

English Identity and the Influence of Gender in *Vera*

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15-06-2018

Abstract

This research examined in what way *Vera* (2011) portrays Englishness and English identity, and what role gender plays in this portrayal. *Midsomer Murders* (1997) is used as an example of stereotypical Englishness. The aspects in this programme that were seen as examples of Englishness were applied to *Vera*, to study whether *Vera* also displays these elements. Gender in the programme was examined through Vicky Ball's "The "Feminization" of British Television and the Re-Traditionalization of Gender." The results of the research showed that *Vera* portrays both Englishness and gender in a more modern and contemporary manner, while simultaneously also containing traditional stereotypes of English identity and gender roles.

Keywords: *Vera*, *Midsomer Murders*, gender, Englishness, identity

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Introduction

In the book *Contemporary British Television Crime Drama*, Jonathan Nichols-Pethick states that “The crime drama has been a staple of television across the globe for about as long as there has been television” (7). From 1947 to 1953, the BBC already created and aired several programmes about crime, although these programmes were more like documentaries than the entertaining dramas that Nichols-Pethick talks about (Turnbull 36). *Fabian of the Yard* (1952-1953), was one of the first series that aimed at providing both a realistic depiction of crime and entertainment for a mass audience. It shows how officers solve crime, but it also has elements like “playful makeovers” for a female officer who has to go undercover to solve a case (Turnbull 38). Over the years that followed, there were many more changes in the crime genre in Britain (Turnbull 44). Some of these happened for practical reasons such as advancements in film technology, or new technologies in police work (44). Others had more to do with changes in style or aesthetics (44). A third and perhaps more significant cause for changes in the genre were the “perceived changes in audience taste” and different “public perceptions of crime and policing in different cultural scenes” (Turnbull 44). The audience taste is important because creators want to sell their work, while television networks want as many people to watch each programme as possible. Television programmes are therefore more likely to change when the public taste does.

In recent years, television itself has undergone major changes as well. Due to increasing globalisation, exporting programmes has become both easier and more necessary than before. Jane Arthurs explains how “digital technology towards the end of the 1990s brought a new era of abundance in which the number of channels has multiplied and their global reach extended” (Arthurs 173). Analogue television is also in the process of being replaced by digital television (173). Due to this digitalisation, there is a debate ongoing on how to maintain the quality of “distinctively British programming in the face of globalising pressures” (Arthurs 172). These globalising pressures exist because many different countries export their programs all over the world. Jeanette Steemers argues that “The idea that TV exports might function as a showcase for Britishness and British life is contradicted by the realities of the marketplace where Britishness is not a major selling point” (qtd. in Arthurs 178). Instead of being a selling point, it is

“stuffy, class conscious, parochial” (qtd. in Arthurs 178).

However, this does not appear to be true in all cases. Tiffany Bergin researched the popularity of the well-known British crime drama *Midsomer Murders*. The conclusion revealed how, in foreign countries, *Midsomer Murders* is one of the most successful British television exports “of all time” (84). The programme is not just popular overseas, but also in Britain itself (84). As a result of its popularity, *Midsomer Murders* has “potency as an international symbol of ‘Englishness’” (84). This is also due to the images of ‘Britishness’ it displays, such as the landscape (89). She describes how there exists “nostalgia for a rural English past” among historians, but also among viewers of *Midsomer Murders*, who enjoy the rural landscapes, for instance (90). Nostalgia influences the way in which British identity is portrayed. If a programme like *Midsomer Murders* can be popular to such a degree that it has this potency as an international symbol, other television programmes may also be able to acquire that status. When programs like *Midsomer Murders* are exported, British culture and Britishness are therefore also exported to some extent.

