

16 Years of Alcohol: An Allegory of a Nation?

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Abstract

Recent academic studies of Scottish television and film fiction have drawn attention to the complex range of factors that shape representations of Scottish national identity. This paper examines participants' reproductions of discourses of culture, in relation to the film *16 Years of Alcohol* (Jobson 2003), which inform understanding of Scottish identity. Specifically, how the characters and story portrayed in this film both reflect and challenge notions of what it is to be Scottish. The research is based on findings from two focus groups – one conducted with a group of Scots-born participants and the other with those of mixed nationality. While some commonalities were evident between the two groups (influences of class and means of view validation) it was significant that the Scots-born group were more comfortable discussing less stereotypical understandings of their national identity. Ultimately, the findings reveal the germane nature of subject positions in investigations of identity construction.

Key Words: national identity; audience; reception study; discourse; Scottish; subject position; class; alcohol; bigotry; sectarianism.

Introduction

Set in Edinburgh, *16 Years of Alcohol* (Jobson 2003) follows the life of urban working-class protagonist Frankie Mac through three time periods in his life: young child, teenager, and latterly in his thirties. Frankie's family, upbringing, alcohol, gang culture and violence all play a part in shaping his young life. As he matures, Frankie finds love and begins to alter the course of his life; however he is unable ultimately to escape his past.

The film was released in the UK in 2003 at the Edinburgh Film Festival and has been distributed to twenty countries worldwide. It has won several awards including the Kodak Award for Best Cinematography and Susan Lynch won two awards for Best Supporting Actress ([IMDB](#), n/d). The film has received mixed reviews in the press, ranging from praise for a fresh approach of a Scottish narrative to criticism of the first person narration of the

protagonist. *16 Years* was chosen for analysis for two main reasons. First it is post devolution: produced after 1999 when the Scottish parliament was re-established. Second, on viewing, I considered the film to challenge historical representations (outlined later) which are often employed in the construction of Scottish identities. Murray asserts that *16 Years* was one of a number of films at the 2003 Edinburgh Film Festival which 'was 'culturally distinct, yet also chime[s] with the themes and aspirations of a new generation of European film-makers' (Didcock, 2003: 11 in Murray, 2007: 84).

The aim of this paper is to investigate participants' understandings of Scottish identity in relation to the narratives and discourses within *16 Years*. There are two groups of participants, one Scots-born and the other mixed nationals born in Scotland, England, Ireland and America. All respondents were resident in Scotland and full details can be seen in *Table 1.1* below. First the paper looks at critical theory in relation to identity construction, and gives a brief overview of Scottish identity and film. Then, prior to the analysis, the theoretical approach and research design are made explicit. The first part of this analysis examines both groups' understandings of Scottish culture before moving on to explore the subject positions from which participants' views arise. Relevant subject positions are: national identity, age, class, gender, and football fan. The term culture is understood in its anthropological sense of everyday practices which are understood as being particular to a group or society (Hall, 1997: 2).

Frameworks for the Construction of Identity

The 'nation' remains highly relevant to how people understand who they are and who others are; how individuals relate to others within and outwith their 'imagined community' of nation (Anderson, 1983) and what is understood as being important (Skey, 2009: 334). However Skey (2009: 334) warns that there is a tendency to 'treat the nation as a given both in everyday life and social theory'. This view echoes that of Billig's (1995) banal nationalism and Hobsbawm's (1983) concept of invented traditions. These analyses suggest that national cultures and symbols facilitate an understanding of a fixed national identity which becomes naturalised, embedded in and through the annals of time. The taken-for-granted nature of national identity is what makes empirical research all the more relevant and necessary in a world dominated by mediated images.

Reicher and Hopkins (2001: ix) state:

The ability to mythologize particular definitions of a particular identity is, in turn, aided and abetted by the general myth that there is always a single valid definition for any given identity.

The understanding throughout this project is that identity is a concept, understandings of which are constructed through language (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Sarup, 1996; Foucault,

2002). Sarup (1996:23) contends that identity is a social narrative, precisely located in space and time, that it is multifaceted; a combination of psychological and sociological factors. An essentialist view of identity relies heavily on the idea of sociological factors such as class, gender and race working together to produce a coherent, unified, fixed identity (*ibid*: 14). On the other hand, non-essentialist understandings of identity are fuelled by a more postmodern view of the world.

