

Staging Contemporary Identities: National Theatre of Scotland's *Glasgow Girls* through the prism of Multimodal Discourse Analysis

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In 2016 the National Theatre of Scotland (NTS) celebrated its tenth anniversary. Since its inaugural performances of *Home* the company has contributed substantially to the shaping of Scotland's cultural landscape. Through its structure of a collaborative, touring theatre without walls, the NTS has challenged traditional perceptions of national theatres as elitist monuments of national culture. Nevertheless, although much has been written and said about the political and cultural factors underlying its establishment (Agnew 2000; Hamilton and Scullion 2003; Leach 2007; Reid 2007), messages conveyed in the company's repertoire have received less scholarly attention. This paper explores the NTS's discursive treatment of contemporary 'Scottish' identities – their character and relevance – in the broader context of the national and transnational imagining. Using methodology grounded in multimodal discourse analysis, it investigates meanings conveyed in the NTS musical, *Glasgow Girls* (2012), arguing that the popular piece is more than an 'unashamedly' positive expression of 'political populism' (Reid 2016 :158-159).

Theatre offers a fusion of various semiotic stimuli which help to convey meanings on various levels. Indeed, in a recent collection of works entitled *Theatre, Performance and Cognition: Languages, Bodies and Ecologies*, Barbara Dancygier suggests that the multimodality of theatre is the very essence of its complexity and potential (Dancygier 2016: 39). The first ten years of the NTS's existence have proven that the company places a strong emphasis on various modes of expression in their innovative, frequently site-specific performances. Music in particular appears as a powerful factor in their work and an exploration of the musical mode (particularly song) reveals that it is used not only as an amplifier of powerful emotions, but as a mode of communication enabling discursively constructed meanings to be conveyed on the level of sound. Drawing on recent developments in social-semiotics this article explores musical discourses discernible in one of NTS's most successful musical plays, *Glasgow Girls*. It argues that music in this production actively contributes to the theatre's critique of old boundaries and national iconographies, offering a bold take on the global circumstances influencing the formation of 'Scottish' identities today. Discourses surrounding the play are initially explored, highlighting ideological undercurrents shaping its representation of immigration and Scottish identity. The article then moves on to the examination of the musical sphere of the play, revealing discursive meanings conveyed in the piece on the level of sound.

Together, the analyses offer an interpretation of the *Glasgow Girls* musical suggesting that the concepts proposed on the national stage may be more subversive and radical than they initially seem.

Glasgow Girls, written by Cora Bissett and David Greig, is a musical play based on real events which attracted public attention in 2005. The play has gained significant critical and popular acclaim with reviewers praising its 'explosive energy and political passion' (McMillan 2016, 363) and referring to it as 'awe-inspiring' (Marlowe 2014) as well as 'strong, gritty, street-wise and unashamedly polemical' (Fox 2012). Indeed, in the words of Mark Brown, '[n]ot, perhaps, since 1973 – when John McGrath and his 7:84 theatre company staged their legendary play *The Cheviot, The Stag and the Black Black Oil* – has Scottish musical theatre packed a political punch as hard as *Glasgow Girls*' (Brown 2012b). The play tells a real-life story of a group of teenage girls from Drumchapel High School, on the outskirts of Glasgow, who embark upon a passionate mission to free their asylum-seeker friend, Agnesa Murselaj, detained in one of the infamous dawn raids carried out by the UK Border Agency in situations where an asylum claim is being rejected (Shaw 2007: 273; Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002). The forced removals, officially criticised by Amnesty International for frequent brutality and racism (Amnesty n.d.), are known to be carried out by the UK Border Agency in situations when the asylum-seekers' country of origin is no longer deemed as posing any threat to their safety (Shaw 2007: 273; Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002). With the notion of 'safety' being somewhat arbitrary and the complexities of applicants' individual circumstances being frequently disregarded, the girls' campaign to release Agnesa became a powerful defence of Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that '[e]veryone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution' (Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, Article 14). The girls' efforts began in 2005 with the launch of a petition to stop child detention in Scotland (an end to this practice was eventually announced in a speech by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg in 2010 (Deputy Prime Minister 's Speech 2010)). The initiative's public appeal and wide media coverage led to a debate in the Scottish Parliament. The girls also won an award for the Public Campaign of the Year during the 2005 Scottish Politician of the Year Awards. The story has been subsequently turned into two BBC documentaries in 2005 and 2006 (<https://vimeo.com/47646327> Glasgow girls documentary 1, <https://vimeo.com/52571808> Glasgow girls documentary 2), a musical play commissioned for BBC Three in 2014 (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b049n0js>) and the NTS musical, performed on the Scottish national stage in 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2016. In a recent documentary entitled *National Theatre of Scotland: A Dramatic Decade*, Cora Bissett explains