Another television program that may be able to attain such a status is *Vera* (2011). *Vera* is a British crime drama for television that was adapted from the book series *Vera Stanhope*, written by Ann Cleeves. The story takes place around Northumberland, where Vera Stanhope, played by Brenda Blethyn, works together with her sergeant Joe Ashworth, and later Aiden Kealey, to solve murder cases. There has been a significant change over the years in how more and more women have become the protagonists of TV programmes in the crime drama genre (McElroy 40). The change can already be seen in the 1995 introduction to a book on detective fiction by Glenwood Irons, who argues how even those people who ignore the many female detectives in popular novels recognize the change in TV and film depictions of these characters (xi). He further adds that there have been female sleuths in film and on television since the 1960s (xi). McElroy has done research on crime dramas in contemporary times and she explains that “many supposedly feminine skills (including empathy, communication and collaboration) have become increasingly important” (42). She then goes on to show an example of this feminization by analysing a crime drama called *Scott & Bailey*. This crime drama demonstrates, among other things, how empathy and the ability to listen to other people have become

increasingly significant (42). She claims that because this programme has many female characters in every part of the crime drama, it manages to show the professionalism women need to have, to function in these workplaces. Additionally, there is a lack of “mimetic accuracy” because in real life there are not that many female officers in one team as this programme has (43).

Vera first aired in 2011, whereas *Midsomer Murders* first aired in 1997. These differences may reveal whether the portrayal of English identity or gender has changed over time. *Vera* is also English, and since it has been exported to other countries, like *Midsomer Murders*, it possibly conveys a different image of Englishness and English identity than older English crime dramas like *Midsomer Murders*. Furthermore, *Vera*’s gender could influence in what way English identity is portrayed. Since, like McElroy claimed, having a woman in charge shows the professionalism that a woman needs to have. A woman’s professionalism may thus be different from what is expected of a man (43). A different sense of professionalism may lead to a woman having a different experience, which potentially influences her behaviour. That behaviour in turn could then produce a different, female portrayal of English identity, which is worth looking into. This is especially true since no other research has yet been done on *Vera*. Gender might even affect the commercial success of a television programme. Since television programmes can influence people’s opinions, it is important to research how Englishness and gender are portrayed in *Vera*. The research question is therefore relevant because it provides information about women who hold high positions, and it also reveals what image of England is shown to people of other countries, and how England is marketed.

The research question will inquire in what way *Vera* (2011) portrays Englishness and English identity, and what role gender plays in this portrayal. It is important to note here that although many people describe *Vera* and *Midsomer Murders* as British, it is Englishness that will be looked at, rather than Britishness. This is because both of these programmes are set in England. Scotland and England, for instance, are not the same countries, and do not have the same cultures. These programmes therefore do not portray the culture in the whole of Britain, but of England. The popular crime drama *Midsomer Murders* will be used as an example of Englishness to see in what ways *Vera* portrays Englishness. For both of these programmes, only

the first seasons will be analysed¹. Both *Vera* and *Midsomer Murders* have been running for several years, and the changes within these series from the first episode to today could be very interesting to look at. Unfortunately this is not possible within the scope of this thesis. The preliminary hypothesis states how, although *Vera* has been created more recently than television programmes like *Midsomer Murders*, and may therefore be more modern, it will still show elements of Englishness and English identity that can also be seen in older crime dramas. Furthermore it is also hypothesized that gender plays a role in this portrayal of British identity, despite the increased levels of emancipation women have achieved over time.

Vera will be examined through several theories. The gender aspect of the question will be looked at with the help of Vicky Ball's "The "Feminization" of British Television and the Re-Traditionalization of Gender." Ball argues that "from the late 1990s the particular use of soap conventions coincides with postfeminist discourses and the demands of the broadcasting economies, [...] that work to create more conservative and traditional representations of femininities" (256). Ball's text focusses on marriage in television dramas in particular, but as Ruth McElroy claims, this theory is useful because "a reading that approaches the series as a female police ensemble drama enables us better to appreciate how the criminal investigative narrative provides writers and actors with the dramatic and cultural space to explore questions of power, agency and gendered labour" (41). As such, this methodology is still helpful to examine *Vera* since the protagonist, Vera, is a woman who is in charge of a team of investigators. Therefore a theory on the feminization of the workforce is important to be able to understand how Vera performs her job, and whether gender plays a role in her performance.