This paper draws conceptually on the theoretical framework of French theorist Michael Foucault's (2002) *Archaeology of Knowledge*. Foucault argues that researchers much consider not only the content of participants' statements but also the social contexts in which they are made (2002: 49-50). This approach is highly productive. It affords some insight into how participants' subject positions, and various media representations, inform their expectations from within the narrative (Herman & Vervaeck, 2007). In particular, discourses which suggest that sectarianism within Scottish football and alcohol abuse are inherent traits of Scottish identity are revealed. At the time of writing alcohol abuse within Scotland and sectarian violence at Scottish football matches are particularly topical issues within the Scottish press (see Alderson, 2011).

Scottish Identity and Film¹

The narratives of film are considered a form of communication, which assists in the understandings of cultural identity within the nation (Schlesinger, 1990; Castelló *et al.*, 2009b). Historically, film representations have provided many fixed notions of what it is to be Scottish (McArthur, 2003). Dominant traditional film representations of Scotland are discussed academically as discourses of Tartanry, Kailyard and Clydesideism (McArthur, 2003; Petrie, 2000, 2004). Tartanry and Kailyard are particularly popular in Hollywood narratives of Scotland and include images of strong masculine men often in kilts; bagpipes; the Highlands; and couthie², homely, and sometimes insular communities (for example *Rob Roy* 1995 and *Braveheart* 1995). Clydesideism depicts a working-class urban environment and is described by Petrie as providing 'overtly masculine associations with hard physical labour and boisterous leisure pursuits such as football, gambling, excessive drinking and violence' (2004: 18). Images of Tartanry along with discourse of alcohol abuse are at times



Figure 1 - Fat Bastard

knitted together, providing decidedly negative symbolisms of Scottishness (see for example Mike Myers' 'Fat Bastard' in Austin Powers *The Spy Who Shagged Me* 1999). However Murray argues that there has been a recognised shift within film production in Scotland. He identifies and discusses a moving away from allegories of the nation to an exploration

of 'private experience and complex, extreme psychological states rather than exploit[ing] popular genres and conventional narrative forms' (Murray, 2007: 84).

Theoretical Approach

My view of why and how nations are formed, and how understandings of the nation are perpetuated is based on Anderson's (1983) concept of imagined community and Billig's (1995) banal nationalism. In line with these understandings, the epistemological underpinnings of this study are located within social constructionism. Meaning is understood as both constructed and struggled over through discourse proceeding from different surfaces of emergence and their power relations. It is argued that repeated images of a 'nation' predominantly form audience understandings of that national identity. That is not to say that these understandings cannot be challenged. Rather representations and understandings of a 'nation' may be altered through time. Any constraints are considered to be from an ideological perspective, constructing understandings of social norms which are in themselves sites of hegemonic shift (Foucault, 2002).

Audience Research Design

Focus groups were used to elicit a variety of views and opinions in relation to the understanding of audience constructions of Scottish national identity. This method facilitated analysis of how understandings of Scottish identity are socially produced and the dominant views aired. Moreover it revealed the power relationships at play during the struggle to define Scottish identity. The focus groups were advertised in small businesses and public amenities in the small towns of Bo'ness, Grangemouth and Linlithgow which are located within the Central Belt of Scotland. One local newspaper, *The Bo'ness Journal*, also agreed to run an advertisement for one week. Eight participants responded and agreed to take part: four male and four female. As it was not possible to arrange a suitable time for all respondents to attend a screening each person was given access to the film to watch at their own convenience. It was evident from the discussions that each respondent had indeed viewed the film prior to attending the focus group.

Participants were split into two groups consisting of four respondents, details of which can be seen in **Table 1.1** below. Two female respondents, Lynn and Rebecca, are mother and daughter, and Ruth and Allan are husband and wife. To facilitate ease of travel arrangements for Lynn and Rebecca it was decided to place them within the same group; however Ruth and Allan attended separate groups. Participants were filtered by self-attributed nationality (or place of birth in the case of Lynn), thus all respondents in FG1 hail from four different nations, while FG2's respondents were born in Scotland. Splitting the groups in this way allowed the group consisting of all Scots-born respondents to talk about the film within a shared subject position of Scottishness. It further facilitated a comparison of the discourses being reproduced, not only within the groups but between the Scots-born

and non-Scots-born groups. The groups were also split evenly by gender in an attempt to limit gendered dominance. Each participant's anonymity has been protected by the use of pseudonyms.

