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# Histories of place: the racialization of representational space in Govanhill and Butetown

## Article

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### ABSTRACT

We argue that the stories told about the histories and nature of places, are vehicles for narrating race. Drawing on interviews with professionals and community workers in Butetown in Cardiff and Govanhill in Glasgow, we explore how they negotiated – and contested – racialized histories of place, constructing different versions or claims to belong. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre’s spatial concepts we explore this conceptualization through examination of the two areas that have distinct histories, and present experiences, of migration and racialization. In discussion of the accounts from the two distinct areas, we show that narratives of the past have a political resonance that shape accounts of current experiences of migration. Accounts of place are often related in relationship to comparisons with and narratives of other places and to global processes of trade and migration. Whilst these racialized narratives are contested, they also shape responses to social problems faced by communities.

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## Introduction

This article explores the enduring power of histories of place<sup>1</sup>. It examines how the stories local professionals and community representatives tell about a place endow these places with particular identities and are also accounts about race, which may shape their response to the social problems faced by those communities. De Certeau tells us that stories are always located: ‘every story is a travel story – a spatial practice’ (de Certeau 1984, 106). In the same way, places are storied – they are lived in and told through stories and they provide one structure through which stories of the self, of community, of change and history are told. Stories of place, particularly urban places are

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temporal – telling of economic and population change, of people coming together, moving in and away (Harvey 2008, 24). Places are the setting of work and home-making; of politics, consumption, and leisure. Inevitably, they are deeply gendered, classed and raced (Massey 1994). Stories about place are an integral part of race-making (Neely and Samura 2011). Lipsitz reminds us that ‘race is produced by space’ and that racism occurs in places (Lipsitz 2011). It is this contention that this article seeks to explore, through close examination of accounts of two particular places. We will examine the accounts of professionals and community representatives working in two specific urban areas (Butetown in Cardiff and Govanhill in Glasgow). These areas both have long histories of racialization but have had much less academic attention compared to English cities such as London or Manchester. We explore how place-making and the production of narratives about place become a means for some to narrate race. In conducting their work, professionals and community representatives were used to negotiating racialized discourses of place and thus their accounts can provide a productive point of entry into this terrain, shedding light on the entanglements between narrations of place and race/ethnicity and migration.

From the national scale to that of cities and local areas, stories about places can tell us about who is constructed as outsiders and who has taken the place of the ‘native’ with claims to a place as ‘home’. Stories also carry affectual and moral valuations of place, telling of stigmatization, degeneration, regeneration, or gentrification. With migration, be that regional, national, or international as the basis of producing the urban, these narratives have cultural difference woven through them. At the same time, reputations of places rely on historical narratives that are often quite fixed and well-worn. They can often feel like scripts, or Foucault’s ‘major narratives’ which are ‘recounted, repeated and varied: formulae texts and ritualized sets of discourses that are recited in well-defined circumstances’ (Foucault, 1984, 56). We will argue that these interviews demonstrate competing representations of space, relying on alternative interpretations of histories of migration and place making. Through these accounts, the article shows how different versions of claims to belong are constructed and whose bodies and behaviours may be seen as disruptive. Our aim, then is to shed light on the racialized and racializing aspects of the politics of space, in the light of de Certeau’s (de Certeau 1984, 39) recognition of, in the last instance, the strategies of the powerful to ‘bet on place’. Narrations of place carry with them the power to exclude or include groups as well as endow deservingness or stigma. In order to explore these dynamics, the article will begin with a consideration of the relationship between race and the city and an elaboration of Henri Lefebvre’s spatial concepts. We argue that while Lefebvre’s conceptualizing of spatial practices and representations is useful, more needs to be done to acknowledge and trace their racialization. We will argue that narratives of the past have present

political resonance which shape accounts of current experiences of migration, and relationships to the local and the national, demonstrating the significance of contestations over histories of place for understanding local communities and identities.

### **Race, the city, and the national**

The urban is a key site in tracking the sociology of race, with the urban both constructing understandings of race, but also marked as racialized (Cross and Keith 1993, 9; DuBois (1967(1899))). Furthermore, race and ethnicity are often read through particular places within cities (Smith 1993) a process that can become heightened with the resurgence of racism (Pred 2000). Therefore, it is critical to be attentive to the spatial if we are to understand processes of racialization and questions of inequality and identity. Space may be organized so as to limit access to certain groups, or people can be categorized and their values read off from the places they inhabit. In these processes, the politics of race are spatial. Following Lefebvre, we see space as a social product – produced through the relations of things and social relations within multiple temporalities. Spaces carry the traces of the past (Lefebvre 1991, 37), as well as being shaped by the intense flows and networks between different places in ways in which undermine the notion of bounded cities or places (Amin 2007).