The Englishness of the programme will be examined by following Ian Bradley's ideas on identity, and *Midsomer Murders*. In Bradley's theory, there are at least three ways of looking at Britishness. The first is in ethnic terms, based on bloodline (33). The second looks at civic identity, which is "through the legal and political construct" (33). The third looks at myths,

¹ The DVDs of *Midsomer Murders* that were used for this research do not show the episodes as wholes, but in parts. The length and duration of each section when selected from the scene selection screen, or by scrolling through the scenes by hand, also differ from each other. Furthermore, the episode "The Killings at Badger's Drift" is incorrectly worded on the DVD box as "Killings at Badger's Drift (Pilot), while "Faithful unto Death" is labelled as "Faithful untill Death". For these reasons, episodes from *Midsomer Murders* have all been referenced by the scene number and timestamp from the scene selection screen, but the episode names have been referenced by their original names, and not those on the box.

values, and customs (33). These different ways “cannot be completely separated” because they are intertwined (33). Although Bradley looks at Britishness, this theory can also be applied to Englishness. *Midsomer Murders* will be used to examine what aspects of an English crime drama are seen as inherently English. These facets, such as nostalgia, will then be used to examine *Vera* to find out whether nostalgia is also something that is present in *Vera*.

Albert Moran and Justin Malbon’s book *Understanding the Global TV Format* will be used to examine the television format that is used for *Vera*. This is important because a format can also be used to export identity or assert certain gendered values.

This research will be conducted in multiple chapters. The first chapter after the introduction will concern English identity in *Vera*. This chapter will provide the reader with information on the social and historical context which is needed to fully understand the society in which the crime drama is embedded. First, identity in *Midsomer Murders* will be analysed. *Midsomer Murders* and *Vera* will then be juxtaposed to see how English *Vera* really is, or whether it has changed its portrayal of Englishness. *Midsomer Murders* will then provide the methodological framework with which Englishness in *Vera* will be examined. After the initial analysis, the framework will be applied to identity in *Vera*.

The second chapter will be on gender in *Vera*. It will examine the relationship between *Vera* and the people around her, as well as *Vera*’s way of asserting herself. This includes the way in which she dresses herself, and how she sees gender. This chapter will also contain an analysis of the relationship between identity and gender, and how gender may influence Englishness

The conclusion will summarize the research. There will also be an answer to the research question and suggestions for further study.

English Identity

Identity is an important part of life for individuals, the regions they live in, and even for countries as a whole. An individual's identity helps that person understand themselves and those around them better. The reason they can understand other people better is because cultural norms and values, as well as behaviour, are part of this identity. On a national level, identities such as 'Irishness' or 'Scottishness' have helped unite people under one flag, and connect them in a way that helps their cause. National identity is a form of identification (Storey 15). This identity is in part constructed using "cultural artefacts" (15). These artefacts are material items such as a flag, under which people feel they have something in common. What separates one nation from another is how that nation imagines itself (15). The word 'imagine' is necessary because in a large community like a country it is not possible for all individuals or smaller groups, like families, to know each other. A shared identity can thus create a feeling of belonging and connect people, which binds them together in a community. The community is important for the survival and progress of those who are a part of it, especially since united groups of people are less likely to fight with each other. Identities are expressed through culture. Cultures that are separate, such as England and China, will have bigger differences than those that are closer, as in the case of the cultural differences between northern England and southern England. These differences usually become most apparent when a person visits another culture and starts living there. Even so, there are also differences that can already be noticed from the comfort of the home through television and film. However, television can never express all of the aspects of a culture that can be observed through living, since it only expresses what a creator shows. Alexander Dhoest explains this when he talks about the creation through television of an 'imagined community' (52). These communities were created to promote unity, but they never completely managed to encompass the entire nation that was their target (52). They were also not entirely capable of erasing the differences between groups (52). This statement shows that in the earliest years of television, it was already not possible to express all aspects of a culture. Furthermore, whatever unity television created has been diminishing over the years, because channels, programmes and mediums have changed so much that audiences and cultural expression have become fragmented (52).

