Navigating England's identity crisis: the shaping of a progressive national identity

A critical discourse analysis on how cultural artifacts and politics reflect and engage in the shaping of a progressive English national identity

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Abstract

This thesis explores the contemporary cultural and political influences that both compete for and contribute to the shaping of England's national identity. Amidst recent politicisation of nationhood and belonging, counter-narratives to prevailing regressive discourses have emerged and this thesis aims to elevate the progressive discourses that better represent modern-day, multicultural England. The underlying argument is that shaping identity is a collective endeavour, influenced by both politics and culture, drawing upon Micheal Billig's theory of Banal Nationalism that a nation is reproduced by subtle reminders in everyday life. Therefore, this thesis uses a critical discourse analysis on Keir Starmer's political statements as well as cultural artifacts exemplified by Gareth Southgate's letter 'Dear England' and Stormzy's Glastonbury performance in 2019. The findings reveal that each of them has an influence on the development of a progressive national identity, underscoring the significance of bottom-up as well as top-down constructions. Moreover, they exemplify the scholarly understanding of national identities as fluid, contingent and unstable, as each figure constructs, challenges and negotiates various aspects of England's identity. Although their articulations are different due to their distinct social contexts and intended audiences, they share an advocacy for a cohesive national identity reflective of the present-day citizens of England and their counter-narratives are based on themes of solidarity, inclusion, and shared responsibility. Moreover, each discourse encapsulates the nuances on identity in society by engaging with both regressive and progressive discourses, while strongly arguing for the latter.

Keywords: England, National identity, Progressive patriotism, Banal Nationalism, Critical discourse analysis

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1. Introduction

"To ask who 'we' are, and for what purposes, remains one of the key questions of our times" (McCrone & Bechhofer, 2015, p.207). This thesis maintains that this question is especially relevant for English people to ask themselves, now that Brexit has mobilised the English question (Kenny & Wellings, 2019) and revealed the potency of national identity as a political force (Chan et al., 2020). The recent politicisation of nationhood and belonging has highlighted England's identity crisis, and Kenny (2014) suggests that "a vital struggle over the political soul of Englishness is steadily emerging" (p.243). This thesis delves into counter-narratives advocating for a progressive national identity reflective of present-day, multicultural England. By examining how cultural artifacts and politics navigate England's identity crisis, this thesis aims to contribute to the academic debate that uncovers and demystifies England's elusive identity.

Englishness can be referred to as 'the elephant in the room'. Many writers suggest that a defining feature of the English is their natural inclination to not articulate their national identity. The critic David Gervais (2001) concludes that "not only do the English resist articulating their 'Englishness', they feel truer to themselves by *not* articulating it" (p.152). On the one hand, this poses an empirical challenge in the study of Englishness, while on the other, it underscores the importance of addressing this issue, especially considering that there is a prevailing feeling among the English of a sense of loss and emptiness (Aughey, 2010), and there are increasing endeavours to locate England's identity (Featherstone, 2012), which devolution has contributed to (Goodheart, 2006).

The English question lay relatively dormant until the devolution debate in the late 1990s that sparked an intellectual and political interest, which was then further fuelled by the rising euroscepticism that has characterised the last decade (Kenny & Wellings, 2019). Identity questions are now more familiar and significant in mainstream political debate as they have become politicised by the right-wing (Kenny, 2014), which ultimately culminated in Brexit. National identity played a significant role in the referendum. According to research by UCL Institute of Education (IOE) and Stockholm University, peoples' voting behaviour was more about cultural values and national identity and less about social class (Chan et al., 2020). This demonstrates an interesting change, given that class identity has historically been more important for English people in terms of both culture and politics (Henderson, 2021, Ch.2).

The concept of national identity has not received as much scholarly attention as the concepts of 'nationalism' and 'nations', emphasised by McCrone & Bechhofer (2015), who contend that national identity is the weak link in the field of nationalism and requires more attention. Kenny (2014, p.1) adds that the English national identity has largely been sidelined in political analysis, often viewed solely through constitutional policy rather than within broader societal contexts of identity and belonging (Kenny, 2014, p.1). Hence, examining national identity is particularly pertinent. This thesis understands identities through the frameworks of social constructivism and intersectionality. In short, the social constructivist approach asserts that human reality is shaped by multiple perspectives and voices (Berger & Luckman, 1967). This underpins the thesis' analytical framework, which includes Michel Foucault's Critical Discourse Analysis and Micheal Billig's theory of 'Banal Nationalism', which is in turn partly based on Benedict Anderson's influential theory of 'Imagined Communities'.

To capture the multifaceted dimensions of national identity within the social constructivist framework this thesis also employs the framework of intersectionality. Some key writers in this field includes Kimberlé Crenshaw, Sirma Bilge and Patricia Hill Collins. Intersectionality describes how forms of social stratifications overlap, such as gender, race, nationality, or class, with a particular focus on marginalised groups (Carbado et.al., 2013). Moreover, the issue of identity is central and many considered it "a theory of identity" (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 89), making it highly relevant for this thesis. More importantly, intersectionality is considered a valuable analytical tool for dealing with "the complexity of people's lives within an equally complex social context" (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 27). As such, it is a significant framework for navigating England's complex identity.

Given that it was England and Wales, not the wider UK, that voted to leave the EU (Uberoi, 2016). it might seem like an obvious, perhaps prosaic, choice to focus on England in a post-Brexit context. But in fact, to investigate national identities in England "remains incongruous to many" (Henderson & Jones, 2021, p.196), and "goes against the grain of conventional understandings of UK politics" (Henderson et al., 2017, p.632). England is unique because its identity has been historically subsumed by Anglo-Britain (Henderson et al., 2017), and England has suppressed its own national identity to maintain the British empire, and its role within it (Kumar, 2010). Moreover, the English have deemed nationalism to be below them and it is not a natural part of their identity (ibid). This has contributed to a lack of a cohesive national

narrative for England, unlike the other British nations (Kenny, 2014). This is not to say that England lacks a national identity; there is indeed a strong sense of what Englishness is. However, the question remains, are these traditional ideas still relevant and representative of modern-day England?

A considerable amount of the prevailing discourses on England's identity revolves around regressive themes of fear, exclusivity, and imperial nostalgia, as demonstrated in Brexit (Henderson, 2021). The political discourse on identity has long been dominated by the right-wing, with UKIP leader Nigel Farage in the forefront (Kenny & Wellings, 2019). However, amidst the politicisation of this issue, counter narratives have emerged. With this in mind, there has been an increasing demand for the Labour party to address, and reclaim, the issue of national identity and patriotism. However, Labour have struggled with this (Brown Swan, 2023) and their many attempts have been criticised for displaying "strategic desperation, ideological vacuity and racial pandering" (Young, 2020). Stafford (2021) concludes that "the idea that Labour lacks a sense of "patriotism" is nearly as old as the party itself". That said, the party leader Sir Keir Starmer has made patriotism one of his main agendas and claims that "Labour is now the true party of English patriotism" (Telegraph article, 2024, April). This thesis will conduct a critical discourse analysis of Starmer's political statements to examine how he counters regressive discourses by the right-wing.

However, the underlying argument of this thesis is that a progressive national identity is a collective endeavour that extends beyond the realm of politics. In fact, numerous instances of progressive nationalism exist outside of political frameworks (Kenny, 2014). Moreover, as Micheal Billig explains: "if banal nationalism were solely confined to politicians' words, what about those who view politicians with cynical contempt?" (Billig, 1995, p.94). This thesis will therefore also conduct an analysis on the negotiations of national identity in popular culture, through exploring how Gareth Southgate, the manager of England's men's football team, as well as Stormzy, one of the most influential British grime artists, express a sense of progressive identity. By examining both political and cultural dimensions, this thesis aims to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the discursive negotiation of a progressive national identity.

The importance of including cultural expressions is reinforced by Micheal Billig's theory of 'Banal Nationalism', which this thesis draws upon. Billig asserts that national identities are

reproduced in the subtle, unnoticed, reminders of nationhood that people encounter in their everyday lives that turn "background space into national space" (p.184). In this context, both music and football are essential parts of English culture and play an important role in shaping and reproducing England through their background presence. Exploring the familiar figures of Sir Keir Starmer, Gareth Southgate and Stormzy may reveal concealed aspects that present an alternative story of England's identity, where progress and inclusivity take centre stage.