Lefebvre emphasized the distinction between different spatial concepts. Spatial practices are daily routines and the everyday ways of moving through the city for work, home and pleasure. But the dominant mode of creating the perception of place are the representations of space that is a conceived, abstract space set out by urban planners and scientists, encoded in maps and ‘objective’ descriptions of space. Finally, representational space is the locus of the imagination produced through symbolic images (Lefebvre 1991). These conceptions of space are social and also peopled. However, Lefebvre did not consider the ways in which spatial practices, representations of space and representational space may be racialized (McCann 1999). Without this appreciation we miss understanding how some bodies, and cultural practices are made not to ‘fit’ within either the officialized maps or within symbolic imaginations of space. This is critical when places become associated with an imagined fixed and singular ‘community’ (Amin 2007). In the UK, spatial narratives about changing demographics of place frequently take the form of accounts of different ‘waves’ of migration. They become histories told by an ‘indigenous’ white group experiencing the migration of racialized others – or, occasionally, a group who have a longer history of settlement who experience a ‘new wave’ of migration. For example, Barnor Hesse (1993) highlights

how many national narratives of Black presence in the UK begin from the Windrush, thereby ignoring a much longer history of Black settlement in Britain, perpetuating a white account of national history.

Thus exploring racialized narratives of local places can speak back to the national in potentially different ways. It is important to consider how narratives about local places fit with narratives of nation or to other locals, including asking what is at stake in claiming that an area is an exception (because it is so bad, or good) or that it exemplifies the 'rule' – or is 'no worse' than lots of other places? In order to trace the dynamics of racialized narratives of place, the next section will set the context of the study and methodology and explore the different ways in which spatial histories arose in accounts about the present.

### **Govanhill and Butetown**

This research comes out of a larger study examining the dynamics of ethnic inequalities in four urban areas of Britain: Newham (London), Cheetham Hill (Manchester); Govanhill (Glasgow) and Butetown (Cardiff). The areas were chosen to achieve a representation from the diverse nations of the UK and because they have both particularly long histories of immigration and narratives of racialization, as will be explored briefly below. In terms of their contemporary composition, they still have large racialized populations and with areas of extremely high economic deprivation. In the 2011 census, Butetown was 66% white with the largest other groups being Asian (mostly Pakistani) 10%, Black African or Caribbean 11% and mixed 6%. Govanhill had 60% white residents in 2011, 25% Asian, again the vast majority Pakistani, 2% African, Black or Caribbean. However, there are concerns about the undercounting of Roma in the census. In both areas, around 20% of the residents were not born in the UK.

It is often difficult to define the geographical boundaries of an urban area. Official designation of wards or other administrative units often do not fit how areas are lived and worked in and talked about. The institutional 'strategies' of mapping cities may contrast quite markedly with the 'tactics' of those who walk the cities or live their lives finding unofficial routes and shortcuts (de Certeau 1984). Representations of space contained in official boundaries often ignore busy roads and parks which are lived as clear boundaries between different areas (Jones and Woods 2013) and may have important symbolic weight. In other instances, ward boundaries may be redrawn (or renamed) for administrative purposes, but many people living and working in the area still retain older senses of identity and coherence of place.

Despite difficulties in defining what the limits of any area are, and whilst there may be disagreements about the exact boundaries, in the case of Govanhill and Butetown, both areas have strong narratives around them as places. These narratives rely on particular accounts of their history. In both the areas, the histories of place and the ways in which they are racialized are highly politicized and show contesting imaginaries of place. Some of these may spring from a distinction between 'strategic' and 'tactical' understandings of the city (de Certeau 1984). But, at the same time, as we shall see, there may be multiple and potentially conflicting 'tactical' histories of the city.