This fragmentation cannot just be seen on television, but also through Englishness and English identity. In his book, Simon Featherstone argues that it is difficult to define Englishness and what it means to be English (2). A national identity in England is 'absent' and Englishness may be "roughly the same as Britishness" (2). This makes it difficult to decide what it really means to 'be English'. Featherstone explains a part of the cause of this problem by pointing out that England lacks nationalism, which is one of the most important ways in which social identity is expressed (3). Such a lack of nationalism does not mean that it does not exist among the English, but rather that England has a "historical willingness to subordinate national expression to broader domestic and global structures of colonial and imperial power" (3). This willingness to subordinate national expression can be seen by looking at Britishness. In the early years of the twenty-first-century there was an attempt to define and promote Britishness so that it could be used to promote cohesion among the groups of people that live in Britain (Bradley 6). Since it was Britishness that was promoted and not Englishness, British identity was given more attention than Englishness, which meant that Englishness was side-lined.

Race, imperialism and post colonialism are part of many theories on what it means to be English (Featherstone 20). Empire has been "erased" from England's national consciousness (Featherstone 22). Since Empire had been erased, that meant that people did not talk about it (23). However, the consequences of Empire still exist. This further complicates Englishness because it indicates that England, Britain, and Empire are difficult to separate due to the way in which they are interwoven. The connection between England and its past shows the importance of the past in the present, because the consequences of the past are still part of living reality. Featherstone further argues that "discourses on Englishness frequently demonstrate political and cultural contradictions and blind-spots" (27). The culture contains many elements, such as a pastoral culture, ordinariness, and imperialism, that cannot be combined to form a coherent model for English identity (27). Even so, an English culture is still expressed.

In this chapter, Englishness and English identity in *Vera* will be explored. Since *Midsomer Murders* will be used to see in what way *Vera* is English, it will be analysed and examined first. The question this analysis will attempt to answer is what elements in this 1997 crime drama make it 'English'. After the analysis, a list of these criteria of Englishness will be created. That list

can then be used to answer the question of in what way *Vera* portrays Englishness and English Identity.

Midsomer Murders

Among the first things that come to mind as a marker of identity when watching *Midsomer Murders* are the landscape and the setting of the story. Storey claims that nations often seem “rooted” in nature within the borders of the country. A part of the belonging people feel comes from the way in which the territory is symbolically expressed. This should then help make the relationship between nature and the nation more natural and unforced (14). This relationship between nature and nation can also be seen in the crime drama *Midsomer Murders*. The television programme is set in the fictional county of Midsomer, which is a rural area that comprises many small villages. Tom Barnaby’s area covers these villages, and as a result, he frequently has to travel between them. From the first episode, all the way to the last episode of season one, the landscape features prominently. Whenever Chief Inspector Tom Barnaby, played by John Nettles, and his sergeant, Troy, leave or arrive somewhere, they are always surrounded by pastoral nature. *Midsomer Murders* portrays the English landscape as a rural idyll (Bergin 89). This invokes nostalgia (90). There are also many transition scenes when Barnaby travels somewhere, where there are views of farmlands and forests. Nature does not end at the doorstep either. Inside the homes and offices of the suspects or other people involved with the victim, paintings or photographs of nature frequently adorn the walls of the rooms.

Next to the landscape, the buildings also mark identity. Episodes frequently feature grand, named country houses, which provide the owners with status and a presence. This is where the historical, imperial past that plays a big part in the construction of Englishness can be seen. Nature and these grand houses both refer to the past because they are ‘traditional’ elements that have existed for a long time. In this sense, they can be seen to be part of ‘the old’ as opposed to ‘the new’ and they invoke nostalgia for a different time. For instance, in scene two of the episode “Written in Blood”, directed by Jeremy Silberston, an elderly lady named Honoria Lyddiard owns a country house called Gresham House. The second scene opens with a

shot of the old and overgrown house, as Barnaby and Troy arrive and joke how Frankenstein must have been shot at this location, indicating that the country house looks like something out of a previous era (00:11:26-00:11:29).

The inhabitants who do not live in country houses also show information about the country life. This can be seen in the way in which these characters interact with each other. In the same episode, a woman has romantic feelings for a man. When she notices that Barnaby wants to ask her about this potential relationship, the woman realizes that people are talking about her and then says “Well it’s a village, one expects that sort of thing (scene 3, 00:04:51-00:04:53). Later on in the same conversation, she explains why she did not want to be seen outside of the man’s house at night because “it could have been misconstrued” (scene 3, 00:08:07-00:08:09). These two quotes show how social control in small villages is present, and that the inhabitants are careful with their behaviour in order to fit in.