1.1 Aim and research questions

This thesis aims to capture the multi-faceted progressive dimension of national identity in contemporary England by contrasting Labour's expressions on England's identity with a selection of expressions in popular culture. The intention is to elevate progressive aspects and challenge prevailing regressive discourses on England's identity. The research questions are:

- How is a progressive vision of England's national identity expressed through a sample of Keir Starmer's political statements, Gareth Southgate's letter 'Dear England', and Stormzy's Glastonbury performance?

- How do popular cultural artifacts and politics reflect and engage in the shaping of a progressive English national identity?

2. Literature review

This section begins with an overview of the academic debates surrounding national identities which delineate this thesis' approach that is based on social constructivism and intersectionality. Subsequently, it provides an overview of England's identity and the connection between Englishness and Britishness. Finally, public polls are discussed, along with considerations on labels and subjectivity.

2.1 Conceptualising national identity

Throughout history, there have been various definitions of national identity. Primordialism suggests that national identity is rooted in ethnic groups and predetermined at birth, with Clifford Geertz as a key figure. In contrast, Anthony D. Smith's ethno-symbolic approach

highlights the emotional ties to history, myths, and symbols. However, modernists such as Ernest Gellner and Benedict Andersen, argue that national identities are dynamic, and influenced by social and economic factors (Özkirimli, 2017). However, it should be noted that the traditional nationalism theories tend to prioritise the concepts of nation and nationalism, whereas national identity becomes an adjunct (McCrone & Bechhofer, 2015). Nevertheless, the three concepts are interrelated, and this thesis employs Michael Billig's theory on 'Banal Nationalism' and utilises the notions of patriotism and nationalism, which will be explained in the theoretical framework.

Before conceptualising national identity further, it is essential to address the scholarly debate on the ontological status of identity and social groups. Brubaker and Cooper (2000) challenge the analytical value of identity in social analysis and criticises the constructivist idea that identities are multiple and interchangeable, arguing that "if identity is everywhere, it is nowhere" (p.1). Their main point is that identity groups are not real, but only the "shared sense of groupness" is real (Jenkins, 2014, p.9). This thesis rejects this ontological status of identity because it fails to recognise the fact that identity is a detectable feature of public discourse (McCrone & Bechhofer 2015). Instead, this thesis aligns with Jenkins's (2014) approach that investigating identity is about a "systematic inquiry into the observable realities of the human world" (p.36). Jenkins concludes that "groups may be imagined, but this does not mean that they are imaginary" (p.12). Rather, "groups are real if people think they are: they then behave in ways that assume that groups are real and, in so doing, construct that reality. They *realise* it" (p.13). This quote introduces the approach of social constructivism, which this thesis is based on.

Berger and Luckman introduced the term 'social construction' in their groundbreaking book *The Social Construction of Reality* originally published in 1966, where they attempt to present a theory for the sociology of knowledge in society. Their key argument is that the human reality is socially constructed, and they conceptualise sociology as "a humanistic discipline" (p.231). Their understanding presupposes a dialectical relationship between society and individuals, similarly to Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis as detailed in the method section. Moreover, their non-positivistic approach is valuable for this thesis because it rejects fixed truths and the idea that reality can be objectively measured and instead recognises subjectivity and contextuality in the construction of reality. This approach underpins this thesis'

understanding of identities as socially constructed, multifaceted, subjective, and continuously negotiated.

This leads us to the question: can we actively choose our national identity? The sociologist David Miller (1995) views identity through a psychoanalytical perspective and suggests that we can, to an extent, "create our distinct identity" (p.45). On the one hand, Miller argues that national identities are found "in the deeper recess of mind" (p.18). This aligns with Michael Billig's (1995) theory of 'Banal Nationalism' that implies that national identities are in a sense unconscious and taken for granted. On the other hand, as McCrone & Bechhofer (2015) remark, Miller recognises that we affirm our national identity by comparing it to other social identities, although he maintains that it is so subconscious that it is not subject to empirical enquiry. Additionally, Anthony D. Smith offers a functionalist explanation that national identity is a sort of psychosocial mechanism that people develop in order to be a functioning member of a society, no matter if they want to or not (cited in McCrone & Bechhofer, 2015).

Although Miller and Smith provide valuable insights and illustrate the topic's ambiguity, this thesis does not agree with their view that identities are assumed because this dismisses identity as a detectable feature in discourse. This thinking has long dominated the field but is now rejected by many scholars. Modood et al. (1997) argue that ethnic identities are now conscious and publicly displayed, shown in the politicisation of ethnicities (p.182). This aligns with McCrone and Bechhofer's critique of Miller and Smith, who argue that individuals neither independently create their own identity or have no control like "puppets on a stage" (p.46). Their social constructivist view is that individuals can shape their national identity, but within certain limits. This is supported by Jenkins (2014), who suggests that some social or cultural connection is necessary, such as citizenship, skin colour, cultural values, traditions, etc., for an identity claim to be socially validated. These characteristics are called "identity markers" (McCrone, 2002, p.308).

Furthermore, identities are dynamic, multiple, and context-dependent (Henderson, 2021). This thesis draws upon Billig's (1995) assertion that national identity is not "a thing" but a way of "talking about the self and community" (p. 60), and thus negotiated within discourse. Moreover, it views national identity as a type of social identity situated within a spectrum of identities (Henderson, 2021, ch.2), aligning with Miller's (1995) view that "we weigh [our national

identity] against other aspects of personal identity" (p.44). This is particularly pertinent when examining England, given its multicultural population with multiple identities (Henderson, 2021).

To explore this spectrum of identities and the multiple understandings that naturally exists within the social constructivist framework, this thesis employs the approach of intersectionality. The term 'intersectionality' was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (2018) in her article originally published in 1989, that discusses how black women are marginalised in antiracist politics and feminist theory. Crenshaw's description of how race and sex intersect offers a framework for understanding how different forms of social stratification influence each other. This critical social theory has received plenty of scholarly attention and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to cover the broad range of perspectives. The key point this thesis emphasises is that identities are multidimensional and cannot be reduced to simple categories, as reality is far more complex, and intersectionality serves as a valuable tool to examine overlapping identities in this context (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). This is particularly relevant to this thesis because of the close connection between Englishness and Britishness, as detailed in the following sections, and a point which will be exemplified by Stormzy in the analysis.

3.2 England's national identity

There is a considerable amount of literature that has attempted to solve the conundrum of England's identity but, in accordance with most studies on national identities, there is a lack of theoretical consensus. Kumar (2010) concludes that is "a fairly hopeless and in any case perhaps unnecessary task" (p.473) to try and define Englishness. Although this could be said for any national identity, England's identity is especially complicated because of its historical context (Goodhart, 2006, p.23). Therefore, this thesis does not aim to *explain* England's identity, but rather *describe* how it can be discursively negotiated. This thesis is drawing upon Featherstone's (2012) approach to Englishness as a "refreshingly unenclosed and informal cultural project... that has yet not sealed its roads or hedged its boarders" (p.4), which corresponds with Arthur Aughey's (2007, as cited in Kumar, 2010) perspective that addressing Englishness should involve engaging in a conversation. This perspective aligns with the social constructivist approach, as well as offering a vantage point from which to examine responses to regressive nationalism.

In order to understand contemporary constructions and appeals of Englishness, it is necessary to provide some historical context, drawing upon Welling's saying that "the past sets the boundaries on the present" (Wellings, 2019, p.10). Firstly, England's role as the dominant force within the UK has meant there has been no contrasting "otherness" to define itself against, unlike Scotland and Ireland that have defined themselves against England (Kumar, 2006; Featherstone, 2008). Secondly, England lacks a tradition of resistance to cultural hegemony due to its imperial past and has not needed to actively protect its own cultural identity, such as having to preserve an indigenous language as with Gaelic e.g. (Featherstone, 2008). Thirdly, England lacks institutional structures such as a national parliament, which the other British nations have, and also does not have a political party advocating for English independence. Lastly, regional differences, notably the north-south divide and urban/rural variations, further complicate England's sense of unity (Kenny, 2014; Baker, 2024). It is therefore understandable that England's identity is particularly elusive.