Table 1.1 Focus Group Construction

Focus Group 1					
Respondent	Age	Gender	Self-attributed Nationality	Time Lived in Scotland	Occupation
Liz	66	Female	British (born England)	45 Years (moved from England aged 21)	Government Employee
Ruth	33	Female	Scottish	33 years	Radiographer
Patrick	68	Male	British (born N. Ireland)	41 years (moved from N. Ireland aged 27)	Accountant
Rae	45	Male	American	38 years (moved from Texas aged 7)	Environmental Funds Administrator
Focus Group 2					
James	40	Male	Scottish	35 years (lived in France for 5 years aged 20-25)	Marketing
Lynn	49	Female	British (born Scotland)	42 years (lived in England for 7 years aged 5-12)	Retired
Allan	34	Male	Scottish	34 years	Utilities Meter Reader
Rebecca	22	Female	Scottish	22 years	Unknown

Focus groups are a tool that facilitates investigation of individual's beliefs and attitudes. However the shortcomings of this method of data collection (group pressure and dominant participants) have been taken into consideration during the analysis of these findings (Wodak, 1999: 107). With this in mind, I will outline some key dynamics from within the groups. Although all participants appeared to be confident individuals, within FG1 it was noted that Rae had a particularly dominant personality. At times this clearly made Liz hesitant to speak and more effort had to be made to include her in the discussions. Within FG2 Rebecca took some time to contribute extensively but it is assumed that this may have been partly due to her youth and the age difference between her and the males within the group. Although Rebecca voiced, at times, similar views to that of her mother this was in no way consistent. The mother/daughter relationship did not appear to overtly influence either participant's willingness to speak their mind.

Composition of Focus Groups

FG1 could be termed middle class in respect of education, language and employment. Ruth, during discussion within FG1, asserted that she would have previously defined herself as working-class; however, during the focus group discussion this definition became problematic for Ruth as she began to re-negotiate this subject position by comparing her upbringing in opposition to that of her husband's perceived more-working-class upbringing. Ruth's husband, Allan, took part in FG2. FG2 was also, in the same terms as FG1, middle-class in composition with the exception of Allan. Furthermore, Allan speaks Scots, which has been reflected within the transcription of the data. Allan's wife Ruth spoke Standard Scots English. However on its own this is not considered to be a marker of a middle-class identity; recent sociolinguistic studies show that women often have a propensity to employ overtly prescribed norms in their speech in comparison to men (Wardhaugh, 2010: 335). (Further investigation of the nuances of habitus and constructions of class are not within the remit of this analysis.)

Although Lynn defines her national identity as British she regularly accepts discourses which place her as Scottish, such as numerous references to *we* and *our* when talking about Scottish culture. Lynn, at this time forty-two, left Scotland at the age of five and lived in England for seven years until the age of twelve when her family returned to Scotland. She now works in a government department (no further details known), frequently working in both Scotland and England. Consequently, Lynn is in a position to inhabit the differing subject positions of Scottish and British, consciously and sub-consciously, depending on circumstance. It is argued here then that as Lynn positions herself as Scottish through discourse, her self-attributed nationality of British does not preclude her from sharing the Scottish subject position of the rest of FG2. Lynn is merely argued to add to the diversity of reproduction of existing discourses surrounding Scottish national identity within FG2.

Results

Within the findings, FG and MOD denote *focus group* and *moderator* respectively. Square brackets within focus group discussions indicate where there was an overlap in speech. All underscoring in extracts is my emphasis. The views of FG1 and FG2, in relation to understandings of Scottish culture, are discussed consecutively by group. Thereafter, and again consecutively by group, an analysis of respondents' subject positions is carried out before moving to conclusions.

Findings: Culture – Focus Group One

Throughout FG1 there was much conflict and some displacement of discourses in relation to the film and its representations. Initially Ruth (Scottish) displayed a very fixed overarching understanding of 'the Scottish people':

RUTH: I think if you've watched anything on telly, even the soaps, you know the wife beater or the drunk is always Scottish, eh? But I don't necessarily think that that's a true reflection on the Scottish people.

Ruth went on to discuss the more positive images of the Tartan Army (a term widely used to describe the travelling support of Scotland's national football team) which she used to symbolise an all-inclusive sense of Scottish friendliness. By drawing on her personal relationships and knowledge of others Ruth ultimately read the narrative references to alcohol abuse as *a* representation but not representative of Scotland per se. She introduced the concept of choice: 'about the parents, you know, what we do, the choices we make affect our children and stuff and I think that goes on [anywhere]'. This statement reveals an appreciation of different identities within Scotland as well as an assumption regarding similarities between Scottish identities and those of other nations.