that the fact the 'story was led by a group of teenage girls that [...] have a passion for life and a kind of defiance and a kind of fearlessness' (Bissett 2016) compelled her to create a 'bigger, bolder, more popular form [and] a musical was the best way to do that' (Bissett 2016). While the use of the musical mode seems to relate *Glasgow Girls* to the expressive power of McGrath's *The Cheviot...*, the way 'local' identities are approached in the later play signify a clear shift from a dissective representation of the past to the a daring vision of the future.¹ *Glasgow Girls*, whilst offering great popular entertainment, emphasises the topics of immigration, belonging and social justice within the mainstream cultural debate in an emotionally disturbing yet forward-looking manner.

As a playwright, David Greig, who collaborated with Bissett on the stage adaptation of the story, is known for exploring the dynamics of economic and cultural transformations which frequently leave his characters ontologically and epistemologically puzzled (Zaroulia 2013: 179-182). Deprived of a stable sense of belonging, Greig's characters seek some form of stability in the largely transnational world in which they constantly shift between places or, to use Marc Augé's term, transient 'non-places' (Augé 1995). Still, although many of the *Glasgow Girls*' characters are forced to abandon their homelands and seek asylum, the vision painted by Greig and Bissett is far from that of a gloomy dystopia. Instead, what *Glasgow Girls* suggests is that against legal and social odds, and despite incidents of racism and xenophobia which dominated the popular media discourse (Brown 2012a), many of the displaced families found a sense of home and community within Glasgow's working-class neighbourhoods of Scotstoun and Drumchapel.

The play begins with a formal notice of removal voiced by the UK Border Agency during a dawn raid:

This is the UK Borders Agency

Your Asylum Claim has been denied

Your residency is illegal

Your temporary admission has been curtailed

Your Removal must be enforced,

¹ For an investigation of ambiguities arising from the selection of songs for *The Cheviot...* see Brown and Innes 2012 and Brown and Innes 2015. For a polemic on the assumed preoccupation of the Scottish independence movement with the past see McMillan 2014.

Alright. Enough. Let's knock the door down. (Greig *et al* 2012: 2)

As becomes clear from the Opening Montage, due to a supposed overcrowding of London, Glasgow was selected as an alternative destination for asylum-seekers arriving in the United Kingdom in 1999. The musical's characters subsequently address the audience:

Roza: Why Glasgow?

Emma: Maybe [...] it was because Glasgow was full of half empty tower blocks that no one wanted to live in.

Agnesa: Or maybe it was because Glasgow's a friendly city?

Ewelina: Who knows?

Amal: But whatever reason it was – in the late spring of 1999 – a few frightened and bewildered families from all the war zones of the world were taken from London and dumped in a city they'd never heard of – Glasgow – (Greig *et al* 2012: 2)

If it is not quite obvious at this stage whether Agnesa's mention of Glasgow's friendliness is genuine or comically ironic, Emma's comment concerning abandoned tower blocks being adapted as temporary refugee accommodation brings to mind a sense of urban dystopia emerging from Augé's work. Drumchapel is not an entirely neutral choice of location for the refugees within Glasgow. The neighbourhood around which the story revolves is a 'peripheral Glasgow housing estate built in the 1960s as an exercise in slum clearance' (Reid 2016, 158). In the words of Jennifer, one of the play's characters, Drumchapel High is '[o]ne of the toughest schools in one of the toughest areas of one of the toughest cities in Scotland' (Greig *et al* 2012: 4). Indeed, according to a report by the Steering Committee on Local and Regional Democracy published by the Council of Europe in 2001, Drumchapel is an area where deprivation and social exclusion contribute to the shortening of its inhabitants' life expectancy by ten years in comparison to those living one mile away, in neighbouring Bearsden.² While social housing in the area may be available, considering the rough character of the neighbourhood as well as frequent dawn raids affecting the refugee residents, the sense of precariousness in Drumchapel would probably seem profound. Nevertheless, it is here that the refugee families find a home and, as the tale unfolds, their children fight passionately to keep it.