That said, there are several identity markers linked with Englishness and Britishness. This thesis will only address the identity markers mentioned in the material. Firstly, Saint George, celebrated on St. George's Day and symbolised by the St. George's Cross, is an important but contradictory English symbol. It is relevant to note its association with the far-right (Featherstone, 2012). Secondly, the National Health Service (NHS), i.e. the publicly funded health-care system for Great Britain, has become an essential part of British identity (Burki, 2018). Thirdly, the British monarchy has long been an important marker (Balmer, 2011). Furthermore, the Union Jack, i.e. the flag of the United Kingdom, and the cross of St George, i.e. the national flag of England, are essential symbols (Armstrong, 2021). Finally, Kenny (2014) explains that the British tradition tends to emphasise capacity and achievements, and references events like the development of the welfare state or the Second World War.

That said, identity markers can be categorised using the widely recognised ethnic/civic framework introduced by Hans Kohn (Leong et al., 2020). In essence, civic markers are tied to territory, while ethnic markers are linked to blood lineage (McCrone, 2002). Additionally, Leong et al. (2020) highlight the recent inclusion of a cultural aspect within this framework. When studying social inclusion, this framework proves relevant as civic markers signify inclusion and multiculturalism, whereas ethnic and cultural markers signify exclusion (Leong

et al., 2020). However, the framework is criticised for oversimplification (Kuzio, 2002), with many scholars such as McCrone (2002) arguing that these dimensions actually overlap. Additionally, McCrone (2002) claims that markers are context-dependent and subject to manipulation. Therefore, rather than focusing on structural aspects, this thesis concentrates on how the navigate these markers as explained by Watzlawick (2012) as the two approaches in identity research.

3.2. Englishness equals Britishness?

Incorporating Britishness into an examination of Englishness is pivotal due to their close relationship. Englishness is bound up with Britishness and, as concluded by Kumar (2010), "an England without Britain is hard to conceive, and would be impolitic to pursue. This position is reasonable given that England makes up 84 % of the UK population (ONS, 2024). Additionally, English patriotism has historically been about British achievements and Britishness has not been 'the other' identity (Colley, 1992). Henderson (2021) explains that "England and Englishness were and are the beating heart" of Britishness (p.11). This complicates the study of both Englishness and Britishness, as they cannot be entirely disentangled from each other.

However, there are some fault lines between them. Firstly, English is the national identity, whereas British is the pan-national state identity (McCrone, 2002). Secondly, Englishness is described as socially conservative, inward looking, self-interested "Little England", nostalgic, and exclusive. On the contrary, Britishness is viewed as socially liberal and cosmopolitan, being outward looking and inclusive (Henderson, 2021; Kenny, 2014). Thirdly, Englishness is treated as a cultural identity and Britishness as a civic one. This means that Britishness is more tied to citizenship, whereas the identity markers of Englishness are about culture and traditions. Henderson (2021) adds that it is more cultural than political, partly because of England's historical lack political institutions or parties (p.52). With that being said, the most important difference is that Englishness is perceived to be an ethnic identity in the sense that it is reserved for white people (Moodod et al. 1997; Mccrone 2002). Although McCrone (2002) adds that this is a somewhat anecdotal view, it is a recurring theme in scholarly discussions and is also supported by trends in public polls (Smith, 2018; University of Cambridge et.al.).

3.3 Public opinion, labels, and subjectivity

A YouGov survey for the BBC (Smith, 2018) shows that most people, across all demographics, feel a strong association with the British identity. However, when it comes to the English identity it is more divided. Firstly, the survey shows that older people are prouder to be English; 72% of people over 65 express pride, compared to 45% of those aged 18 to 24. Secondly, the survey demonstrates that diversity is a significant factor in the divide; 61% of white individuals are proud to be English, but only 32% of ethnic minorities feel the same. Moreover, while only one-third of those identifying more as English see England's diversity as important to their identity, two-thirds of those identifying more as British consider it significant. These trends further suggest that Britishness is more inclusive, and Englishness more exclusive. That said, it indicates that Englishness is becoming more inclusive, with a generational shift placing greater importance on being born in England. This is supported in a poll by British Future (Gimson et.al., 2012), which also adds that contributing to England through paying taxes is important.

In regard to Black Britishness, it is evident that racism is still a prevalent issue in Britain and contributes to a strong sense of exclusion. The most extensive survey-project so far on black peoples' perceptions of Britain is the 'Black British Voices Project' conducted by the University of Cambridge, the Voice and I-cubed, published in September 2023. The report highlights a growing difference on attitudes towards Englishness and Britishness. Englishness has become increasingly associated with white ethno-nationalism and far-right parties, and connected to Brexit, and Britishness is seen as increasingly inclusive, with more individuals identifying with it compared to previous years. However, while 81% of the respondents describe themselves as British to some extent, only about half of them say that they are proud of it.

It is important to note that while public polls offer valuable insights into societal attitudes, they are not unchallenged truths. Firstly, the meaning of identity labels depends on the context. For example, being British means something different in Scotland compared to England, as it has different connotations. Secondly, when we look at how identities change over time, sometimes people just change their vocabulary rather than actually change who they are (McCrone, 2002). Overall, these public polls further demonstrate that identities can be perceived in multiple ways. They are elusive, context-dependent, and can be multifaceted. Therefore, this thesis aligns with

McCrone's (2002) view: "What matters is not the label that is used, but what it signifies when claims to identity are made in context" (p.13)

3. Theoretical framework

To understand the diversity of identity negotiations, it is not sufficient to rely on a single theory or discipline. Therefore, this thesis combines several disciplinary fields' insights in order to revitalise the thinking of national identity, in contrast to the "unduly narrow and partisan views" that characterise this research area (Kenny, 2014). It is also relevant to point out that discourse analysis, explained in the methodological framework, functions as both theory and method within the overall theoretical framework. This section explains the main themes of Micheal Billig's theory of "Banal Nationalism", followed by a discussion of progressive patriotism in relation to nationalism.

3.1 Micheal Billig's theory of Banal Nationalism

Micheal Billig was the first to systematically analyse how nationalism and a sense of national identity are reproduced (Özkrimli, 2019, p.184). His fundamental argument is that nationalism is "the endemic condition" that goes almost unrecognised and is "reproduced in a banally mundane way" (Billig, 1995, p.6). In other words, it is about recognising how aspects of nationalism are encountered and strengthened in peoples' everyday activities. As such, he moves beyond the notion that national identity is only constructed through the nation-state and restricted to overt and passionate representations, i.e. 'hot nationalism' (Özkrimli, 2019, p.184; Billig, 1995, p.8). Instead, Billig (1995) aims to emphasise the unnoticed, subtle reminders of nationhood that turn "background space into national space" (p.184).

To clarify, Billig does not imply that hot nationalism lacks significance; rather, he underscores its need while also indicating that there are additional factors to consider. This is important to note because the analysis focuses on hot nationalist expressions, as their articulations provide rich insights into a progressive identity. However, the reason to why they are chosen and why they are influential in society is because of their background presence in everyday life, which citizens encounter and may lead to a shift of viewpoint.

Billig (1995) extends Benedict Anderson's theory of nations as "imagined communities". Anderson (2006) reasons that the idea of the nation is based on collective cognitive processes since individuals have a shared sense of identity despite never having met and argues that shared historical memories and shared media consumption, for instance, creates a sense of community. Both Billig's and Andersen's theories are based on the social constructivist principle, as they ultimately argue that it is individuals who together socially construct what is mutually understood as a nation. While Anderson's theory offers a valuable framework, Billig (1995) contends that solely collective imagination is insufficient, and that banal practices are needed to uphold and reproduce the nation.

An important part of Billig's theory is the concept of 'othering', coined by Spivak (1985). This suggests that identities are constructed in opposition, and that by establishing social differences towards 'others' we can define the 'self'' (Jensen, 2011). Billig (1995) concludes that "there can be no 'us' without a 'them'" (p.78). Moreover, Jensen (2011) adds that this process is related to power dynamics, where those in authority classify the 'others' as inferior to establish their control. Related to this, Billig explains that in everyday discourse, there exists a "syntax of hegemony" (ibid:87), reflected in terms such as "you", "us", or "them". With this observation he aims to highlight that nationalism permeates our surroundings and is not just in the periphery, and something only declared nationalist parties express.