Following from the importance of the setting, nostalgia is a second aspect that is important to take into consideration. *Midsomer Murders* contains “nostalgia for a rural English past” (Bergin 90). The values and the sense of a nostalgic community that shows like *Midsomer Murders* evoke, are what many people in the contemporary world wish to have (90). This phenomenon of English rural nostalgia has already interested the English for a long time (90). Nostalgia is shown in the programme, and not just through the landscapes, but also by the characters themselves. In “Written in Blood”, Honoria Lyddiard is writing a book on the history of her family and its heritage. This work is mentioned multiple times and Lyddiard even states that she has “traced them back to the fourteenth-century” (scene 1, 00:16:20-00:16:22). The comment clearly indicates that England has a long history. In Britain, culture and its corresponding practises are shaped by “their histories and their traditions” as well as the present (Higgins et al. 1).

These cultural practises can also be seen in *Midsomer Murders*. In the episode “Death of a Hollow Man”, directed by Jeremy Silberston, sergeant Troy visits a store to buy a birthday present for his mother. When he explains what he is looking for, he reveals his mother likes “heritage-Edwardian-lady-stuff” (scene 2, 00:03:28-00:03:31). He then lists which items, like tea towels, she already has (scene 2, 00:03:31-00:03:38). Heritage and history are thus shown to

still be important for the people who live in this area and this country, as it is a part of the identity of the inhabitants, and its influence can be seen and felt in the present.

Another important facet is class, specifically the relationship between superiors and their subordinates. Social class still carries significant importance in Britain to this day (Higgins et al. 2). The presence of class is especially pronounced in *Midsomer Murders* due to the many country houses the series shows, as well as its inhabitants. Honoria Lyddiard, with her large house and ancient lineage, is a good example of this. Lyddiard even claims at one point that “our name is woven into the very warp and woof of England” thereby affirming the importance of her family (“Written in Blood.” scene 2, 00:13:47-00:13:50). However, it is not just the aristocracy who acknowledge class. In the pilot episode of the series “The Killings at Badger’s Drift”, directed by Jeremy Silberston, Barnaby and Troy visit a suspect at a large country house. When Troy sees the building he comments that this must be “how the other half live” suggesting the existence of a difference in social class between the suspect and himself (scene 2, 00:09:04-00:09:05). Even if class is not as clearly pronounced as it used to be, the relationships between superiors and subordinates, as well as titles, are still important.

This also goes for style of dress, mannerisms, and speech. Barnaby wears a serious, dark suit while Troy, who is younger than Barnaby, wears colourful ties. Troy always addresses Barnaby with ‘sir’ while Barnaby uses no indication for a title of any kind for his subordinate. At the house of another suspect in the same episode, Troy is addressed by the suspect as a constable. He takes offense to this and explicitly states that he is a sergeant and not a constable, (scene 2, 00:03:51-00:03:57).

Lastly, there is also a difference in speech between the characters. Barnaby uses a more formal vocabulary, but Troy occasionally uses slang, such as ‘bonking’ for intercourse in “Killings at Badger’s Drift” (scene 1, 00:15:13-00:15:15). There are more instances like these where Troy uses slang language, which provides the viewer with information about the generation gap. However, at the same time, Barnaby occasionally comments on Troy’s behaviour and even calls him ‘old-fashioned’ about his opinions on homosexuality in “Faithful unto Death”, directed by Baz Taylor (scene 4, 00:08:50-00:08:54).

The use of dialect, or the lack thereof, is also important. Language, as well as dialect, can

be used to determine class and someone's character. There have been television programmes that could not be exported to the United States of America, because people thought that the dialects would be too difficult for Americans to understand (Turnbull 51). Since television programmes are increasingly used for export in the competitive environment of digital television, marketability is likely to be taken into consideration when creating a television program. This makes it important to look at dialect as well.