² This figure is cited by the Steering Committee on Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR) prepared with the collaboration of Professor Massimo Balducci, *Neighbourhood Services in Disadvantaged Urban Areas and in Areas of Low Population*, (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2001), 150

The audience meet the key protagonists, Amal, Roza, Ewelina, Agnesa, Jennifer and Emma early in the play (the seventh original schoolgirl, Tony-Lee, does not feature in the NTS piece). Having described each other briefly, the characters announce that Mr Girvan, a Bilingual Learning Support Teacher, Scots-language enthusiast, Kilmarnock fan, great lover of folk music and the poetry of Robert Burns, and a 'legend' (Greig *et al* 2012: 8) is also a 'Glasgow Girl' – a significant and surprisingly subversive concept which is crucial in understanding *Glasgow Girls* as more than a celebration of a naively conceived, multicultural utopia. The play, which interlaces the account of the girls' campaign with musical material functioning as a powerful commentary on their situation, offers a discursively innovative and realistically feasible take on cultural diversity and what its shape could be in a contemporary, forward-looking society.

To understand what the refreshing take on these issues is, it is first necessary to look at the interaction of the newly arrived girls and their Bilingual Support Teacher. Mr Girvan initiates his teaching of English with an image and narrative embedded in the target language and culture (McGonigal and Arizpe 2007: 27). He begins with Robert Burns, Scottish national poet, whom he presents to the girls on a banknote. He then moves on to recite Burns's 'To a Mouse', a poem expressing the poet's poignant reflection upon the fate of a helpless *beastie* he has accidentally made homeless while ploughing the field. The lyric is thus offered as a form of 'introduction to Scotland' (discursive complexities associated with that choice are explored in the section devoted to the poem's musical rendition below). Crucially, the teacher delivers the poem in Scots followed by its English translation, which students may be more likely to understand. Notably, during this first performance at the beginning of the play, Mr Girvan asks the pupils to draw images reminding them of home. His request significantly amplifies the straightforward message of compassion conveyed in Burns's stanzas as the last drawing is Roza's image of a man pointing a gun at another man's head (Greig *et al* 2012: 12-13). Mr Girvan thus delivers what appears to be an emblematically Scottish poem, whilst simultaneously enabling foreign students to immediately identify with the work's themes through their own, often traumatic experience of war and persecution. Not only is the sequence a mere endeavour to represent the process of translation during an English language class, but an attempt at conveying universal human experience. It is possible through the use of a familiar poem which enables the students as well as the audience to identify with the experience of others. Contrary to assimilation models of multiculturalism (Pires and Stanton 2005: 42-43), Mr Girvan's seemingly simple gesture opens a window of opportunity for meaningful dialogue hinting at what historian, Donald, terms *transculturalism*, in which, instead

of merely tolerating, we perceive ourselves in the 'Other' (Cuccioletta 2001/2002: 9). It is this approach which makes it possible for Emma to say that:

Emma: The Bilingual base soon became a haven – a sort of second home for the Asylum kids.

Jen: A place where they felt comfortable. (Greig *et al* 2012: 13-14)

This sense of acceptance and safety in the school environment finds a strong reflection in the girls' integration within the local community. Indeed, in the words of the bilingualism scholar Jim Cummins, '[b]ilingual students who feel a sense of belonging in their classroom learning community are more likely to feel 'at home' in their society upon graduation and to contribute actively to building that society' (Cummins 1996: 236). The interaction here is nevertheless not initiated from a position of a 'tolerant', socially dominant power, but openness and recognition of human experience. It is the mutual, two-way interaction which underlies the notion of 'Glasgow Girls' as a term encompassing both the refugee kids who claim a Glasgow identity and, equally, members of the local community who identify with the refugee cause.

In order to fully appreciate the complexity of messages conveyed by the NTS play, the discursive undercurrents related to the specific choice of musical material within the drama should be analysed in more detail. The relationship between Burns's 'To a Mouse', its contemporary musical rendition as well as the play's theme song, 'We are the Glasgow Girls' will thus to be examined. According to scholars such as Johan Fornäs, song ought to be approached as a 'multimodal supergenre that mediates between words and music' (Fornäs 2003: 37-38). Discursive meanings are conveyed by both lyrics and music, which carries sets of underlying contextual references. As argued by semiotician, (and jazz musician) Theo van Leeuwen, music and speech were not always treated as entirely autonomous disciplines. Recent advocates of social semiotics and multimodal theory call for a more holistic approach to meaning. Such a position stems from a recognition that communication consists of many more elements than just language. According to social semioticians, in order to understand how meanings are transmitted and perceived, an interaction of a variety of audio-visual and spatial factors can, and should, be considered (Kress 2009: 1-15). Van Leeuwen proposes that instead of invariably following the approach to language as a dominant and largely fixed code, more emphasis should be put on the exploration of semiotic resources, enabling objects and practices to be perceived and interpreted in multiple ways depending on the context and manner in which they are used. While Roland Barthes argued that denotation and connotation are not limited to language but can include image (Barthes 1964), social semiotic investigation