The histories of both places have been shaped by industrialization, empire and de-industrialization and then some subsequent regeneration. Govanhill grew up around the 'Dixon Blazes', the Govan Iron Works that functioned between 1837 and 1556, attracting both the rural Scottish and new migrant communities to settle and work there. These included Irish, Jewish, Italian, and Pakistani communities living in tenements built to house the industrial labour force, with this history of their arrival often being described in 'waves' which finally end with the more recent settlement of Roma from Slovakia and Romania from the 1990s onwards (Audrey 2000; Maan 1992; Mullen 2018). Govanhill largely missed out of the early regeneration and rehousing schemes experienced by other parts of Glasgow – as one respondent put it, Govanhill marks the place where the 'money ran out'.<sup>2</sup>

Butetown (or as it was previously known, Tiger Bay) has a clear status in both local and wider discourses as a place with a highly racialized history characterized by a long (pre-Windrush) history of non-white settlement centred around the docks, a key route for the export of Welsh coal and a long history of inter-racial marriage and mixing. Global seafarers (particularly from Somalia and the Yemen) and others coming to work in the coal industries settled in the area including from the Caribbean, Norway, Spain, Italy, Ireland, and West Africa. This history is increasingly well documented and celebrated (Jordan and Weedon 2015). The docks were in decline from the 1930s, with coal exports ending in 1964. In more recent times, Butetown was a place of refugee settlement and also experienced large-scale regeneration on its doorstep in the development of the Cardiff Bay area from the late 1980s, also involving a 'rebranding' of the area. The case of Butetown demonstrates some of the complex politics and 'magical powers' (de Certeau 1984, 104) of naming and its interplay with processes of regeneration. The name of the area had shifted over time, in part due to large-scale regeneration; however, this renaming is not without contestation, with Tiger Bay still lingering as an identity for the area, particularly among older generations. Having discussed the sometimes uncertain geographic boundaries of the areas in question, the following section will briefly explore how we conducted our fieldwork.

## Methods

The primary fieldwork for this project involved extensive ethnographies and qualitative research interviews conducted<sup>3</sup> with a range of representatives who were involved with the areas with a professional or activist perspective (see also Harries et al. 2019, 2020; Garratt et al. 2021; Smith et al. 2021). The respondents were identified through purposive sampling achieved through a mapping of organizations and activists within the area, particularly those focused on issues of race equality and in specialist areas such as housing, health, education, welfare, and youth services. The majority of the organizations and those we spoke to identified as Black or 'BME'. The interviewees included local activists and community representatives, but also those working in local and regional government, including councillors and civil servants; representatives from local NGOs; housing associations; and religious education. Some of these interviewees were also resident in the areas, particularly in Butetown where interviewees tended to have long connections with the area. In their professional activities of service provision, fundraising and campaigning, the interviewees in both areas were often engaged in constructing and delivering accounts of the areas, which as we shall see, to a certain extent involved producing – or contesting – different scripts about history, race and place. We were interested in their experiences of working and organizing in the areas and how the nature and practice of ethnic inequalities and community organizing had changed over the last 20–30 years. The interviews, which took place at the interviewee's convenience (in private areas in their workplaces or quiet cafes or occasionally their homes), covered their views on the current situation in the areas and they were also asked about how the areas had changed over time. The interviews were analysed thematically by the researchers and analysis and reflections on them cross-referenced and discussed. Through this analysis, it became apparent that to ask about and talk about an area is often to put it in a scheme of comparisons, both negative and positive. The next section considers how areas were racialized in the interviews, drawing on symbolic and collective ideas of representational space. Furthermore, we argue that work on race and ethnicity needs to explore the production of specific places and how they relate to the global as a key site for understanding the politics of racialization – as well as for considering narratives of nation and migration.

## Grappling with the past

Those respondents who had grown up in Butetown, as well as those now working in it often claimed that, at least historically (but within living memory), race and ethnicity in Butetown were irrelevant as 'everybody was

a mixture of everybody else'. In these accounts (the following is from a local historian), Tiger Bay was presented as a stigmatized area, but one that provided a protective buffer against racism:

If we should leave Tiger Bay to go into the rest of the city, one sensed a tension, or you got the glances as though you'd just arrived on the boat and, you know, you weren't really from Wales and you weren't really Welsh. So it was when you come back down Bute Street and you got to the railway bridge and you went under and over the next bridge, which is not there no more, it was like a sigh of relief.