Billig's theory is pertinent to this thesis because it demonstrates that the unnoticed representations of national identity, found in popular culture for instance, are crucial in shaping and reproducing England's identity. This provides a good backdrop for uncovering concealed aspects to portray another side of England. Although it is essential to consider political leaders, given their influential role – as stressed by both Billig and Anderson - it is also important to uncover representations in everyday life to achieve a more balanced understanding. Additionally, Antonsich (2020) argues that is increasingly relevant to uncover how "different people in different contexts and for different purposes" (p.1235) mobilise the nation, especially amidst the current populist efforts to reinforce simplistic nationalist narratives that treat the nation as ethno-culturally homogeneous.

3.3 Progressive patriotism

National identity is intertwined with national attachment, which is primarily expressed through nationalism and patriotism (Blank & Schmidt, 2003). These are often dichotomised as "good patriotism" versus "bad nationalism" (Bitschnau & MuBotter, 2024). Nationalism is generally associated with protectionism, nativism, and right-wing populism and is regarded as an intolerant and aggressive attachment based on superiority and competition. Conversely, patriotism is regarded as an innocent attachment that is rational, tolerant, and enlightened (Bitschnau & MuBotter, 2024; Mock, 2020). The key distinction lies in the nature of their love for the nation: patriotism cherishes democracy and shared liberty, while nationalism prioritises ethnic, cultural, and religious unity (Viroli, 1997, p.2). That said, this normative bias and binary thinking is refuted, and scholars suggest a correlation between them (Bitschnau & MuBotter, 2024). Nonetheless, the dichotomy remains widely acknowledged and is suitable for analysing identities because it renders the concepts discernible and palpable (Mock, 2020). However, they should still not be treated as completely fixed (Mock, 2020), which is in line with the overall approach to identities as fluid and multifaceted.

There are numerous subdivisions of patriotism, and this thesis focuses on 'progressive patriotism'. This approach is neatly captured by Denham (2021): "A progressive patriotism addresses the nation as it is and as it can be, not as it once was. It obviously rejects the idea of national identity as defined in cultural, ethnic, or racial terms. The search for shared national stories of England starts from the principle that both England and ideas of English identity must belong to everyone who is making their lives here" (p.72). This description provides the foundation for detecting a progressive sense of national identity in the material.

4. Methodological framework

Billig (1995) remarks that several critical social psychologists emphasise that studying identity requires an examination of discourse (p.8). Therefore, this thesis will conduct a critical discourse analysis according to Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model. This section will provide a brief overview on the social scientific discussion on the use of discourse analysis, whilst outlining my approach.

4.1 Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is a broad, multidisciplinary field that should be considered both a theory and method (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Its multifaceted nature allows for different interpretations and blending of various perspectives, which has produced numerous approaches within the field (Van Dijk, 2001). That said, this thesis maintains that existing approaches within the field should not be treated as rigid frameworks dictating specific methods of analysis, but rather that they should be seen more as flexible blueprints. As such, this thesis adopts an open, interpretative approach, guided by Titus Hjelm's (2000) emphasis on that it should be treated as an "analytical toolkit" that can be modified to suit one's research question and material (p.237), which is supported by Winther Jørgensen & Phillips (2002).

The main thought behind discourse analysis is that language is an important part of peoples' social practices, and by identifying and examining various patterns in language, we can learn more about different social contexts. The term 'discourse' can be generally described as a fixed way of speaking about and comprehending reality (Winther Jørgensen & Phillip, 2002). This thesis follows the post structuralist understanding that discourse is not merely a mirror of reality; it is *constitutive* and plays an active part in shaping reality (Hjelm, 2021: Boréus & Ekström, 2018). As understood by Norman Fairclough, discourses are socially integrated and it is a dialectical relationship (Winther Jørgensen & Phillip, 2002).

This thesis employs Norman Fairclough's approach of critical discourse analysis (CDA). Its main aim is to link concrete text with reality, and it therefore goes beyond only linguistics (Wodak, 2001). This approach distinguishes itself from the rest of the field because it is *critical* and aims to reveal power structures or ideological underpinnings that might not be visible (Widdowson 1995). Moreover, CDA tends to take the marginalised peoples' side and aims to challenge the existing hegemony and promote change, and therefore Widdowson (1995) contends that CDA is in between social inquiry and political advocacy.

Fairclough draws upon Michel Foucault's take on power as being both productive and oppressive, which implies that power structures are not static. On one hand, it is believed that power structures are historically situated and upheld and ideologically produced by those in authority (Meyer, 2001). On the other hand, it is assumed that these power structures can be negotiated and resisted from below given that the core belief of CDA is that the interplay of

discourses that produces and shapes individuals' positions in society (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004). This enables research on both the influence of authority figures, i.e. top-down constructions, and the resistance against it, i.e. bottom-up constructions (Meyer, 2001).

4.1.2 Fairclough's three-dimension model

Fairclough's three-dimension model is based on the idea that texts can never be treated in isolation and context is always needed. This analytical framework is valuable for this thesis because it pedagogically describes the interplay between text and context by dividing discourse analysis into three dimensions: as text, as discursive practice, and as social practice (see figure 1).
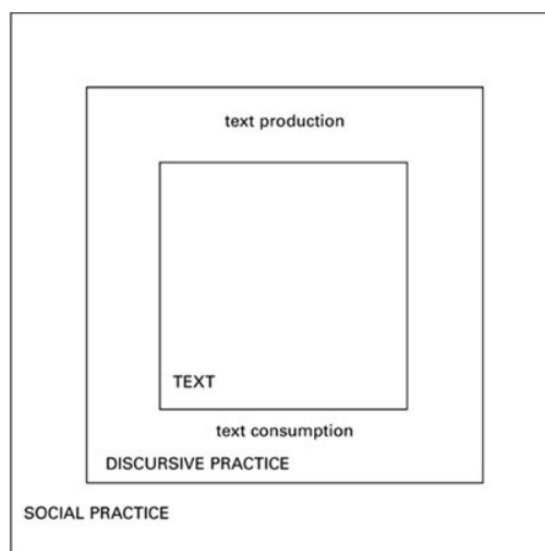

Figure 1. Fairclough's three-dimensional model for critical discourse analysis (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p.68)

The first dimension, *text,* explores what is said and examines linguistic features (Winther Jørgensen & Phillip, 2002). Notably, it is not limited to written text but can be content in various forms (Meyer, 2001). Micheal Billig (1995) stresses the importance of being "linguistically microscopic" to detect Banal Nationalism. This involves focusing on small words like "here", "this" or "the" and pronouns like "we" or "them". Additionally, Billig suggests that words related to nationhood, such as "people", "nation" or "society", are particularly relevant to consider (p.94). Furthermore, analysing modality provides insights into how the figures present their arguments and the level of certainty they express (Winther Jørgensen & Phillip, 2002).

This thesis pays particular attention to the aforementioned linguistic features. However, it does not consider sentence structures and word formations, since they are typically not under the speaker's control (Van Dijk, 2001).

The second dimension, *discursive practice*, mediates the link between the concrete text and the broader social context, which is what CDA ultimately aims to show. It examines how it is said and is about the production, distribution, and consumption of the text. In terms of production, this thesis will focus on interdiscursivity and intertextuality, which is how existing texts or discourses are drawn upon (Winther Jørgensen & Phillip, 2002). In terms of the consumption, it will focus on how the distribution and production might influence the interpretation and experience of the reader.

The third dimension, *social practice*, considers the broader social context of the discursive practice, and how it interacts with prevailing discourses (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). This thesis explores whether what is said sustains the current mode of discussing and interpreting English identity, i.e. in a regressive sense, or contests and reconstructs it. This is relevant for this thesis as it sheds light on how the materials engage with existing discourses surrounding England's identity, in turn informing us about their progressive stance.

4.2 Reliability and validity

To fully grasp critical discourse analysis, we must acknowledge some limitations and drawbacks. A key issue is determining the boundary between the discursive and the non-discursive, and there are several views on this issue. Fairclough incorporates both linguistic and social contexts, in contrast to other approaches that either treats discourse as solely text or posits that there are no rigid boundaries and that discourses encompass all social phenomena (Boréus & Ekström, 2018). That said, Winther Jørgensen & Phillip, (2002 p.31) suggests that this boundary could be treated as an analytical one, instead of empirical, which Norman Fairclough's three-dimension model also does. Moreover, there is criticism regarding social-psychological aspects. Winther Jørgensen & Phillips (2002) argue that subjectivity and the extent to which individuals control their language affects the reliability, as well as the issue of polysemy, as individuals can interpret content differently.