of meaning goes even further and incorporates visual, auditory and even kinaesthetic modes (previously 'signs') in what is known as the multimodal discourse analysis (van Leeuwen, 2005: 4-5, 26, 37). As suggested in the introduction of this article, theatre offers a rich source of material for a multimodal investigation devoted to the constructions of national and transnational identities. Writing about the inherent multimodality of theatre, Barbara Dancygier argues that '[t]he interaction between the material, the embodied, and the linguistic is intricate and relies on a number of dimensions: visual perception, frame evocation, conceptualization of the human body, understanding of space and, last but not least, the language' (Dancygier 2016: 39). To that list I would certainly add the perception of auditory modes such as music, the exploration of which can be successfully approached using methodology grounded in social-semiotic analyses of van Leeuwen (van Leeuwen 1999 and 2005), Kress (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001 and Kress 2010) and Machin (2010). Such an exploration reveals discursive complexities underlying the message put forward on the Scottish national stage. 'We are the Glasgow Girls', the theme song of *Glasgow Girls*, is a potent source of material for such an investigation.

Without delving into neuroscience (which admittedly offers fascinating insights into processes involved in the perception of music),³ social semiotics enables us to investigate music as discourse. In the words of van Leeuwen, 'Almost everything we do or make can be done or made in different ways and therefore allows, at least in principle, the articulation of different social and cultural meanings' (van Leeuwen 2005: 4). A socio-semiotic analysis is thus interested in how exactly semiotic resources are used, who uses them, what connotations they carry in a particular situation and what new meanings emerge in this process. The plural form 'meanings' is deliberately used here as the meaning potential is not fixed. Drawing on the works of James Gibson (Gibson 1979: 57-60) and Michael Halliday (Halliday 1978), van Leeuwen suggests that the semiotic potential of the resources is largely informed by their past uses which may be selectively employed depending on why the new users need them.⁴ It is thus largely up to the users to pick a particular meaning applicable to a given situation. What complicates the matter is that the potential use of a given resource (in other words, its *affordance*) remains objectively there, which leads to a somewhat paradoxical conclusion that meanings are subjective and objective at the same time (van Leeuwen 2005: 4-5). Still, the idea that semiotic resources should be analysed not only in their current context but also with consideration of their origins and past applications is highly useful in the exploration of musical

³ See works by Stefan Koelsch, <http://www.stefan-koelsch.de/papers.html>. (Last accessed on 30 September 2016).

⁴ See differences between 'theoretical' and 'actual' semiotic potential in van Leeuwen (2005: 4).

discourse in the work of the NTS and, more generally, in theatre as a medium of communication. What such an approach necessitates is attention to change. To put it in Barthesian terms, semantic resources will never emerge 'naturally' or in an ideological vacuum, however persuasive such visions may be (Barthes 1964: 32-51).⁵ They will always be driven by some form of ideologically marked discourse. Unravelling these discourses within the work of the NTS enables an exploration of changes within the collective 'imagining' conducted on the Scottish national stage.

'We are the Glasgow Girls' is the theme song of the musical, written by a reggae, trip and hip-hop artist MC Soom T. Born in Glasgow to a family of Indian immigrants, MC Soom T, or Sumati Bhardwaj, enjoys a reputation as a militant activist⁶ and stands out as a powerful female voice on the city's music scene – details which certainly resonate with the themes explored in the NTS musical. To comprehend the musically and discursively significant elements within her song, it is useful to examine it through the prism of the following factors: its relation to other musical pieces in the play, musical genres and traditions influencing its composition, rhythm, prosody and song lyrics. The discursive potential of 'We are the Glasgow Girls' is best realised in its initial performance in the show beginning immediately after, and thus in juxtaposition with, the acoustic, folk rendition of Burns's 'To a Mouse', which has already been mentioned. The use of a 1785 poem in a drama staged by a contemporary national theatre has a variety of underlying connotations. It can be interpreted as a reference to a collective past which is subsequently transformed and adapted to the twenty-first century context. Contrary to voices criticising references to heritage as standing in inevitable conflict with Scotland's alleged civic nationalism (Torrance 2014), the employment of a traditional piece can be seen here as a form of critical engagement with cultural memory— a sense of a historical and cultural past through which national character may be celebrated but also questioned (Rigney 2012). Several aspects concerning the choice and arrangement of the poem suggest a more complex interpretation. First of all, the use of a contemporary, acoustic guitar accompaniment hints at a rather dynamic character of the proposed 'past'. The poem, seemingly familiar, is already transformed by being accompanied by the relatively new instrument for Scottish folk music, the guitar, rather than the traditional fiddle, clarsach or whistles, and subtly foreshadows the more radical changes to come. The very choice of an 'iconically traditional' piece by Burns not only resonates with heritage but also a variety of potential transgressions if we consider the bard's reputation as a music-loving dancer (Lockhart 1830: 28), internationalist (Crawford 1997: xi), and working-class radical