This narrative of Tiger Bay in times past – as a haven against racism and as a space that was free of ethnic tension – was common. However, despite such a strong and widely held narrative among older interviewees, there were some who questioned this account. One (younger) respondent, an artist working in history and community projects in Butetown admitted that he was unsure how to read it:

Lots of rose-tinted glasses, I think, on some sides, but then a lot of people who grew up here would say it's not rose-tinted glasses; that's exactly what the community was like.

We can feel how difficult it is to assess the narratives for this respondent. Another, also younger, community worker who had been born in Somaliland but also had family who had come to Butetown as seamen, expressed frustration with this narrative, and awareness of it *as* a constructed narrative that may at times be used to unfairly criticize the present and the way younger generations associate:

I mean, young people all get on. Go to same places, all go to the same school. I mean, they're all friends, regardless of what background they come from. They're all friends. I think it's just the older generations who have lost their – I mean, they just – I just think they reminisce the good times they had and I mean, maybe from our generations, in twenty years' time, we'll be saying oh what a good days 2014 (laughs). And it's just reminiscing from the past and you can't blame them, you know, open door policy, you can come in and drink tea and whatever. Them days are gone, unfortunately (Laughs). Time has moved on.

Here we get a sense of the politics involved in different versions of representational spaces and the pressure for the present to live up to imaginings of the past. Is the older generation just expressing a 'rose-tinted' nostalgia that is used to critique the practices of younger generation? Will those younger people also be able to reminisce in their turn, or has something really changed (and been lost)? This is left unresolved by the interviewee. In the following account from a community worker, what was at stake in the accounts of histories of ethnic diversity, mixing, and harmony becomes one of a 'separation' from, or hostility to, recent migration to the area.



Certainly, in the late eighties, the early nineties, one of the larger Somali populations came over and the population grew substantially, there was a sense of separation. And a level of animosity grew up with that as well, you know, what we used to all be in together but now “they don’t mix with us”, type thing. So there’s a generational divide there in terms of that population even though they’re visible and quite high in numbers. [...] And some of the things people are saying are very, very prejudicial but you would not *perceive* them as being discriminatory because they see themselves as being an ethnic minority so therefore how can they possibly be?

Thus, the area continues to be understood through racialized relations, but certain narratives are also contested. Representational space is disputed – and disputable. A narrative of ‘mixing’ is set against current problems of ‘segregation’. What is missing from the narratives is an account of the contexts in which spatial practices emerged. The nostalgic narratives only rarely acknowledge the very different economic contexts in which the two ‘waves’ of migration occurred – the difference between inward migration responding to the needs of an active industry and the settlement of refugees in a now more deprived area. There were also different gendered dimensions with the migration dominated by men coming to work whilst the later arrivals came as families. Alongside these economic changes is also a cultural shift. The current narratives about the past have also to be understood in the context of the current rhetorical retreat from multiculturalism as discourses of the threat of segregation become heightened (Lentin and Titley 2011) and amid the build up to the Brexit referendum.

As an older female mixed-race community worker explained:

I can see the younger generation are completely different to my generation in regards to mixing and integrating. They have you know ... For some reason that’s fragmented – over the years it’s broken away – so the threads are kind of coming loose. We now have a Somali community who do a lot of things together. We have a Yemeni community which tends to clump together. We have a Pakistani community clumping together. That wasn’t the case before. You was all integrating and being with each other.

This description of different ways of being implicitly criticizes current practices of ethnically defined ‘communities’. A spatial politics that may be radical in one context can, over time, become a nostalgic discourse of representational space that marks some as ‘outsiders’. At the same time, there is a failure to acknowledge that, historically, similar processes of ‘clumping together’ have functioned as a protective measure against racism. Thus accounts of Butetown demonstrate some of the potential *risks* of nostalgic histories which set precedents of sociality which the contemporary era is unable to live up to. The political context in Govanhill was even more sharply defined, and this led some we spoke to provide counter narratives that sought to defuse current tensions.

## Restoration and contestation

In Govanhill at the time of the fieldwork, historical narratives and representations of the area had taken on a political importance and urgency due to the newly formed (late 2013) local campaign group named 'Restore Govanhill'. Questions of ethnicity and migration were central to the narrative.<sup>4</sup> The name of the group itself contained a temporal comparison. It conveys the image of a past that should be restored. While much of the groups' campaigning focused on crime and problems with fly-tipping and rubbish, the group was also used by some as a vehicle to express concern about the number of Eastern Europeans living in the area. An equality official explained:

In Glasgow we've got a really, really, really big Roma community in one particular area, Govanhill, primarily Slovak Roma, but also Romanian Roma. [...] I mean, you could only really describe what's happened there as culture shock really for the local community. And I'm not just talking about the local White community, the local Asian community as well has found it quite surprising to suddenly have a bunch of neighbours that they weren't familiar with. And again it is the problem that you always get around stereotyping.