On the other hand Liz (English) and Patrick (British: born N.Ireland) were initially more firm in their belief that the film's references to alcohol and violence were uncharacteristic of Scottish identity. They felt very strongly that these representations gave the wrong impression of an overtly friendly nation. In relation to their lived experience and cultural awareness of Scotland the narrative of *16 Years* was unconvincing for these participants. Liz's statement (below) reveals that her core understanding of Scotland, and thus an expectant culture, is informed by a discourse of the Highlands:



Figure 2 - *I Know Where I'm Going*

LIZ: *Back in my days* I didn't know anything about Scotland at all. I just thought that it was just, just Highlands and just grass and everything else, because I'd *never been taught anything different*, not even in the *schools* back in the 50s or thereabouts.

Bearing in mind that Liz is sixty-six years old, the Highlands were the predominant setting for narratives in the popular films of her youth; for example, *I Know Where I'm Going* (1945), *Whisky Galore* (1949), and *Brigadoon* (1954). Moreover, Liz specifically states that her school education did not contradict such images; she was schooled in England in the 1950s. Liz's statement illustrates the perceptions of homogenised national identities that the education system can engender – as does the argument put forward by Gellner (1983).



Figure 3 - *Whisky Galore*

discussed in terms of representing 'small rural communities and the vagaries of village life', rather than McArthur's (1982) more negative description of being inward-facing and regressive.



Figure 4 - *Brigadoon*

It does seem reasonable however to suppose that Rae's opinion is informed by his American family background, upbringing and education in an American school within Scotland. Rae's perception of the insular nature of Scottish identity goes some way to justifying his comfort with the film as representative of Scottishness – the protagonist and his immediate social circles, in the first (and to an extent, the second) phase of the film, could be argued to facilitate this understanding. For example, the second part of the film's introduction provides an image of a very close knit community with the protagonist's father appearing to represent a patriarchal leader. The non-diegetic soundtrack, *The Fields of Athenry*, also signifies nostalgia for a lost sense of community. However, as discussion continued, a struggle for the dominant understanding of Scots' relationship with alcohol became evident. Ruth continued to argue that it was down to choice while Rae perceived it as an all-encompassing 'national' problem.

Through her lived experience of residing in Scotland for forty-five years Liz is now more aware of Scotland's varied geography – she lives in a small town of Scotland's Central belt. This lived experience aside, throughout discussions Liz's views of Scottish identity and her reaction to the narrative of *16 Years* (at times revulsion) was very much informed by traditional discourses of Tartanry and Kailyard.

Kailyard as proffered by Castelló *et al* (2009a: 470), where this discourse is

Conversely Rae, although classing himself as American, has lived in Scotland for thirty eight years, since the age of seven – thus receiving his education in Scotland. However his understanding of Scottish culture is more in tune with McArthur's more negative description of Kailyard:

RAE: They can be very *insular*; they can be *inward facing* in terms of communities.

First, and importantly, it can be seen in Rae's next statement that his perceptions of Scottish identity were at times similar to those of Liz and Patrick. In fact Rae's assertion is also particularly reminiscent of popular Hollywood versions of Scottish history seen in films such as *Braveheart* (1995) and *Rob Roy* (1995):

RAE: Scottish culture has evolved out of *clan culture*, which were essentially tribal...it's all well *documented* the way the tribes, the clans treated each other...these are *the great Scottish stories that we have*.

However Rae strongly rejected the rest of the group's view that alcohol was a wider global issue. Instead Rae's understanding of Scottish identity is more totalising in this respect. First Ruth can be seen emphasising the generalness of the discourse of alcohol abuse to other national identities. Then Rae reinforces the validity of his view by referring to the discourse of *Scotland's alcohol problem* (widely circulated within the media):

RUTH: [But I think] it's a *class thing*. Because when I watched the film, me and (my husband) watched the film; and I know he's not here, but I was like '*I just cannot relate to that, I just wasn't brought up with anything like that*'. *Whereas (my husband) says 'oh no I can totally relate to that, that's just how my family was, working class, in the pubs, kids were outside waiting on their parents coming out the pubs'* and it's obviously a kind of class thing and *it might be in Ireland or whatever*.

RAE: I think alcohol is a major problem in Scotland. *We all know it is*, it's a big health issue, it's an anti-social behavioural issue. But you can't really take it away and say that's everywhere...it's a *nationalistic* thing. *Scottish people are known to like a drink*, and you know I would imagine that *we have, you know, globally high alcoholism rates within Scotland...I don't know the figures but I'm guessing that with alcohol goes these social problems*. Certainly with the youth, the *Scottish youth*, there's a major issue. *They're out of control*, and that basically is because they're not being brought to heel ... I don't think *the parents* know what's going on out there.