⁵ See Roland Barthes's critique of myth in *Mythologies* (London: Grant and Cutler, 1994).

⁶ See for instance Echorek, <http://echorek.com/soomt/>, last accessed on 20/09/2016

(McIlvanney 2002), expressing the voice of those marginalised within the society (Rawes 2011: 94). These factors not only embed the play in the narrative of social resistance, but also foreshadow its focus on youthful passion and rebelliousness, which is key to its expressive power and discursive orientation. If Carol McGuirk's recent take on 'To a Mouse' affirms it as one of the bard's most powerfully self-reflective works in which he considers the precariousness of his own social and economic prospects (McGuirk 2016: 65), the play's preoccupation with asylum-seekers gives it doubly resonant interpretative undertones, which easily give in to both direct and metaphorical interpretations. The teacher's second rendition towards the end of the play completes the process of cultural transformation explored throughout the musical. *Glasgow Girls* is thus not only an emotional story of the girls' struggle to release their friend from detention, but also a story of the Scottish working class neighbourhood becoming a home to the recently arrived refugees, *as well as* the area becoming enriched with the newcomers' cultural influence. This, of course, carries a variety of implications for both local and incoming communities and finds expression in the musical layer of the Mr Girvan's performance which is interjected with sudden, fast-paced Romani-style stanzas. The composition does not follow the rhythmic pattern we expect on the basis of what we are familiar with and what we hear at the beginning of the piece. Without analysing the lyrics, the rhythm itself, with its recognisably shifting origins, signifies an interruption in the familiar sound flow and suggests a change in the character of the tune leading up to the musical finale. These interludes signify more than a change of musical style. They reflect a complex transformation in the nature of the 'local' Scottish voice. It is quite clear that the critical commentary on the political turmoil leading to hostilities amongst 'fellow mortals', as well as the references to the destruction of the mouse's safe dwelling, relate Burns's song to the adversities faced by the displaced asylum-seekers, confirming a contemporary, spatially and thematically fresh dimension to the otherwise well recognised traditional piece. The Romani sounds, however, initially coming across as incongruous with the familiar mode of Scottish folk performance, offer a performative prelude to the 'We are the Glasgow Girls' finale which acts as a musical statement concerning the multicultural transformation within the local Glasgow communities.

The play's musical finale is based on a combination of electronic beats, quickly-articulated, reggae-influenced rap lyrics interwoven with melodious choruses and elements of 'world-music' blended into its structure. As such, it offers a rich source of material for socio-semiotic discourse analysis. The overall hip-hop style of the song carries a variety of underlying meanings and connotations. While the study into rap's origins in the sixteenth-

century Scottish flyting headlined news in 2008 (*Scotsman* 2008), it is fair to agree with Becky Blanchard that contemporary rap music is most strongly associated with the 'hip-hop culture of young, urban, working-class African-Americans, its roots in the African oral tradition, its function as the voice of an otherwise underrepresented group [...]' (Blanchard 1999). Certainly not all contemporary artists subscribe to this celebration of early genre-associated values in their lyrics, but, if some of the mainstream rappers abandoned social engagement in favour of swish cars, diamonds, and private jets (Shahid 2012), strands of hip-hop, and notably European hip-hop, continue to constitute a platform for expression and empowerment to the otherwise underprivileged. Focusing on the struggles faced by the rappers' close-knit community, they stay true to hip-hop's 'foundational roots' embedded in the reality of the 'hood' (Forman 2002: 236). Indeed, Scottish rap has been described as 'the sound of the schemes', driven by the desire to 'give voice to the voiceless' (Ross 2012). Such attitudes are also well reflected in migrant communities where the music scene tends to be one of the very few arenas granting social acceptance (Zeiger 2013: 241-242). Here, migrant youth assume an equal space in their articulation of solidarity as well as protest against racial, political and economic oppression. Through their musical practice, through the shared physical act of music production and perception, and finally through the expression of shared messages, these musicians construct a community. A community thus becomes not just 'represented' but 'constructed' through the medium of music. In the words of Simon Frith:

the issue is not how a particular piece of music or a performance reflects the people, but how it produces them, how it creates and constructs an experience – a musical experience, an aesthetic experience – that we can only make sense of by *taking on* both a subjective and collective identity. [...] Music, like identity, is both performance and story, describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social [...]. (Frith 2007: 294)

Importantly, drawing on the African oral traditions where 'rhyme, beat and vocal inflection carry as much meaning as the words themselves' (Frith 2007: 224), identities and meanings in hip-hop songs are conveyed on various, linguistic and supralinguistic levels. Consequently, if hip-hop connotes a rebellious struggle for recognition of a marginalised voice, it is quite significant that this particular call is articulated not outside but inside a national theatre performance. On the discursive level, the youth, hip-hop theme song of the play thus brings the question of the marginalised, underprivileged members of the society into a high profile cultural debate. The genre-associated meanings are further stressed when analysed through the prism of cultural history: hip-hop, together with rock 'n' roll and jazz, to give other examples, have been seen

as socially dangerous musical styles attributed to youth (Austin and Willard 1998; Bennett 2001) and the 'common people' (Kooijman 2088: 11). In fact, the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane which has fuelled such ideas about popular music has operated in the Western discourse since antiquity, with popular music being often dismissed as 'pornographic [...and] inciting bad behaviour' (Terkourafi 2010: 2). In line with this theory, there is a significant (and hierarchical) dichotomy between spiritually-elevated high cultural music to be contemplated in silence and the sex-driven rhythms of pop (Frith 1996: 130-141), which have been widely enjoyed by audiences around the world, and frequently used as means of shaking off the established social conventions (Machin. n. d. (a)). Bearing in mind that hip-hop continues to be a largely male-dominated genre (Sharma 2010: 150), the distinctively female voice within the musical further emphasises the play's rebellious drive to tear down inadequate barriers, expose social injustice and instil a sense of agency amongst the contemporary youth. This is well reflected in the following stanza:

Amal: Girls united from afar

We bind to make a fist

Roza: To make right the very wrongs

Betrayed by the courts justice

Ewelina: Rebuild the faith that once was gone

Assist those in our hearts and homes

All: Never to be left alone (Greig *et al*: 23)

The feeling of strong defiance against unjust treatment of fellow humankind is clearly and emotively articulated here. As will be argued in the sections below, also the structure of the musical's hip-hop verses plays a crucial part in conveying the political message successfully. With its earliest focus being, in fact, dance and rhythm (Samuels 2004: 148), hip-hop is extremely evocative as a means of discursive attack on the political and cultural establishment.

Understanding the significance of rhythm in theatre offers a valuable insight into the tremendous success of *Glasgow Girls*, a play which certainly loses a lot of its electrifying appeal when only experienced on the page. According to van Leeuwen, rhythm, as a basic,

natural element of our biologic existence, is the very 'lifeblood' of semiotics (van Leeuwen 2005: 181):

As we act together and talk together we synchronize. The rhythms of our actions become as finely attuned to each other as the parts of different instruments in a musical performance. [...] The essence of rhythm is alternation – alternation between two states: an up and a down, a tense and a lax, a loud and a soft [...]. Such an alternation between two 'opposite poles' is so essential to human perception that we perceive it even when, 'objectively', it is not there. (van Leeuwen 2005: 181-182)

What this means is that rhythm and its various aspects such as pulse, accent, meter and stress organise sound as well as our actions into structured patterns (Cooper and Meyer 1960: 1-11). By doing so, they tend to facilitate better understanding of multimodal compositions which convey messages through dialogues, movements or, indeed, music (van Leeuwen 2005: 181-182). Rhythm helps to transmit meaning through allowing the listener and their entire body to give in to its natural ebb and flow. This is particularly true for regular rhythmic patterns which characterise structurally uncomplicated popular songs, appealing to the widest audience. This brings to mind Aristotle's distinction between heroic metres such as hexameter, and those associated with speech of ordinary people, such as iambic (Aristotle 1954: 180-181) As is to be expected, iambic often features in the lyrics of popular songs and, indeed, large sections of 'We Are the Glasgow Girls' are performed using this metre. One of the fast reggae-hip-hop verses of the piece reads