This opposition to recent immigration can be seen in the comments of a signatory to Restore Govanhill's '38 degrees' campaign:

Action must be taken to sort out the unacceptable state Govanhill has been allowed to sink. Politicians and councillors have chosen Govanhill to be their welcoming area and dumping ground for their influx of foreigners causing overcrowding and slum conditions with a total disregard for the local Govanhill residents (<https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/restore-govanhill> accessed 3.2.15)

In this account, we can see the process of stigmatization – with well recognized keywords such as 'slum conditions', 'overcrowding' and the idea of an area 'sinking'. At the same time, a symbolic division is created between those identified as 'local Govanhill residents' and the 'influx of foreigners' who are rejected as residents, even though they live there. Roma families had migrated to the Southside of Glasgow from the 1990s onwards and there is a relatively large concentration of Roma in a small area of Govanhill – as well as other Eastern Europeans who may often be confused for Roma (Clark 2014). In the quotation above, the phrase 'slum conditions' has its own implicit temporal and spatial frame – summoning up images of past Victorian living conditions, or alternatively those of 'developing' countries. The politics and tension around the question of Roma and other Eastern Europeans living in Govanhill provided an important context for the interviews. The narratives given by activists, Third Sector workers, community and council workers often present an explicit counter-narrative. Rather than regarding Govanhill as radically worsened by the presence of

recent immigrants, they present a history of the area which puts the new arrivals in a different context, disrupting the idea of a break from the past and contesting arguments about the behaviour of the new migrants in public spaces.

Particular points of tension in Govanhill were around rubbish and housing and other street practices that were gendered. There were concerns about children running around unsupervised, but hostility often focused on groups of men socializing in the streets in the evenings. Whereas many interviewees pointed out the potential causal links between over-crowding, poor housing and socializing on the street, an older white community worker who lived locally also tried to put this street practice in a historical context:

There's a lot of Eastern European people that hang around the streets. They're out in the public, but should you go back, I don't know, forty years, this was – it would be a traditional Glasgow way of doing things. They'd be out on the street. We've got folk songs about women hanging out their windows and throwing sandwiches to the children on the street and that was considered a great thing about places like Govanhill [. . .]. Now, the *same* type of people, in my opinion, who moan about the loss of that kind of sense of community resent people doing exactly that: people just meeting on the streets.

He also went on to counter the idea of a preferable past, with stories of far more violent street behaviour:

So, six years ago, seven years ago, they would fight outside in the streets, there were all sorts of things going on, but to the Restore Govanhill people that's fine. [. . .] So long as you don't have a Slovakian spitting out some sesame seed on the floor. Do you know what I mean? Then everything was fine. You can have a stabbing and that, but so long as that's just a good traditional Glasgow stabbing.

The public space of the street have a high profile in narrations of ethnic differences, becoming a key locus for labelling some activities as local and socially appropriate and others as alien intrusions in the space (Puwar 2004). In Govanhill, those perceived to be Roma were the wrong bodies doing the wrong things in the wrong places and their spatial practices deemed unacceptable.

The prominence of discourses about litter, cleanliness, and street behaviour in narratives about ethnic difference and space recall colonial discourses that position racialized others as polluting and unclean (McClintock 1995). They also remind us of the concrete materiality of place where new people doing different things in both public and private spaces can be constructed as an intrusion (Smith et al. 2021). However, these narratives should not necessarily be read as proof that newcomers are necessarily responsible for increases in rubbish on the streets or intimidating behaviour. Grill (2012) points out that all residents of Govanhill, including the

newest arrivals of Roma, were unhappy about the state of the streets and public hygiene. Nonetheless, the public sphere of the street was the focus of talk about both ethnic difference and perceived changes in the area.

Thus, the accounts from both Govanhill and Butetown demonstrate how professionals, working at a local level in public and third sectors, and community representatives have narratives of place which are often concerned with historical accounts of place and change in the area. This suggests the importance of grappling with understandings of place and contestations of representational space and their racialization (Lefebvre 1991). Historical narratives of settlement and place are frequently racialized and follow relatively narrow scripts – they can also be contested. Having argued for the importance of understanding spatial processes of racialization in local places, the next section will explore the role of global processes in the making of local areas and the ways in which these are – or are not – narrated.