Rae's understandings of 'the Scottish youth' reveal a further totalising discourse in the construction of contemporary Scottish identity. In an attempt to reinforce his views as dominant he appeals to 'common-sense' understandings when he states 'we all know it is'. Rae's reference to 'the figures' and 'these social problems' are also an indirect reference to 'official' stories which circulate within the news periodically within Scotland (see BBC News, 2006). Moreover, this 'national' discourse is not one which is solely reproduced via media institutions; it is also a political rhetoric. Tom Little (2008), a reporter for *Scotland on*

Sunday, brands the Scottish National Party's (SNP) suggested alcohol pricing and age reforms as 'a crusade'. While in the same article Kenny MacAskill, the SNP's Justice Minister for Scotland, refers to drunk and disorderly behaviour in Edinburgh on Friday and Saturday nights as 'what we do in Scotland'.

Although Liz and Patrick appeared unhappy with notions of alcohol abuse as representative of Scottish culture in any way, they did begin to shift their original positions slightly in light of Ruth's argument. As a compromise they displaced their total rejection of the narrative by incorporating it into understandings of wider geographic identities. However, ultimately these respondents' preferred view of Scottishness, and how they perceived that others see Scottish identity remained largely informed by the more traditional discourse of Tartanry as is evident in the following extract:

PATRICK: I think as an overall Scottish identity when you think about that you think about *bagpipes and the thistle* and all of these sort of things ... from a national point of view then I think you know *your music, the culture*, the things that come through, *those are what people on a worldwide basis see as being Scottish*.

Although Liz and Patrick have lived in Scotland for over forty years, it was clear that their views were informed through their early years' education and their preferred media genres – countryside and historical programmes such as *Landward* (BBC2), and *A History of Scotland* (BBC Scotland).

Although it is not suggested here that complete consensus within the group was ever reached regarding the discourse of alcohol abuse, Rae did gradually displace his views. After some time Rae appeared to embody the dominant view of the group in relation to the representation of Scotland and class influences within the film. As with Liz and Patrick's earlier displacement, it is not know if this was due to a shift in subject position, drawing on his many years of actually living in Scotland; or, as is often argued to be problematic within focus groups, a desire for superficial harmony within the group (Wodak, 1999). Focus groups are, in some quarters, subject to claims of ethnographic fallacy (see Walsh, 2004). However, I argue that in this instance focus groups have provided the most naturalistic opportunity for negotiation as is possible to address the research question (Tonkiss, 2004). Reasons for the displacement of discourses may not be certain, however I would argue that as in 'real life', once exposed to an opposing argument one is unlikely not to give consideration to that argument to some extent.

As sectarianism is discussed within the findings of FG2, it seems appropriate to note here that this discourse only emerged in FG1 in a brief reference to Scotland's past. The hegemonic struggle between Rae and the other members of the group ensured that when

contemporary Scottish football was discussed it was within the positive terms which surround the Tartan Army – friendly/well liked!

Culture – Focus Group Two

In complete opposition to FG1, participants of FG2 expressed overall surprise at the lack of drinking within the film:

REBECCA: There was *hardly any drinking* but there was a fair bit of references to alcohol I found, but there *wasn't actually any drinking*.

JAMES: Yeah, well, and yet it was a film that I watched *expecting to see* a lot of drinking and a lot of violence and when it came to an end I thought *there were really very few scenes of alcohol being the catalyst for what happened*.

A content analysis revealed twenty-eight references to alcohol within the film, eight scenes involved actual drinking, three of which saw the protagonist at his youngest drinking whisky. Consequently the unanimous acceptance, within the Scots-born group, as to the general lack of drinking within the film may suggest banality of expectation in relation to representations of alcohol within films depicting Scots.

It must be pointed out however, that short general discussions within this group lead to a wider range of views. Discourses of class, geography and personal choice were all mobilised by this group, thus producing a more complex understanding of Scottish identity in relation to



Figure 5 - Young Protagonist in *16 Years of Alcohol*

alcohol. For example, in the following extract taken from general discussions on perceptions of Scottish identity, James appears to hold a fixed understanding of alcohol abuse in a Scottish national sense:

JAMES: I think if one of the *stereotypes* is 'this is a nation of hard drinkers' then that's backed up by the *hard medical facts, numbers don't lie*.

