cast and location all steeped in socio-geographic specificity. By incessantly comparing these two films in multiple reviews, the cultural value of *Sunshine on Leith* is reduced to relying on the tropes and tartanry of traditional Hollywood rather than offering the audience a new representation of Scotland.

## CONCLUSION

Framing the process of national identity into distinct ‘modalities’ captures the configurations of the homogeneous elements that may exist within a heterogeneous context. Due to *Sunshine on Leith*’s position within a growing canon of contemporary Scottish cinema that re-centres representations of national identity and the socio-political crossroads at which the film was released, *Sunshine on Leith* provided clear examples of how films function as a social creation and identity formation at multiple sites and scales. As a contested cultural form, the reception of *Sunshine on Leith* reveals the complexities in the sustenance of contemporary national identities in general and Scottish national identity in particular.

Recognising such complexities has broad implications for how film geographers approach works of national cinema and nationalist movements. The political impact of a film is heavily influenced by ‘which political currents are in circulation and which discursive strategies they adopt’ (O’Shea 1996 p.259). In the context of *Sunshine on Leith*, the film witnessed a rising tide of support for Scottish political independence leading up to the 2014 independence referendum. Although *Sunshine on Leith*’s Hollywood-esque appropriation and reconstitution of romantic imagery exemplified the dis-embedding of national culture, it also provided new images and

reconfigured narratives in a contemporary urban Scotland. Rather than losing their significance, the national and global transmission of such images and narratives may be fed back into local discourses, heightening the power over their own constructions of Scottish identity.

While the analysis adequately addressed the initial questions that informed the research, it naturally led to an array of further questions. Does the romantic cinematography of Leith's landscape change residents' views on Leith when, in fact, they recognise its perceived falsities? Would somebody consider living or working in Leith after having watched the film? While such questions would shed light on the interconnectedness between the imagined, meditated and lived experiences, they prove difficult to answer through secondary data sources. The future of film geography research into national identity lies in drawing upon a mixture of methods that better capture the effects of cinema on the material world. In the meantime, however, this paper hopefully adds a fresh perspective to the rich and complex field film geography.

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