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A picture that smashes Nigel Farage's fear-mongering

The Reform leader portrays Glasgow as swamped by foreigners but his monomania is in contrast to Scotland's vibrant culture

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I had a wander around a new exhibition of photography at the Gallery of Modern Art in Glasgow this week and one particular picture caught my eye.

The exhibition is called *Still Glasgow* and it features some tremendous photographs by luminaries including Oscar Marzaroli and David Eustace.

The picture that caught my eye showed a dozen or so kids messing around on a roundabout in a playpark. What a lovely portrait of childhood innocence, I thought. On closer inspection, more than half the kids had brown skin.



Eric Watt's photo at the Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow

Was this proof that Nigel Farage had a point? Last weekend the Reform UK leader [used a speech](#) in Scotland to warn that one in three children in Glasgow did not have English as their first language. This, he said, amounted to the "cultural smashing" of the city.

The photograph, a Farage supporter might argue, was an illustration of what he was talking about. This, so the logic might go, was typical of Glasgow in 2025. A city suddenly swamped by foreigners

with foreign ways and foreign tongues. A city where not even our playparks were safe from an alien influx.

Except, no. This picture was taken by an amateur photographer, Eric Watt, in Maxwell Park in May 1974, more than half a century ago. The brown kids playing on that roundabout would be in their late fifties now, many with children of their own, maybe grandchildren too.

Did these kids, in their 1970s tank tops and floral dresses, smash Glasgow? Many were undoubtedly brought up in homes where English was not their first language. Half a century on, have they proved to be an existential threat to Scottish culture?

I would suggest they have not. My guess is these children quickly learnt to speak a broad Glaswegian English just as gloriously profane as that of their white friends. They grew to be Scottish citizens equally as valuable to our common future as children of any other colour or creed.

These wee Weegies with Asian antecedents became part of the warp and weft of our rewardingly complex nation. They became sitcom actors and entrepreneurs and lawyers and politicians. In a parliament that was only a dream in 1974, one such kid even became first minister, a title that would have meant nothing to anybody then.

Scottish culture is unsmashed. Scottish culture is alive and kicking and all the better for the children of Maxwell Park.

I have a personal message for Farage: I see you. My family on my mother's side came to Scotland in the late 19th century from Co Cavan in Ireland. They came seeking work in the jute mills of Dundee, refugees from a potato famine that would claim a million lives. Along with other Irish families, they made their home in slum tenements in an area called the Hilltown.

The Farages of that time did all they could to stoke up fear and mistrust about these foreigners with their impenetrable accents, their unwelcome religion and their many children.

A gentleman called James Myles, in a book called *Rambles in Forfarshire*, had this to say about "the Hilltown Irish": "Their vile slang and immoral habits have seriously injured the general character of the poor population of Dundee and I think throughout Scotland. The low Irish are not a very improvable race. They cling to their rags, their race and their filth with all the besottedness of perfect ignorance and stupidity."

Farage is the Myles of today. The same othering. The same demonisation. The same lack of cultural confidence. And yes, the same racism.

Did the Irish bring about the "cultural smashing" of Scotland? Did the Italians? The Poles? The Pakistanis? The English? I suggest the answer in each of these cases is no.

Farage's incendiary comments about the children of Glasgow are a useful clarifying moment in the Holyrood election campaign. They allow Scots to see Farage in his true colours. His world view is indistinguishable from that of the Trump administration, which last week in a 33-page national security strategy said Europe faced "[civilisational erasure](#)" from immigration.

This delusional characterisation of Europe, hysterical and untethered from reality, is of a piece with Farage's warnings about the cultural smashing of Glasgow. The same paranoia. The same monomania. The MP for Clacton is a dutiful courtier.

Make no mistake, the Holyrood election is one front in a global war between liberal democracy and an authoritarian nationalism that makes no apology for its preference for a caucasian, Christian,

tradwife monoculture. Farage's allies in this conflict are Viktor Orban, JD Vance, Elon Musk, Marine Le Pen and the far-right German AfD. These goons are all on the ticket in May.

Farage used his Scottish speech to unveil an ermined defector from the Scottish Tories. [Malcolm Offord](#), who intends to divest himself of his life peerage as Baron Offord of Garvel in order to stand for election as an MSP, will lead the Faragist charge north of the border.

Offord is clearly a stranger to shame. His opportunism is pitifully transparent. If he has any moral queasiness about joining Reform UK, it comes a poor second to his heedless ambition.

What the anointing of Offord suggests to me is that Farage is more focused on replacing the Tories than in challenging for power at Holyrood. Offord may well appeal to a certain kind of habitual Tory voter. A merchant banker who once gave £147,510 to the Conservatives, he is not the kind of populist insurgent who might have dug deeper into the Labour and SNP vote.

Farage's eyes remain firmly on the prize of Downing Street. But first he has a reckoning with the ordinary voters of Scotland.