James's understanding is informed by 'medical facts', presumably communicated via news media. However, by referring to 'the nation' rather than 'we', it would appear that James does not place himself within this representation. Certainly from other of James's contributions he often mobilises discourses of internal difference and external similarity suggesting a more fluid understanding of multiple identities.

Below, Allan refers to 'parts of Glasgow'. This also represents what can be argued to be a less totalising understanding of Scottish identity:

ALLAN: Ah heard on the *news* the ither day ther they were puttin the retiral age up fae 65 ti 70 say, an there's *pairts oh Glasgae* thi thi average life expectancy is 59 or suhim, 58/59. So these folk are goin 'we'll be deid ten years afore we retire' yi know.

Allan does not refer to Glasgow as a whole, which in turn implies differences within Scotland's borders. Furthermore, both James and Allan draw on popular news media stories – similarly to Rae, and his references to 'documentation', this is seen as a means of validating their statements as the dominant discourse.

James and Allan both felt that in their personal experience, others (outside Scotland) expected them to be hardened drinkers – even if personally they were not:

JAMES: When I was in France...there was an *expectation* that I would ... *could drink any of them under the table* just because I [came from Scotland] and it was, you know, *whisky because I came from Scotland ... yeah, alcohol was probably top of the list of those stereotypical things*.

However the following extract from Lynn shows a perceived totalising understanding on the part of others as well as on her part. Lynn's statement and her discourse – 'we do' and 'it is part of our culture' – suggests that this 'national' understanding is backed up by personal experience of comparison with 'others'. This definition of self in opposition to 'the other' is also a basic principle in social identity theory (McCrone, 2002):

LYNN: I...work in London and I do think *they think we drink a lot* but *I think we do* 'cos even though my colleagues and I would say we don't drink a lot, the people at work, the only people who go out after work for a drink are *the Scottish folk*. And *they're the ones* who buy a bottle of wine in the super market and go back to the hotel are *the Scottish folk* and *I mean I do it as well*. But it is only because I was *speaking to the English ones* who say that they never drink at all during the week, they'd only drink on a Saturday night that I kind of realised that we drink more, and it is *part of our culture*.

It is argued here that FG2's understanding of others' totalising perceptions of Scottish identity, may be a contributory factor to the group's banal acceptance of the film's references to alcohol within the narrative.



Figure 6 – Orange Walk in *Just Another Saturday*

Culturally, the most problematic area for this group (Scots-born) was the representation of football and religion; particularly the lack of sectarian representations. Sectarianism within Scotland has been explored in various media forms, a good example being Peter McDougall's screen play *Just Another Saturday*, aired on BBC's Play For Today in 1975. This narrative examines social realities which surround 'Orange Walks' in Scotland; the story is told through the eyes of a young protestant lad who is eventually

left disillusioned by the actions of members of his Orange Order. Indeed, there has been much recent news coverage surrounding sectarianism and football in Scotland (see Alderson, 2011). James's statement below is a concise example of the problematic nature of the narrative in terms of these audiences' understandings in relation to the discourse of sectarianism and Scottish identity:

JAMES: He didn't do anything with the religion. At no point did the *bigotry* or the *usual* kind of, if you're going to talk about a Catholic life story *you're going to bring in the guilt really*. None of that was really coming through so I don't know if it was meant to say more than 'this is a kid and this is his local team'.

ALLAN: Well, ah've got Irish Catholics in ma faimley and ah suppose, aye, like we say, it's a *class thing*, ye cid pit it *onywhor* an it's jist the same. Ah suppose it wid be the same kind a idea as 'the *workin-class work hard and play hard*' ah suppose. So yi'v got yir fitba team and yi'v got yir *Saturday nigh's* or whit'ivr.

JAMES: A working *class* kid. Yeah I think it could have been a *Liverpool strip*, a *Liverpool poster* on the bedroom wall and *said exactly the same thing to the viewer*.

Football can be seen to be understood here as both regional, thus fluid, in one sense of Scottish identities but also totalising in another. These participants recognise a local dimension within the film, however also expected a more totalising discourse to be reproduced within the narrative. This suggests that these respondents are so familiar with representations in which class, football, bigotry and understandings of Scottish national identity are synonymous, that they too have become banal. Although, to put this into context, both these respondents are fans of Celtic who, although not attending football

matches, are avid viewers of the team's games on television. Both men are of similar age, thirty-four and forty. Conversely, the respondents argue that the film is not merely representative of Scotland. Understandings of similarity with other urban working-class cultures such as Liverpool and Irish diasporas are also evident. (This was the same argument put forward by Ruth in FG1.) Moreover, the personal nature of the production also began to emerge within FG2's discussions.