Additionally, Widdowson (1995) argues that the researcher's bias will dominate, suggesting that CDA leans towards interpretation rather than analysis. He maintains that the researcher, or in his words the interpreter, is "ideologically committed", and therefore "what is actually revealed is the particular discourse perspective of the interpreter" (p.169). However, Meyer (2001, ch.2) argues that this criticism applies to most social science methods: Can a researcher ever remain completely neutral? Can one draw conclusions from solely empirical data without a preframed context? This in mind, CDA acknowledges that complete neutrality is impossible and allows for partiality in selecting material (Meyer, 2001, p.5).

Therefore, this thesis is conducted within the interpretative research design framework and aims to minimise the subsequent bias through data triangulation. Wodak (2001) maintains that discourse analysis requires incorporating other disciplines, a point reiterated by Chouliaraki & Fairclough (1999), who argue that without integrating other perspectives it is challenging to examine the third dimension 'social practice'. Therefore, the thesis integrates insights from the literature review, Billig's theory of Banal Nationalism, public polls, and the contexts of the material.

4.3 Data collection and material

The aim of the data collection is to illuminate various facets of a progressive national identity. Initially, this involves considering each figure's unique perspective, as they belong to different social contexts and appeal to separate audiences. This is achieved through including both written texts of different formats from various platforms, as well as a musical performance. This diversity of material provides a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics involved in negotiating national identity. However, it is important to note that the material represents only a sample of the figures' articulations and, overall, this thesis should serve as an example and introduction to how identity is negotiated through discourse not an exact determination of these figures' opinions.

The selection criteria for the figures are that they are English, given the focus on England, and that their discourses are integrated into everyday English culture making them 'familiar' faces, aligning with the Banal Nationalism theory. The aim of the data collection is to select the most informative data from each figure to address the research question within the constraints of scope and time. That said, there are some criteria for the data collection: Firstly, that the material

explicitly addresses issues around nationhood and belonging. Secondly, that it is in the time frame of post-Brexit, i.e., after 2016, as Brexit raised discussions on national identity and belonging (Wellings, 2019) Another reason for this timeframe is to capture the contemporary discourse on identity in modern-day England, thus prioritising recent material. Thirdly, the material for each figure is selected to maintain proportionality both in terms of length and content, ensuring that the analysis is balanced between them. This section introduces the figures and their relevance and details the data collection process for each figure.

4.3.1 Sir Keir Starmer

Sir Keir Starmer became leader of the Labour Party in 2020. Although other Labour MPs have been more vocal about progressive patriotism, such as Rebecca Long-Bailey who also contested for the leadership, this thesis will focus on Starmer because, as the party leader, he is representative of the party as a whole. More importantly, he is a key figure in politics, especially with the up-coming election, and his presence in media makes him that "familiar figure" that citizens encounter in their everyday life. Therefore, in accordance with Billig's theory of Banal Nationalism, it is highly relevant to examine Starmer's articulations. During the leadership contest, a YouGov poll (Smith, 2020) revealed that 50% of party members believed it was important for the new leader to be patriotic, while 45% did not care. It was therefore recognised early on that patriotism would be significant to Starmer (Goes, 2021), marking a "patriotic turn" compared to his predecessor Jeremy Corbyn's minimal focus on nationhood (Goes, 2021).

This thesis analyses two political statements: Starmer's 32-page essay for the Fabian Society "The Road Ahead", published in September 2021. Due to limitations in both time and scope, this thesis will concentrate on the section entitled "Identity and Belonging", which provides the most substantial data relevant to the research question and is approximately one page long. The other statement is a comment published in the Telegraph in April 2024 entitled "Labour is now the true party of English patriotism". These statements are chosen because they align with Starmer's tenure and target different audiences, as The Fabian Society is a think-tank for left-wing politics (Fabian Society, n.d.) whereas the Telegraph is conservative leaning (Smith, 2017). Selecting diverse material offers deeper insight into the political discourse of Starmer, since the political context inevitably influences how he navigates national identity. As such, it aligns with the thesis' aim to capture the multifaceted nature of identity negotiation.

4.3.2 Gareth Southgate

Gareth Southgate has been the manager of England's men's football team since 2016. It is highly relevant to include the perspective of football when analysing national identity in England not only because of its significant role in English culture (Abell et.al., 2007) but also because of sport's inherent ability to consume and reproduce the nation (Arnold, 2020). The historian Eric Hobsbawm (1992) says: "The imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people" (p.143). Furthermore, explicit recognition of England's identity is scarce, but when it comes to football it is unmistakeably articulated. In fact, many consider football as the main vehicle for a progressive English identity (Henderson, 2021).

Southgate's team embodies an inclusive and multicultural England. A public poll conducted by British Future (Katwala et.al., 2021) shows that the England's men's team stands out as the one symbol for Englishness that everyone, all races, and ethnic backgrounds, feels like they belong to more than any other English symbol. This is recognised by Southgate who says: "In England we've spent a bit of time being a bit lost as to what our modern identity is. I think as a team we represent that modern identity. Hopefully, people can connect with us" (Alexander, 2019). This in mind, by combining Southgate's ambitions, the popularity of football in England and the unifying influence of sports, Southgate's team has a strong potential to act as a significant catalyst for progressive patriotism by influencing the everyday life of English people.

This thesis analyses Southgate's open letter "Dear England" published in The Players' Tribune on June 8, 2021, which was released in response to racism against the players and the team facing booing for 'taking the knee' against racism at games. Evidently, there is still a long way to go beyond the pitch, despite the team being a symbol of inclusion. A public opinion report by University of Cambridge et.al. (2023) suggests a perceived rise in racism in sports and that the media often fails to fully address racism against football players. The letter has also inspired a play of the same title, written by James Graham, which has received considerable attention and effectively perpetuated Southgate's message. This further underscores the relevance of analysing expressions in the letter, as it now reaches an even larger audience in the cultural domain.

4.3.3 Stormzy

Stormzy, born Michael Omari, is one of the biggest grime artists in UK and has received numerous awards. In 2019, Time Magazine recognised Stormzy as a 'next generation leader', with a notable civic engagement extends beyond his music and he participates in several schemes to give opportunities for young black Britons (Eddo-Lodge, 2019). Stormzy's engagement with society makes him a particularly relevant figure for this thesis as his articulations on identity have the ability to affect many.

Moreover, one of the rationales behind this selection is that grime is arguable the most distinct British music genre (Barron, 2013). A report from the UK parliamentary Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee (2019) maintains that grime is "one of the UK's most exciting musical exports". Furthermore, grime is relevant for this thesis because it makes Banal Nationalism visible. Barron (2013) explains how grime rappers reflect on their everyday life and therefore act as ethnographers of their local communities.

Stormzy serves as a valuable case study for this thesis because he exemplifies the intricate relation between the English identity and the British identity. Although this thesis focuses on England's identity, it is vital to include the British identity because, as emphasised in the literature review, the two identities are conflated. Stormzy's civic engagement predominantly revolves around "championing Black British culture" (Eddo-Lodge, 2019). This is significant for this thesis because Stormzy addresses the ethno-centric aspect of the English identity that hinders inclusion and is an important factor in England's identity crisis, especially in the context of its increasingly multicultural population. To get a comprehensive view, it is necessary to include this tendency for marginalised groups to identify more with the British identity because it is significant to many English peoples' feelings of belonging in England.

This thesis analyses Stormzy's performance at Glastonbury Festival in 2019, which is held in England and is one of the world's largest music festivals (Somerset council, 2023). Significantly, Stormzy made history as the first black British solo artist to headline at Glastonbury. Additionally, in 2019, he was the second youngest headliner ever. The performance was critically acclaimed and widely recognised in media (Walker, 2019), which makes it a relevant case study in line with Billig's Nationalism Theory. Moreover, Stormzy said

about the performance: "I wanted it to be the pinnacle of my career, my defining moment" (Eddo-Lodge, 2019) and therefore it is a representative embodiment of Stormzy's views.