### **The local and the global**

Much of both Butetown and Govanhill's development as areas of residence and identity were built around specific place-based industries – the docks in Cardiff and blast furnaces in Glasgow. These industries not only provided employment but became the locus of political solidarities. With the decline of these industries, employment and its associated relationships were lost. Thus the areas, despite their strong local narratives, are unlikely to contain people's lives in the ways in which they did in the past. This perhaps, in part, accounts for the nostalgia present in place-making narratives in both areas. Yet although industrial developments prompted in-migration to the areas, the symbolic dominance of these historic periods in local narratives risk presenting the areas as relatively unchanging, albeit 'washed over' by different 'waves' of migration. In this way, a particular relationship to the global is established which remains an external, rather than constituting, force.

Both areas have narratives that reflect linkages to global processes. In Butetown, this was a story of with a distinct break, with the earlier seafaring in-migration told in a different way from more recent arrivals, often refugees. This is the case even where the new arrivals are from the same country as the seafarers (most frequently Somalia and Somaliland<sup>5</sup>). Some of these differences were concerned with the lack of connection to the docks as well as many new arrivals coming as family groups, rather than individual working men. However, although the narrations of place in Butetown are intimately tied up with global processes, the narrations do not include reflections on wider socio-economic and political processes (perhaps most relevantly civil war in the Horn of Africa) which have brought this new 'wave' of immigration. This produced significant silences around the nature of the global events and processes that shaped the area.

In Govanhill, narration of ‘waves’ of immigration was a particularly strong feature of the narration of place. In many interviews with professionals in Govanhill there was the production of a narrative of the area as a ‘gateway’ area, receiving waves of different migration coming to work in the developing industry or arriving as political and religious refugees. These narratives demonstrate an understanding of places being tied into wider global forces of movements of goods as well as people, but they often constitute the kind of ‘formulae texts’ and ‘ritualized set of discourses’ that Foucault (cited above) described.

Interviewees were aware that cities are not bounded spaces (Sassen 2000) but are, rather, intimately connected to global flows, networks and interconnections (Appadurai 1996). These accounts often sought to counter the claims of rupture suggested in the ‘restore Govanhill’ accounts by stressing Govanhill’s longer interconnections with global migration flows. This sometimes also involves descriptions of the area as what a youth worker, who was also a long-term resident, described as a ‘stopover’ place

When you come here, you’re going to live there for – well, settle yourself, then work hard, make some money, try to get yourself a business or whatever you can, and move out of there, you understand. [. . .] Govanhill has never been the be all and end all for a lot of people. It’s always the poststop, like moving on . . . once you do well for yourself and you’ve got some money, then you get out – you get out of that area as quick as you can.

He resists the idea that Govanhill is a place of permanent settlement in which belonging and identities were forged. This can also challenge the representation of Govanhill as a place ‘before’ migration, which the Restore Govanhill narrative might suggest. Rather it is implied that Govanhill only came into being through migration. In an interesting rejoinder to narratives that see incomers only in a racialized frame, a couple of respondents went back further than immigration of the Irish (Devine 1991), to consider how Govanhill had also been settled by rural migrants from Scotland. A housing officer explained:

We looked at it, and it’s technically migration. There was migration from Highland and Lowland Scotland and even then when you looked at the press reports, people were saying, “Oh, these Highland Scots can’t be trusted, you know, Lowland Scots are all thieves,” and whatever.

The inclusion of the rural Scots as migrants reshapes ideas of who is a migrant; who is ‘native’ to the city; who is the outsider or newcomer. The novelty of the position is underlined by the phrase ‘we looked at it, and it’s technically migration’. This respondent is contesting who could be considered ‘outsiders’ to the city, reminding us of other stories that can be told, which might be conjured up as other ‘hauntings’ (de Certeau 1984). Thus, in examining the ways in which spatial representations are raced, we argue that it is important to be attentive to how the globally constituted nature of place is – and is not – narrated. At the same time, place-making can also occur

through comparison with other areas and places. The next section will discuss how comparison is used to define areas – through both difference and sameness

### It's not like London here

Narratives about places are often understood in relation to other areas – either local or national. In the case of both Glasgow and Cardiff, as cities in devolved nations (and in Scotland at the time of the Independence Referendum), this includes reflections on both the nations of Scotland and Wales as well as Britain. In this context, London (and sometimes England) serve an important point of comparison (and also demonstrates the importance of studies on racialization beyond the British capital). In considering this question of comparison, it is worth remembering that, in a context of increased competition over resources within the austerity-cut public and third sectors, professionals may have added incentives to claim the uniqueness, and extremities of need of the areas the advocate for and work in (Harries et al. 2020).