Rebecca (female, 22) was also briefly involved in this discussion. She appeared to believe that sectarianism is purely a historical problem which her generation are not involved in:

REBECCA: I feel, for *my generation* at least, we don't care as much, or it doesn't matter as much, because *we grew up* outwith all the kind of unrest and kind of trouble that *your generation* would have seen more of, because we were like young children weren't we? So I suppose you guys would have seen that stuff.

Rebecca's understanding seems based purely within a social context, informed by her personal experience within her social group. Rebecca is aware that many of her friends support either Celtic or Rangers, but she is unaware of any social conflict within her group. However Rebecca's view is not one which is shared by the Scottish media, or by the Scottish government. Indeed contrary to Rebecca's understanding is a view of the need to educate children within Scotland regarding the socially unacceptable nature of religious sectarianism (see Glasgow Council (2011); and The Scottish Government (2011a; 2011b)). Despite this, Rebecca also conveys a perception of fluidity within her understandings of Scottish identity.

Subject Positions – Focus Group One

From a perspective of subject positions then, it would appear that Ruth's Scottish subject position, personal life experience and age appear to afford her greater discursive complexity in constructing her understandings of Scottish identity. Ruth mobilises a class discourse and then adopts a middle-class subject position. In this way Ruth differentiates her upbringing from that of her husband and re-emphasises her understanding of difference within the 'nation' and sameness outside the 'nation'.

In the case of Liz and Patrick, I would suggest that generational subject positions appear to dominate here as opposed to national. Ruth specifically mentions the English education system in her 'youth'. However national subject positions are clearly relevant here also.

Finally, Rae speaks from a very American subject position. He can also be seen to adopt a distinctive class subject position in his comments: 'I'm guessing' and 'the parents'. Rae's subject position and discourse of class, place him in an apparently more elite position than other parents in Scotland and is a reproduction of complex essentialist understandings of identities within Scotland as proletariat, backwards and parochial (see Petrie, 2004: 7;

O'Donnell, 2008; Kirk, 2011: 197). Rae appears to briefly adopt a Scottish subject position in his reference to *we*. However, as this is not repeated in his numerous contributions throughout the discussions, this is perhaps not the context in which this statement should be read. Rather this may merely be an inclusive reference to place of residence.

Subject Positions – Focus Group Two

The predominant subject position within this group is that of Scottishness. The generational difference between Rebecca and the rest of the group, within this discussion, were not seen to alter the common views in relation to banal understandings of the nation (Billig, 1995). This was particularly evident in relation to alcohol abuse. The subject positions informing views of Scottish football are complex. Rebecca is a young female, while Allan and James are older male football fans. Rebecca and James are described as middle-class, and Allan working-class. I suggest that rather than gender or class, it is the subject position of football fan which is most relevant to James and Allan's perceptions.

Lynn's subject positions were the most complicated of the group. She employs both essentialist and non-essentialist understandings of alcohol abuse but these appear dependent on whether she inhabits Scottish or British subject positions. Lynn differentiates the people of London (English) from I/we (Scottish) and talks of 'our' culture: these are all statements made from a Scottish subject position. However, Lynn also makes reference to 'the Scottish folk', 'they are the ones', 'my idea of Scottish people': Lynn here is argued to inhabit a British subject position. Finally, in Lynn's extract below, it can be seen that Britishness appears synonymous with a subject position of class:

LYNN: *my idea of Scottish people, ... about a year ago I got friendly with this Scottish woman and kinda got introduced to her friends, and they are quite bizarre to me I suppose, because I grew up in Falkirk, they grew up in Falkirk but we must have obviously had completely different lives ... It's quite bizarre [actually] ... I mean they go to pubs that I wouldn't go to so I don't know whether all these people just hang out in all these pubs, but that's quite outstanding to me.*

The statements underlined suggest a view which is informed by a middle-class subject position. Lynn can also be seen very early in the initial part of this extract (see Focus Group Two: Findings) consciously removing herself from her more negative views of Scottish identity; for example she states: 'the Scottish folk ... they're the ones'.

Conclusion

The narrative of *16 Years*, at a glance, may produce thoughts of Clydesideism with its use of images of excessive alcohol and violence. However ultimately, within both groups, *16 Years* was not considered to be representative of the 'nation' of Scotland. In particular, the poetic

nature of the film's narration and an absence of sectarianism/bigotry, within the discourse of football, run counter to expectations in this sense. Moreover, it was largely accepted within both groups that representations which defined the protagonist were globally transferable. Therefore, it is argued here that Murray's (2007: 90) assertion that contemporary Scottish films should be read in a wider framework of analysis than assumed allegory-of-the-nation is reinforced.