5. Analysis

The analysis is divided into three case studies for each figure, employing Fairclough's three-dimensional model on CDA as outlined in section 4.1.2. To provide a cohesive narrative, the material is analysed through the lens of following themes: Inclusion and Exclusion; Ethnic, cultural, and civic identity markers; History and traditions; Power dynamics. Moreover, the analytical frameworks of social constructivism and intersectionality, detailed in section 2.1, are important for the analysis. They allow for a more nuanced discussion about national identity, demonstrating that national identity should not be viewed as a fixed entity, but rather as a dynamic and subjective spectrum. This is important to remember because of the three distinct cases. After discussing each case, the thesis will then draw connections between the cases and discuss how each contributes to an understanding of progressive patriotism in England in the conclusion.

5.1 Sir Keir Starmer

Starmer's Fabian Essay "The Road Ahead" is firstly analysed, followed by his comment published in the Telegraph.

5.1.1 The Road Ahead

Starmer engages with existing political debates around identity and belonging in an attempt to revitalise the thinking on national pride and set the stage for him to compete in narrating England's identity. To begin with, Starmer seeks to reclaim terms related to nationhood with regressive connotations, stating that "community, family, and country are not conservative or backwards ideas - they are the building blocks of strong societies. When we celebrate families, we celebrate them in all their different shapes and size. When we celebrate our country, it is a love of place and people, not jingoism". Starmer's disassociates them from "jingoism" and his counter-narrative is based on inclusion and creates a positive tone with words like "celebrate"

and "love". Furthermore, Starmer contends that Britain is "built on the bedrock of our traditions but one that evolves, grows and embraces change", thereby challenging the notion that progress implies distancing from historical traditions.

Moreover, Starmer's moves away from the notion that national belonging is determined by civic, cultural, or ethnic identity markers. He states that he wants "a Britain that judges its people not by race, nationality or the way the live their lives- but on how they contribute to the greater good". By framing the identity discourse around action rather than attributes more or less beyond one's control, Starmer establishes a discourse where everyone, in practice at least, is included. His advocacy for inclusion is also articulated in: "we don't seek to create ingroups and out-groups- instead, we want to create a forward-looking, inclusive Britain".

The pervading theme of this text is to frame nationalism as damaging and patriotism as progressive, which marks his entry-point into the discourse on national pride. Starmer explains that the ideologies as completely separate, and the delivery of this message is enhanced by the high modality, evident in the phrase "in fact" and the juxtaposition. He states: "In fact, they are opposites. Nationalism represents an attempt to divide people from one another; patriotism is an attempt to unite people of different backgrounds …". By attributing nationalism to having "done immense damage to the progressive cause" and being "the most immediately damaging to the country", Starmer avoids solely blaming citizens, implying potential for change by advocating patriotism as a national attachment instead.

Significantly, Starmer is 'othering' the Scottish National Party (SNP) and The Conservative Party by strategically labelling them as nationalists, contrasting Labour as patriots. By conflating these parties and drawing a clear distinction between his approach and theirs, Starmer effectively presents Labour as the preferably option. He asserts that "their politics is symbiotic", and they "both use nationalism freely to whip up fear of the other". In doing so, Starmer is able to freely define his view of patriotism which does not align with their regressive discourses.

With this in mind, Starmer also recognises the citizens' role in shaping the discourse, either to the worse or for the better. He argues for shared responsibility in opposing nationalism, evident in his use of inclusive pronouns when discussing nationalism's impact, saying "we atomise our society". Starmer emphasises the importance of individuality and independent thinking while

also advocating for coming together in his argument to "build broad coalitions" and in statements like "in the pursuit of creating a better country and a better future we may sometimes disagree and have differences". The strength of solidarity is also evident in Starmer's reference to how Covid-19 revealed "the prospect of a better society, built on people coming together <u>for something bigger than themselves</u>". In this way, Starmer reminds the reader of their shared identity and emphasises it as a unifying force.

5.1.2 Comment in the Telegraph

Firstly, the title "Labour is <u>now</u> the <u>true</u> party of <u>English patriotism</u>" provides several insights. Firstly, it appeals to readers who value national pride and the assertive tone captivates them. Secondly, "true" suggests that Labour's claim is more legitimate. Thirdly, using "English" instead of "British", he engages readers who prioritize England's identity. Notably, he opts for "patriotism" rather than nationalism, in line with "The Road Ahead" statement. Lastly, "now" marks a distancing from previous perceptions on Labour's patriotism, suggesting a recognition of its past inability to reclaim the issue of patriotism. Overall, the title demonstrates Starmer's desire to redefine Labour's position on national identity.

To delineate his own position, Starmer uses the process of 'othering'. Starmer 'others' other nations to assert England's superiority, for instance in: "… Britain the strong democracy <u>that's the envy of the world</u>". This demonstrates clear nationalism rather than a cosmopolitan worldview. Thus, he diverges from his predecessor Gordon Brown's stance, who faced accusations of being overly cosmopolitan (Brown Swan, 2021). Additionally, a prevailing theme is 'othering' the Conservative Party. Given their stronghold on English nationalism it is notable that Labour's strategy to claim ownership is to argue that only one party can be patriotic at a time.

The 'othering' of the Conservatives is evident when analysing word choices which reveals that Labour is depicted with positive terms like "renewal", "respect", "pride" and the Conservatives with "trashed,", "weakened", "contentious" and "denigrated". Furthermore, Starmer creates a syntax of hegemony, in line with Billig's terminology, through pronouns and address them with "you", "them", and "their". In statements like "<u>they</u> don't care if division weakens <u>our nation</u> if it strengthens <u>their</u> grip on power", Starmer establishes a distinct 'us versus them' dynamic. In doing so, Starmer engages the reader and constructs a narrative that underscores how the

actions of the Tories affect everyone collectively, and therefore should all relate to his critique. However, although aiming to emphasise inclusivity, this language may inadvertently contribute to national division, implying that only non-conservatives are included in Starmer's "our".

However, the article was published in a conservative-leaning newspaper, indicating Starmer's intention to reach typically right-wing supporters. A point reinforced by Starmer's argument throughout the text that only one party can be patriotic at a time. To further address conservative readers, Starmer engages with how they are "shouting woke" to dismiss attempts towards a progressive identity. Starmer counters with the role of democracy, stating: "I'm proud to be English because it's a place where we can disagree … and still celebrate a common identity, a shared history and a future together". As such, he demonstrates that their shared identity and democratic values can facilitate progress, and this approach allows him to resonate with readers of different political values.

To foster a sense of togetherness and reinforce his claim to English patriotism, Starmer alludes to moments of national unity and reminds readers of Labour's role in these moments. He states: "whether it's establishing NATO and the NHS as monuments to our collective sacrifice in the 1940s, or the renewal of our public realm at the start of this century, Labour is at its best when it has celebrated, defended and served the values of our country and its people". This aligns with the British tradition of emphasising capacity and achievements, described in section 3.2.

In terms of identity markers, Starmer further emphasise democracy and describes "free speech, dissent, and independent thinking" as integral. Moreover, he seeks to reclaim the marker of St. George's Cross by countering the notion that it is exclusive, saying: "I have no time for those who flinch at displaying our flag. Because the cross of St George belongs to every person who loves this country and seeks to make it better- a symbol of pride, belonging, and inclusion". As such, he describes how symbols are polysemic and negotiable. Significantly, Starmer does not explicitly engage with the ethnocentric discourse on Englishness, only mentioning cultural and civic markers. Although he states, "To be proudly English means to be proudly ourselves", he does not explicitly address the challenges faced by those from a multicultural background who feel they cannot proudly be English because their other national heritages are not included in Englishness, as shown by public polls in section 3.3.

Finally, Starmer shift power dynamics and reduces his authoritarian position by empowering citizens and placing control in their hands. This is evident in his concluding remark: <u>we share the responsibility</u> to write the next chapter of British history … whoever you vote for, know that <u>we will serve you</u>. And that we will always put <u>country first</u>". With this, he underscores that nation-building is more important than who is in parliament. However, Starmer also clarifies his desire to contribute and believes that together with the voters they can construct a national identity that reflects modern-day England.

5.2 Gareth Southgate

The letter establishes an intimate connection with the reader. Early on, Southgate establishes that this is a one-on-one conversation through pronouns: "<u>I</u> can't possibly hope to speak for an entire country, but <u>I</u> would like to share a few things with <u>you</u>". Moreover, the use of "Dear ..." and "Yours ..." at the beginning and end, as well as the overall informal way of writing makes it intimate. Additionally, the letter's structure - beginning with his personal connection, followed by the players' own experiences, and concluded with acknowledgment of the reader's role and importance - creates a captivating story that involves the reader, making them feel integral to Southgate's ambitions.