Descriptions of Butetown by the interviewees often involved claims of uniqueness in the context of Cardiff, Wales, the UK or even globally. As shown by the account of teacher in a community centre:

And I think Cardiff was unique in that, where you can marry all these different cultures together, where your mother was so and so, your father was so and so, and they were able to blend. I think it was the most successful blending around the world, to tell you the truth.

This teacher, black and not local to the area, is producing a familiar account of Butetown/Tiger Bay, what another interviewee referred to as a 'unique melting pot' where ethnicity was irrelevant. An equalities professional stressed how Cardiff stood out from the rest of the Welsh context:

Yes. I mean one of the things that you've got to be aware of is that Cardiff is a complete anomaly in Wales. You know, there is *nothing* else like Cardiff. You know, this is – there really is nothing. [. . .] Cardiff is not representative of Wales at all. You know, it's a different, different – I mean it is more like a city in England than anything else that you'll find in Wales.

This claim to exceptionalism in Wales is an implicitly racialized comparison, achieved through the reference to – the assumed inherently more multi-cultural – English city.

Similar dynamics of comparison also feature in Govanhill. One interviewee, a white woman working in a housing association, described Glasgow as affected by migration flows, in a kind of 'time-delay' in relation to Britain:

We always had that connection with the English scenario, if you like. To some extent, what would be happening in London or in Sheffield would be kind of happening slightly before it came here.

This effect of being 'behind' in experiences of migration, contributed, for one respondent, an advice worker, to the anti-immigrant reaction in Glasgow:

You see the reaction from people here in Govanhill, it was the same in Sighthill and various parts of Edinburgh, the same as it is in Bradford or Liverpool or anywhere else, and in some ways a lot worse. And because we have a population that's mainly around Glasgow and the surroundings, you go anywhere out of that and we've a rural population which, no offence (I'm one of them), are a bit hillbilly. They have the same kind of attitudes to race that you would find in rural Ireland or anywhere like that.

A negative response to immigration is constructed as caused by a 'backwardness' described as non-urban and therefore not cosmopolitan. Somewhat ironically, this falls back onto anti-Irish racism, where the rural Irish are taken as a symbol of primitive anti-cosmopolitan sensibilities (Gallagher 1987). We see a similar suggestion in the comments of a development worker:

You know, Edinburgh was always kind of cosmopolitan, quite a mixed city. Glasgow was an industrial city. It was people from the local area who did the work, or they had a lot of folk from Ireland, but that was basically it. Whereas Edinburgh was much more of a kind of melting pot, like London.

In several interviews in Glasgow, the capitals of Edinburgh and London stood as high-water-marks in terms of migration – and presented as thereby more sophisticated – whilst Glasgow and Govanhill were seen as less accustomed to dealing with the issues raised by immigration. For others (drawing on a recent newspaper article), the comparison was made with the iconic symbol of immigration, Ellis Island, again setting up a particular kind of narrative about migration and its particular impact. Thus in these accounts we see how comparisons with other towns, cities and national contexts can serve to explain the particular experience of the areas under consideration.

### **Conclusion: the importance of spatial narratives and their risks**

This article argues that examining narratives of the spatial as a form of representational space adds to our understanding of how race is lived in the everyday and of processes of racialization which shape understanding of particular places and their histories. The interviews with professionals working in two different areas has shown sometimes contradictory forces shaping narratives of place. Both areas had experienced economic decline with the loss of their dominant industry. In the case of Butetown, interviewees emphasized the

long history of migration and settlement that the docks brought and the unique experiences provided by sustained ethnic mixing. This uniqueness was sometimes claimed on a local scale – in relationship to the rest of Cardiff or Wales. But it also sometimes included wider comparisons. Yet nostalgic narratives of community and place have the potential to position newer migrants as outsiders who, in Butetown, were not seen as having the same practices of sociality. This narrative was sometimes contested by younger interviewees. In Govanhill, in a highly politicized context, there was a concerted attempt by the professionals interviewed to resist a nostalgic discourse that protested about more recently arrived immigrants. The professionals retold Govanhill as a place whose history has *always* included the settlement of outsiders, whether from rural Scottish migrants or international migration. These counter-narratives also included contesting definitions of anti-social behaviour, as well as sometimes positioning Govanhill as somehow ‘behind’ Edinburgh or London/England in its approach to racialized difference.