It can be seen from the evidence provided that the discourses constructing understandings of Scottish identity are very complex. There is no straightforward answer to how Scottishness is understood. Essentialist and non-essentialist understandings were mobilised, to varying degrees, within both groups – less totalising views were held within FG2. However, within FG2, although a fixed understanding of the 'nation' was not accepted, Lynn mobilised the identity marker of class as key to understanding Scottish identity. Significantly, both men in FG2 displayed a taken-for-granted acceptance surrounding Scottish working-class identity, football and bigotry. While there was a struggle to establish a dominant discourse surrounding alcohol abuse within FG1, this was not evident in FG2. Instead FG2, although rejecting fixed views of alcohol abuse within Scotland, also displayed a banal understanding. Moreover, this banal acceptance appeared to be further reinforced by others' (outside Scotland) assumptions, various media representations, and political rhetoric.

The complexity of understandings of Scottish identity is significantly informed by various intertwining and competing subject positions drawn on by participants. A shared subject position of Scottishness is seen to influence a banal understanding of alcohol abuse but when class and generational positions are mobilised, within FG2, understandings begin to shift. This suggests a more fluid understanding of Scottish identity, a more *general* understanding of Scottishness as opposed to a *total* understanding (Foucault, 2002: 10-11). Conversely FG1, for much of the discussion, predominately preferred a more fixed (historical) understanding of Scottish identity. But again, when the subject position of class comes into play, similarities can be seen between the focus groups: Rae (American) and Lynn (Scots-born/British), when speaking from middle-class positions, proffer similar views.

The salient subject positions within these findings are seen to be *national identities* – particularly evident in the case of Ruth and Rae; *age* – as in the case of Patrick, Liz and Rebecca; and *class* – most noticeably within the utterances of Rae and Lynn. Although considerably younger than Patrick and Liz, Rae often employed similar discourses of Tartanry and Kailyard. This suggests then that Rae's American subject position is more dominant in his constructions of Scottish identity than is his age and place of residence. One may have expected Rae (having lived in Scotland for so long and from such a young age) to have similar views as the Scots-born male participants, being of a similar age. However in opposition to

these respondents, Rae is initially very comfortable with the totalising discourse of alcohol abuse and violence.

Skey (2009: 334) cautions that some assumptions may be too readily accepted in regards to national characteristics. Reicher and Hopkins argue that such singular understandings of national identity are mythical, and that these concepts aid ideological domination. These propositions reflect Foucault's (2002) argument surrounding the purpose of *total* histories, and the fixing of history for the purposes of power. However, as has been argued, the banal elements of Scottish identity, when discussed in the group situations in response to the narrative of *16 Years*, were revealed to be less fixed and more nuanced dependent upon the subject positions drawn upon by the reader. In this study, those who argue most for a fixed notion of what it is to be Scottish are predominantly not born in Scotland. Where Scots-born respondents have asserted more totalising understandings of Scottish identity, this revolves around subject positions and discourses of class, or knowledge of what some others (outside Scotland) believe.

Finally, the average age of participants is forty five years. In light of the many recent films such as *Ae Fond Kiss* (2004: Ken Loach), *Red Road* (2006: Andrea Arnold) and *Hallam Foe* (2007: David Mackenzie) which are argued to challenge the traditional discourses constructing understandings of Scottish national identity (Murray, 2007; Neely, 2008) (and the recently changed political landscape of Scotland), it would be beneficial to analyse the discourses of a younger audience to gauge a more nuanced understanding of any generational changes in views which may exist.

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List of Films

- Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me* 1999 (UK)
Braveheart 1995 (USA)
Brigadoon 1954 (USA)
I Know Where I'm Going 1945 (UK)
Just Another Saturday 1975 (UK)
Rob Roy 1995 (UK)
Sixteen Years of Alcohol 2003 (UK)
Whisky Galore 1949 (UK)

Notes

¹ Depictions of women are not absent within the three historic discourses of Scotland discussed within this section. However, although I consider representations of women within the narrative of *16 Years* to be oppositional to many depictions of the past, this argument did not emerge from the data and is not within the remit of the paper. Consequently this discussion focuses on the more traditional masculine representations.

² 'Of persons or personal qualities: (1) Agreeable, sociable, friendly, sympathetic' (DSL, 2005).