An element that *Midsomer Murders* has been criticized for is the lack of ethnic diversity. Turnbull explains why controversy about *Midsomer Murders* exists because of producer True-May's comments about the programme. In an interview, True-May commented on the lack of ethnic diversity in the programme. He said that *Midsomer Murders* was not (ethnically) diverse, and that the programme would not work as a crime drama if it were (qtd. in Turnbull 26). These comments were perceived as being racist (26). Contemporary society in England, but also Britain as a whole, is far more ethnically diverse than it used to be. However, in *Midsomer* diversity is almost completely absent. Turnbull explains that although True-May's comments are racist, there may be some truth to them, as the appeal of the series may actually lie in the nostalgia for "the idealised, less ethnically diverse version of 'Great Britain' as imagined in the pages of the classical detective story at the start of the twentieth century" (26). This happens because *Midsomer Murders* appeals to people because of its classic formula, and ethnicity is part of that formula (26). In a format, the episodes are similar enough to be recognised as being part of the same program, while they are still different enough to be seen as distinct from each other (Moran and Malbon 20). In fact, the use of a format is reassuring, because it does not change (Turnbull 26). The culprit almost always get caught in crime dramas, which allows people to comfortably watch the episodes, because there will be some form of justice. Nevertheless, ethnicity is different from justice, and in today's society it is important to see whether diversity is present in television programmes.

The last important aspect is family life, and the food they consume. Many scenes in *Midsomer Murders* revolve around food: from high-tea cakes and biscuits, to meals Barnaby has at home. Every single episode shows how Barnaby eats dinner with his wife. He is sometimes joined by his daughter, who is a student at a university. These meals are almost always cooked

by Barnaby's wife or daughter, and many conversations that Barnaby has with his wife are about what she is cooking for dinner. At one point in "Faithful Unto Death", Barnaby even goes so far as to offer Troy breakfast at his house, only for him to continue and state that his daughter is the one who will be making it for him (scene 4, 00:15:19-00:15:23). When Barnaby does not eat breakfast at his home, he eats it at the police station where there is a canteen. The programme focusses on the ingredients that Barnaby asks the chef to put on his plate, such as bacon, scrambled egg, beans, and toast, thereby creating what people often think of when they think of an English breakfast ("The Killings at Badger's Drift." scene 1, 00:12:36-00:12:49). When Troy joins Barnaby shortly after, he asks Barnaby whether he does not get a warm breakfast at home, since Barnaby's breakfast could also have been made at home by his wife (scene 1, 00:13:02-00:13:03).

Vera

Now that the list of elements that show English identity has been put together, these facets will be examined in *Vera*, starting with the setting. *Vera* is set in the area of Northumberland, an area which also contains urban settlements. Right at the start of the first episode, directed by Adrian Shergold, the setting already becomes apparent. Instead of the cheerful music and rural landscapes of *Midsomer Murders*, the programme starts with a lady who sits alone in a bus at night. She is seen using a mobile phone for communication. The phone is a sign of the programme's more modern setting, when technology was already more advanced ("Hidden Depths" 00:00:00-00:00:20). It illustrates that England has modern technology and is not just stuck in its history. The woman's house that is shown next has narrow corridors. It is a terraced house, and it is located in an urban setting. This style of house immediately reveals that the inhabitants do not belong to the upper classes, as their houses are not large and expensive enough to reflect the corresponding lifestyle. The use of public transport instead of a private car is further proof of her class. The terraced houses reflect both modern life and that of the general populace, as most people are obviously not wealthy enough to live in huge mansions. The relatability is increased even more when the woman in this scene later confesses why she took the bus, namely because she does not have enough money to

afford a car.

These elements reflect the “assertions of common sense and ordinariness” that Simon Featherstone sees as a part of what it means to be English (27). Tiffany Bergin explains how Barnaby’s “‘ordinariness’ can be deeply comforting to viewers” (89). Being ordinary means that he does not threaten the existing social order, which allows him to soothe the viewers (89). Vera is not as ordinary as Barnaby: she behaves differently, and is often openly emotional. Her style of dress is also different than his, as it is much more dishevelled. Even so, she is average in other ways. She deals with the loss of her father, lives on her own, and is troubled by the cases she has to solve, because she feels emotional over the suffering of the victims. Grief and loneliness are both emotions that many people deal with in their daily lives, and the crimes Vera is asked to solve reflect everyday life as well.