Southgate's solidarity with the reader is reinforced with pronouns. He consistently uses "we" and "us" (22 times) and, notably, inclusive pronouns are often connected with words affiliated with nationhood like "<u>we</u> are an incredible <u>nation</u>", or "<u>our</u> country". This, in combination with that the recipient is called "Dear England", he suggests that the readers together constitute England. Moreover, the pronoun "you" is used to demonstrate football's impact on the nation's collective consciousness by highlighting how it generates individual memories of shared events: "<u>You</u> remember where <u>you</u> were watching England games. And who <u>you</u> were watching with. And who <u>you</u> were at the time". With this, he fosters a sense of togetherness while also recognising individuality.

Southgate's high level of modality enhances the persuasiveness of his message. He presents his arguments as indisputable facts by using modal verbs like "must" and "will", verbs like "is" or "are" and phrases like "it is true" and "in fact". For example: "<u>It's clear to me</u> that <u>we are</u> heading for a much more tolerant and understanding society, and <u>I know</u> our lads <u>will</u> be a big part of that. It <u>might</u> not feel like it at times, but <u>it's true</u>". Here, Southgate portrays a notably

optimistic perspective on England with a persuasive tone. The one time he uses "might", a modal verb with low level of certainty, is when discussing the possibility that not everyone feels this positive, which Southgate undermines with modality.

The letter has a high relatability as it reaches across various demographics: old, young, parents, fans, and even those uninterested in football. This strengthens his aim to bring people together and show that they all are a part of England. He states: "Regardless of your upbringing and politics, what is clear is that we are an incredible nation". Here, Southgate articulates an inclusive England where he acknowledges differences while arguing that their shared national identity makes them similar. A key argument is that their shared national identity is a uniting force, evident in: "We do have a special identity and that remains a powerful motivator". However, Southgate recognises that the multiple perceptions of the national identity: "everyone has a different idea of what it actually means to be English. What pride means".

A central theme of the letter is to delineate the meaning of pride for himself, the players, and the readers. Analysing these discussions reveals how Southgate navigates existing discourses on England's identity. For instance, it is evident that his own source of pride and identity is grounded in traditional values. Firstly, he describes the civic identity marker of the military as important. Moreover, he states: "Queen and country' has always been important to me. We do pageantry so well in Britain, and, growing up, things like the Queen's silver jubilee and royal weddings had an impact on me". Equating "Queen" with "country" illustrates his belief that the royal family has an integral role in England's identity. Highlighting "pageantry" as influential emphasises the significance of "hot nationalism", which lays the groundwork for football to shape the nation in a similar way as a celebratory moment.

Although Southgate values traditions, his key argument is that one does not have to choose between traditions and inclusion. He argues for a balanced approach that preserves traditions whilst still moving forward: "we have a desire to protect our values and traditions - as we should - but that shouldn't come at the expense of introspection and progress". Here, modality enhances the argument as the modal verb "should" indicates a sense of moral duty and responsibility, thus asserts what others should believe too in a persuasive tone. However, the contrasting "but that shouldn't" softens this assertiveness and reveals that he recognises certain regressive connotations with traditions and marks his stance that progress is as important.

Southgate implicitly counters the notion that the team's multicultural composition mean they lack pride in England. Southgate calls it "a false narrative" that "some players don't know what it means to play for England". He promptly clarifies that his own pride based on traditional markers is not exclusive to him, implicitly recognising his ethnic background, stating that "everyone has that pride. And that includes the players". Southgate explains how the players embody a progressive English identity by embracing their pride in England while valuing their diverse backgrounds, saying they are "humble, proud, and liberated in being their true selves". By describing the players' pride in both England and in their diverse backgrounds, he supports the scholar understanding that national identity exists within a spectrum of identities and it is possible to have multiple.

To clarify his position, Southgate recurringly challenges discourses on identity that are violent, racist, and exclusive. For example: "there are things I will *never* understand ... Why would you choose to insult somebody for something as ridiculous as the colour of their skin?". He distances himself from this discourse by saying: "you're on the losing side". Instead, he articulates a positive vision: "I am confident that young kids of today will grow up baffled by old attitudes and ways of thinking". In this way, he encapsulates both progressive and regressive discourses, showing his awareness of the nuances in society while strongly arguing for the positive perspective.

Southgate reflection on power dynamics between the team and fans reveals that they have mutual influence. He reiterates his and the players' influential positions, saying about himself: "I know my voice carries weight, not because of who I am but because of the position I hold". About the players, he says: "our players *are* role models. And beyond the confines of the pitch, we must recognise the impact they can have on society". Southgate realises that their positions come with responsibilities, saying about the players: "it's their duty to continue to interact with the public on matters such as equality, inclusivity and racial injustice, while using the power of their voices to help put debates on the table, raise awareness and educate". This said, Southgate makes clear how the fans influence the players too and breaks down the distance between them by highlighting the players' humanity and vulnerability, saying "these lads are on the same wavelength as you on many issues" and explaining how their mental health is greatly affected

by "abusive comments" on social media. As such, the players influence the fans, but the fans also greatly influence them.

Southgate establishes how football constructs the national in both 'hot' and 'banal' nationalism. He describes how the games are "an experience that lasts in the collective consciousness of our country", being a shared celebratory moment where people come together for England. However, the letter does not focus on football's impact as an overt expression of nationalism, but rather through banal nationalism. Southgate only reflects on issues off the pitch, and the team's presence in everyday life. This focus is made explicitly clear: "When England play, there's much more at stake than that. It's about how we conduct ourselves on and off the pitch, how we bring people together, how we inspire and unite, how we create memories that last beyond the 90 minutes". As such, Southgate demonstrates how the team constructs the nation in everyday life too. He proceeds to say: "… all the young kids who will be watching …I just hope their parents, teachers and club managers will turn to them and say, 'Look. That's the way to represent your country. That's what England is about. That is what's possible'". In this way, Southgate delineates how the team embodies a progressive England and can inspire change, but it will only happen if the fans can embrace it off the pitch in their everyday discussions.

5.3 Stormzy

The performance opens with footage of Jay-Z, an African American rap artist that previously headlined Glastonbury, advising Stormzy on how to make the most of this opportunity: "It is important for you to take that and say, 'Okay, how can I create a culture around this whole thing?' Because culture moves the whole world ... Point is, the world is ready for it, so when you step on that stage you are going to see it … What do you do with it now?". This introduction asserts the powerful impact of culture which sets the scene for Stormzy's aim to be a driver of social change. Additionally, the open question creates suspension of how Stormzy will embrace this opportunity and it marks the beginning of the performance as a cultural journey.

The performance includes several bold political statements. For instance, the entire crowd sings the lyrics "F**k the government and F**k Boris. In this lyric, Stormzy makes his political stance clear in that he does not agree with the values of the Conservative Party. Instead, he shows that he stands in solidarity with the Labour Party as he employs intertextuality through sampling a speech by the Labour MP David Lammy talking about racial injustice in the criminal

system. As an in-between-act, it says on the stage screen: "… The system isn't working if recidivism rates are 46 % for black men …". Stormzy shows that culture can serve a platform for addressing political issues and reaching audiences beyond the House of Commons. This recognition of the link between politics and culture, and how they both negotiates issues is central to Stormzy's performance.

Stormzy's political messages are enhanced by his outfit choice – a stab vest with the Union Jack on it, designed by the renowned artist Banksy (Banksy, 2019) Notably, the flag is black and white with red tones that looks like blood, and the vest arguable alludes to the issue of knife crimes in the UK, as the words "knife crime" are stated in the background. Significantly, because it is a protective vest, Stormzy aims to counter the narrative that they are criminals and instead describing them as victims. In this way, he negotiates the stereotypes of marginalised groups in UK and argues that they must be included in the British identity, and not be neglected by the government.

Moreover, the vest is a statement that Stormzy identifies with Britishness, and it is an expression of hot nationalism to assert the presence of Black British people in UK. In this way, Stormzy reclaims the Union Jack and expresses pride in his British identity, whilst still arguing that that there is still progress to be made. Significantly, Stormzy's choice of the Union Jack over the English flag reflect the feeling among Black citizens that they are excluded from the English identity and instead feel more pride in the British identity, a trend that public polls indicate as described in section 3.3. As such, Stormzy's decision to focus on the Union Jack is noteworthy because it illustrates the intersection of race and identity and how Black Britishness intersects with broader notions of Englishness.