/ x / x / x / x

We'll organise and plan this war

/ x / x / x

And we'll set out to win

/ x / x / x / x

Back rights for all our fellow men

/ x / x / x

Community and friends (Greig *et al* 2012: 45)

The fast, clear and broadly iambic rhythm thus follows the metre of common speech. As explained by Steve Larson in *Musical Forces; Motion, Metaphor and Meaning in Music*, listeners get used to such 'rhythmic stability' as they grow familiar with a given rhythmic pattern

(Larson 2012: 143-149). Regular rhythmic pattern and skilfully interwoven international rhythmic and tonal influences are certainly some of the most important reasons why 'We are the Glasgow Girls' works well as the play's anthem. While the context and provenance of used sounds and rhythms express sets of values and ideas, their combination in a different musical setting constructs new meanings, expressive of entirely new realities.

As argued by Larson:

in agreement with contemporary cognitive metaphor theory, our experience of musical motion seems to borrow not just selective features of physical motion but any aspect of physical motion that can be mapped onto musical succession [and] physical motions tend to have beginnings, middles, and ends that move from stability through instability then back again to stability. (Larson 2012: 145)

If we pursue Larson's movement metaphor and apply it to the musical discourse of the main song in the *Glasgow Girls*, our attention may be drawn to the fluid character of contemporary identities, which, just as the sounds of displaced communities they come from, are very much in the state of flux. Understood as a process rather than a fixed given, identity can be perceived similarly to music— as a flow, movement through time (Frith 2007: 295). If Mr Girvan's 'To a Mouse' may initially suggest the notions of a familiar Scottish 'national' status quo (or Larson's 'stability'), the Roma beats introduce the sense of 'global' cultural and political disturbance and tension, which is subsequently resolved in a creative blending of international influences in 'We are the Glasgow Girls' finale. If it is clear that the musical mode of 'To a Mouse' discursively represents 'us' (the 'local' voice) and the semiotic resources used to denote asylum-seekers' appearance in the community are initially perceived as an unexpected sound of the 'Other', the entire play and, importantly, the emotionally powerful musical finale, arrives at a very transformed sense of who 'we' are.

'We Are the Glasgow Girls' mixes and juxtaposes verbally transmitted text with music drawing on a variety of semiotic resources. In terms of voice articulation, the rap/singing style of the song performed by the girls follows standard semiotic assumptions about meanings non-verbally conveyed by the human voice. Words are articulated quickly with a raised tone conveying a sense of urgency. As in the case of news delivered by on-the-scene reporters, the high tempo helps to create a feeling of relevance and immediacy amongst the listeners (van Leeuwen 2005: 191). This is certainly true in the stanza already quoted above. Essentially, the voice, articulated with tension, not only is in itself tense but 'also *means* tense and *makes* tense' (van Leeuwen 2005: 33), helping us to understand connotations underlying

the performance. In the words of van Leeuwen, 'we can use our experience of vocal tension to understand other things, transfer it from the domain of direct human experience to the domain of more abstract cultural ideas, values and practices' (van Leeuwen 2005: 33). In the case of *Glasgow Girls* the tension seems to refer to the frustration with the unjustly precarious position the refugees find themselves in. What is significant, however, is that meanings conveyed by text and music in the song do not always correspond but subvert each other, taking the discursive argument to somewhat unexpected conclusions.

'We are the Glasgow Girls' is performed assuming an agitated, bold if not angry hip-hop voice – a notion enhanced by the play's trailer visuals,⁷ which involve a somewhat threatening black and yellow tunnel with flashing slogans rapidly appearing in the background, (Figure 1,2,3). But what the slogans and lyrics say is not quite what the notion of 'migrant youth against the system' or 'militant activism' could suggest. The rebelliousness here is simply the rejection of obsolete boundaries which stop the girls from being a part of *their* local community. The community in question is importantly not that of migrants or refugees, but that of Scotstoun and Drumchapel. The notion of 'us' and 'them' is thus fluid and its character is further explored through the use of musical borrowings in the song's composition.

Figure 1.



⁷ NTS *Glasgow Girls* 2012 trailer, available on-line on: <https://vimeo.com/50772326>. (Last accessed on 3 November 2016).

Figure 2.



Figure 3.