Thus we argue for the need to understand local narratives and their impact on how particular places are understood as racialized. Drawing on Lefebvre, we have also emphasized the different ways of engaging with the spatial showing how the local is a key site for understanding the politics of racialization. However, spatial practices are embedded in social and economic contexts, in ways which some accounts of local histories may not account for. Thus, whilst the focus on local narratives of space has several benefits, we suggest that it also contains risks. Perhaps the most important danger of the focus on spatial narratives is that the local is seen not only as a lens through which to examine processes of racialization and identification, but also is held responsible for the solutions to the problems it raises. This focus on the local can suggest that either physical infrastructure, or more commonly, the culture of the deprived community itself is the source of poverty, racism or other social problems (Amin 2005; Clayton, Donovan, and Merchant 2016; Featherstone et al. 2012). This tendency, which Bill Jordan (2008) traces from the rise of the ‘Third Way’ under New Labour and reliance on notions of social capital takes is particularly heightened in areas with large ethnic minority communities (see also Garratt et al. 2021). These are areas where, under the current government’s language, the problem can be identified as a lack of appreciation of ‘British values’. If we focus on the local to the extent that we omit consideration of those global flows and conditions, then we risk seeing only ‘local solutions to local problems’.

When we pay attention to the global flows – of people, goods, and information – it becomes clearer that the causes and solutions to inequality most often have to be sought outside those local conditions. As Dorothy E. Smith famously argued, ‘the local’ matters, sociologically speaking, because social inequalities



are lived, experienced and concerted in local forms and through everyday practices. Yet in seeking to turn the local into a problematic, Smith insists, in approaching it as site from 'which questions originate' (Smith 1988, 91). We need also to avoid a fetishism which imagines the local as a world of self-contained processes and experiences. Such a move is, contemporarily, all too obviously complicit with the presumptions of neoliberal policy-making that construct local areas and communities as solely responsible for their own problems, and which charges them with a corresponding responsibility for finding their own solutions. Against such a view we can recall that, for Smith, attentiveness to the contradictions and problems of local experience should point us, sociologically speaking, to an awareness of the ways in which 'The conditions of our action and experience are organized by relations and processes outside them' (92). In this regard, we need to acknowledge that local prejudice and hostility cannot only be solved by dialogue and education on a small scale, but may require larger, more systemic solutions to injustice (Amin 2007), even if, as Eric Swyngedouw (Swyngedouw 2004) argues, too much focus on globalization excuses political elites from responsibility over outcomes. It may also obscure the ways in which elite practices shape the form and impact of globalization.

Places are both determinately concrete, but they are also the locus of affect (Thrift 2004) and are located within networks to which geographical boundaries have only limited importance. Places are made and re-made in the intersection of (and sometimes tensions between) located spaces, networks, and affective ties. They are also made and remade in the tensions between changing spatial practices and accounts of both representations of space and representational space (Lefebvre 1991). This article has demonstrated how research on race and ethnicity in particular places can be a means of exploring how these processes are racialized, but only if it avoids the pitfall of (re)-creating spaces as ultimately fixed and bounded.

## Notes

1. The fieldwork in this article was conducted under the approval of the University of Manchester Ethics committee.
2. However, this may be less accurate currently, given the major regeneration which has occurred in Govanhill since 2017, including by the Govanhill Housing Association with a programme of building and improvement to housing stock.
3. Eighty six interviews were conducted in the four research areas – approximately 20 in each area. The majority of the interviews were conducted by Lindsey Garratt and Bethan Harries and took place in 2014–15. All fieldwork was covered by the University of Manchester's ethical review panel.
4. To see how these discourses have continued, see Mullen (2018).
5. Although there is an ongoing fraught politics in this region of East Africa, this was rarely mentioned in the interviews in Cardiff.

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