Moreover, Stormzy included a ballet performance to demonstrate how racism permeates so many aspects in life in the UK. Behind the dancers on the screen, it says: "Ballet shoes have traditionally not been made to match black skin tones until now. Previously ballet dancers 'pancaked' their shoes with makeup. Now there are ballet shoes to match all skin tones. A huge leap forward for inclusion in the ballet world". With this, Stormzy reflects on how marginalised groups have been treated throughout history and serves as a reminder of their shared heritage and struggles. But, most importantly, he highlights the progress and how far they have come. Additionally, the featured dancers are from a UK-based company called 'Ballet Black' that

works for an inclusive and diverse ballet industry (Ballet Black, n.d.). This reinforces Stormzy's emphasis on solidary and to elevate others who works for a more inclusive nation. Moreover, Stormzy recognises the multi-faceted process of negotiating identity, and more importantly recognises that it requires working together.

Stormzy uses his platform to amplify voices that challenges traditional notions of British identity. He pays tribute to "everyone who have paved the way for me" as well as everyone "coming through now". The reciting goes on for over a minute, with nearly 70 names mentioned. Additionally, the artists Dave and Fredo are invited to perform their song 'Funky Friday' and Stormzy explains: "The reasons I invited them is that Funky Friday is the first pure British rap song to go number one in the UK. Do you understand what that means? That means we have come a very long way. But we still got a long way to go". The language used here indicates that Stormzy takes pride in British achievements and is also an example of banal nationalism as it reminds spectators of their shared national identity. Also, the pronoun "we" asserts a sense of togetherness which, although not explicitly stated, likely refers to rap as a genre and black artists in the music industry. This is reiterated by the major rap artist Dave, who thanks Stormzy saying: You've allowed us to believe", which also marks the influence of Stormzy on the music industry. That said, by standing in solidarity with other Black artists in the rap music industry, Stormzy reinforces his belief in the shared British community and the importance of solidarity and elevating each other to create a more progressive national identity.

6. Conclusion

Exploring how Sir Keir Starmer, Gareth Southgate and Stormzy each express their progressive vision of England's national identity in the sample of materials illuminates the multifaceted process of negotiating identity. The findings show that the understanding of national identities is fluid, contingent and unstable, as each discourse constructs and negotiates various aspects of England's identity. Moreover, the examples encapsulate the nuances in the discourse on identity by engaging with both regressive and progressive discourses, while strongly arguing for the latter. Naturally, their articulations are different due to their distinct social contexts and intended audiences. However, they all share the belief that England's identity should include everyone

that makes their lives there, and their discourses revolve around solidarity, inclusion, and shared responsibility.

Starmer's entry-point into the political discourse on national identity is to leverage the normative charge of nationalism as damaging and patriotism as progressive and use the process of 'othering'. Starmer consistently juxtaposes Labour with the Conservative Party, positioning Labour as the preferable option. Additionally, the Conservative Party and the Scottish National Party are strategically labelled as nationalists, enabling Starmer to reclaim patriotism. This evokes hope that progress is possible – not through nationalism, which causes division, but through solidarity, which he asserts patriotism embodies. Moreover, a prominent theme in Starmer's discourse is emphasising that democracy facilitates progress, which aligns with conventional patriotic beliefs. His advocacy for democracy, combined with his use of inclusive pronouns, reflects his belief in shared responsibility as a means to achieve national unity despite differences. Finally, in terms of identity markers, Starmer moves away from the notion that national belonging hinges on certain civic, cultural, or ethnic identity markers, and instead frames an identity-discourse around action: if you contribute to England, you belong in England.

Stormzy's Glastonbury performance demonstrates how culture can be a platform for addressing political issues and reaching audiences beyond the confines of political spaces. The pervading theme is to assert the presence of black Britons and marginalised groups, thus challenging ethnocentric discourses on national identity. Stormzy's emphasis on his British identity, as evidenced by his use of the Union Jack, is significant. It not only illustrates the intricate relationship between Englishness and Britishness but also sheds light on the intersection of race and identity. As such, Stormzy offers valuable insights into how black English individuals navigate England's identity crisis. Stormzy recognises the multi-faceted process of negotiating identity as the performance showcases the richness, complexity, and resilience of the black British identity. He depicts modern Britain by addressing various issues, including racial injustice within the criminal justice system, and the pervasive nature of racism, even within cultural realms like ballet, as well as exhibiting disapproval of the Conservative Party. His solution for a progressive and inclusive national identity is solidarity and to uplift each other, which he demonstrates as he shares his platform with other British rap artists to amplify voices that challenge conventional notions of Britishness. Stormzy takes pride in his British identity,

but he also critiques the status quo, emphasising progress while stressing that challenges remain.

Similarly, Southgate's letter serves as a powerful testament to football's role in shaping national identity by emphasising its special ability to bring people together. He recognises the multiple perceptions of Englishness but makes a clear stance against the regressive discourse that the players' multicultural backgrounds hinder or prevent them from being proud of England. As such, the scholarly understanding that identities exist on a spectrum, and it is possible to have multiple, is reinforced. By describing how the men's team embodies a progressive national identity, Southgate illuminates how football functions as a microcosm for modern-day England. However, he recognises that although progress is evident on the pitch, challenges remain off the pitch. Southgate cultivates an inclusive, liberal, and tolerant discourse that transcends the regressive, racist, exclusive discourses that prompted him to write the letter. With a firm belief in a positive vision of England, enhanced by high modality, high relatability, and high reach across demographics, Southgate has the potential for impact as he effectively illustrates how football both mirrors and shapes contemporary England.

A shared theme is the figures' effort to reclaim and reintroduce traditional markers of England's identity, thus emphasising their polysemic nature. Stormzy's use of the Union Jack claims ownership of the British identity as a black man, albeit this pride is enveloped in critique. Southgate articulates pride in the traditional markers of the monarchy and the military. Starmer emphasises the St Georges Cross and redefines its regressive associations. By challenging regressive associations of certain symbols and reclaiming them positively, they both express a discourse based on a balanced approach that preserves traditions while acknowledging the need for progressive adaptation.

Furthermore, the figures illuminate how both 'hot' and 'banal' nationalism influence the ongoing negotiation of identity. Starmer references hot nationalist moments, such as establishing NATO and NHS. These 'flags' are reminders of national unity and are examples of how solidarity makes progress. Southgate describes football as an arena for overt nationalism, being a shared celebratory moment that influences the nation's collective consciousness. However, his focus is not on the overt nationalism of the actual games, but on the banal nationalism in daily discussions about having a multicultural England team, and how

the inclusive or exclusive nature of these discussions shapes the perception of belonging. Furthermore, Stormzy's performance itself is an overt nationalist expression, but reflects on how racism permeates all aspects of society, for instance through the ballet interlude. In doing so, Stormzy makes banal nationalism visible and sparks important discussions about belonging.

Moreover, the figures advocate shared responsibility. Although they recognise their influential positions, they dismantle power dynamics and align themselves with the citizens. Southgate bridges the gap by highlighting the mutual influence of players and fans. Starmer emphasises Labour's service to the country, acknowledging that power lies in the hands of the citizens. Stormzy shares his platform with other British rap artists, emphasising the importance standing in solidarity with and elevating marginalised groups. Additionally, their inclusive language, such as repeating the pronoun "we", reinforces their belief in solidarity. Although there are differences in each figures' "we", given their distinct contexts, they together highlight the multiple perceptions of a progressive English identity.

Finally, incorporating both political and cultural dimensions reveals the multifaceted nature of negotiating identity and highlights the significance of bottom-up as well as top-down constructions of national identity. For example, the fact that Starmer does not explicitly engage with the ethnocentric discourse on Englishness but both Stormzy and Southgate address this essential aspect of England's national identity, shows the significance of considering dimensions beyond the political realm. Moreover, the cultural capital of Stormzy and Southgate in combination with the political capacity of Starmer makes for an influential impact on the contest of navigating England's identity. With this in mind, perhaps the elusiveness and fluidity of England's identity should be viewed as a strength and an opportunity to not only reshape the discourse to be more representative of modern-day England, but to be an agent for change that results in a redefinition of England's identity that reflects its present-day citizens.

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