'We are the Glasgow Girls' features a variety of borrowings from world-music sources. Such semiotic 'imports' are employed in music for various purposes. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, folk instruments, such as the French hurdy-gurdy, were employed in symphonic orchestras to convey the sense of authenticity associated with an 'idyllic countryside' (van Leeuwen 2005: 40-41). In other instances, contemporary film makers used relatively recent instruments in their attempt to convey the 'national' spirit in soundscapes of films preoccupied with a distant past. Such was the case of Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* (1995) and the employment of bagpipes (Machin n. d. (b)). 'We are the Glasgow Girls', an overall urban-sounding, dub-hip-hop piece, features gypsy scale stylisation (Tan 2008: 24-25) realised in a sorrowful, emotively lingering melody phrase combined with the word 'Glasgow' towards the end of the contrastingly energetic chorus. The syncopated Kurdish beats (Bisset 2016) appearing towards the end of the song give it a boost of vibrant folk-dance energy. Finally, an Arabic stylisation is introduced on the repetition of the word 'strong' through a clever use of the C# minor harmonic scale which hints at the quartertone melismata (Cohen and Ruth Katz 2006: 229-230) popular in the Arabic music tradition. The lyrics of the popular refrain read:

CHORUS

Glasgow Girls

We'll show them how to do it

When we show the world

How to get up and to it
The Glasgow Girls are one and all
The Glasgow Girls together we are strong
Together we are strong
Together we are strong.

CHORUS & ROMA

Glasgow Girls, we show em [*sic*] how to do it –
Oh, Glasgow
Oh, Glasgow
Glasgow Girls
Glasgow Girls [...]
Hup hup hup hup hup hup hup
Glasgow Girls
We'll show em how to do it [...] (Greig *et al* 2012: 45)

While words may convey relatively clear meanings, musical borrowings used in the song function as distinct semiotic resources which can attach very specific connotations to otherwise entirely neutral vocabulary, such as 'oh' or 'hup'. While an uprooting of sounds from their original cultural context into a piece of western, popular music could be interpreted as a sign of cultural appropriation or simply a fusion of international influences in the age of globalisation, what the international influence certainly seems to offer is a semiotic change. As the notion of mobile, adaptable identities lies at heart of the play, the sense of what is local and what signifies the foreign 'Other' is shaken. The girls confidently voice their own story, which, significantly, becomes a story of all of Scotstoun, and, indeed, everyone supporting their cause. As the re-contextualised external musical influences blend in with the Scottish tradition and become proposed as local, the notion of what 'local' means becomes creatively transformed, opening up to a variety of resources which become naturalised and embraced within one semiotic order of things.

Employing elements of multimodal analysis this article illuminates the role of musical discourse in David Greig and Cora Bisset's *Glasgow Girls*. Music is a tremendously significant factor in the work of Scotland's National Theatre and, indeed, in the construction of Scottish identities. In the case of *Glasgow Girls*, its passionate, youthful energy has been a key factor in bringing the issues of refugees and working-class communities to the forefront of the 'national' cultural debate. It has certainly helped to convey an overwhelmingly positive

message concerning the sense of integrity within these communities and, by doing so, functioned as a resonant factor in the NTS's criticism of UK immigration policy. Still, even though the diverse multicultural vision of Glasgow is certainly stressed in the drama, the NTS does not pretend there is no other side in the argument – it is well articulated in the hostile attitudes of xenophobic radio callers or even Jennifer's own father (Greig *et al* 2012: 57-60, 38-39). This is significant if we consider Gerry Hassan's criticism of the myths of modern Scotland which he sees as being continuously propelled in the political and popular discourse (Hassan 2014: 31-38). One of such false beliefs, according to Hassan, is the openness and tolerance binarily opposed to British prejudice and conservatism. This, he argues, is far from a shared stance amongst the whole society and could be perhaps rephrased as an 'aspiration' rather than the actual state of affairs. Nevertheless if, as Foucault, and others, have argued, powerful discourse is capable of constructing reality, the visions and versions of contemporary Scotland rehearsed on the national stage may in fact (to draw on psychoanalytical theory) influence the popular attitudes to some of the most pressing topics today (Campbell 2001: 1-18). Although the NTS is frequently praised for remaining politically neutral in the case of Scottish Independence, it does not shy away from engaging with the general topic of Scottish identities in ways which, often, emphasise the distinctly Scottish take on contemporary global issues. In the heat of the current refugee crisis, this certainly involves a discussion of belonging and identity, in which the NTS cautiously yet confidently searches for a common ground between its national roots and transnational routes.

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