Although the episode is set in an urban area, there are still many instances where nature and wildlife feature. In the middle of the urban area are gardens and meadows where children are playing, and shortly afterwards seagulls fly through the sky as DCI Vera Stanhope parks her car close to the sea. Birds are a recurring theme in this season. Vera’s late father loved them, and in the episode “Hidden Depths” a group of bird watchers are suspects in a murder case. In the same episode, all victims have flowers lying next to them. When Vera asks herself whether these flowers were shop-bought, she answers herself, and says that they are wild flowers, specifically those from a meadow (00:07:29-00:07:40). This comment is repeated several times throughout the episode to reinforce the idea that these flowers grow in Northumberland.

Rural nostalgia evokes values and a sense of community that many people long for (Bergin 90). It is telling that the first episode contains a scene where sergeant Joe and his family play in the meadow, together with their dog. The family presents an image of the traditional nuclear family ideal, and they are also happy and enjoy each other’s company. They therefore have the stability and ideal family life that many people from broken homes do not have. Divorces were not always as common as they are today, so this stable family in a meadow could also evoke nostalgia for a time when such things as divorces were not as common.

Nostalgia is important to crime drama. Although this drama does not feature many aristocrats or members of the upper class, those that do appear depict a strong nostalgia for the

past. The episode “The Crow Trap”, directed by Farren Blackburn, depicts a dispute between people who want to build a quarry in nature, and people who want to preserve the natural site. The company that wants to build the quarry has money and is trying to buy the villagers’ land. Vera remarks that people are nowadays more interested in the economy than in the environment (00:07:18-00:07:22). She then states how her late friend Constance, who used to live on the land in question, would not have accepted the quarry at all (00:07:23-00:07:25). Joe later suggests that creating a quarry might be an improvement because the meadow is a large, open space, which he dislikes. Vera then replies “lose sight of this, Joe, [and] you say goodbye to your soul” (00:11:21-00:11:32). Through her statement, Vera reveals that her ‘soul’ or her ‘essence’ is tied to the geographical location. This underpins Storey’s statement about how nations often seem “rooted” in nature within the borders of the country (14). Vera’s English identity is tied to the rural landscape, and it is a part of her, as is the case for other inhabitants. The same episode features a man who is the son of a nobleman, but who has not inherited anything. He is very bitter towards contemporary society. This can, for instance, be seen when he angrily asks “who do you think the Queen got her land from?” to Joe when he is asked to answer a question. (“The Crow Trap.” 00:18:17-00:18:20). The man’s family once used to own the land a long time ago, but they have since lost it, and he has trouble dealing with his present situation. This shows a clear difference between the present and the past. It illustrates the feelings the past evokes, as well as the feelings that the man has towards part of his identity being taken from him.

However, while there are not many instances where class is overtly shown, rank, titles, and status are still important. When a girl mistakenly calls Joe a ‘policeman’ in “The Crow Trap”, Joe corrects this to ‘police officer’, affirming the way in which he wishes to be addressed (00:15:21-00:15:27). Policeman and police officer have the same meaning, with the exception that police officer is gender neutral. Even so, Joe still insists on being called an officer, because in his eyes, that is the correct title. In the episode “Little Lazarus”, directed by Paul Whittington, Joe consciously disobeys Vera and refuses to listen to the order he was given. Vera turns around and looks at her sergeant in surprise. Joe then proceeds to explain why he does not want to do what she has told him to, and adds that it must be because Vera is not feeling well (00:50:50-

00:51:02). When Vera hears this, she gets angry and retorts with “don’t you dare patronise me!” while visibly being upset over Joe’s comment (00:51:02-00:51:06). This means that even if Vera may be feeling ill, which was in fact true, she will not accept this kind of behaviour from any of her subordinates, as they are expected to comply with her orders.

Where class has become less important, diversity has become more pronounced. Diversity is not just about race. Vera is a woman, and she is in charge of a whole team. Her team also includes a young woman named Holly, who, although inexperienced, is shown to be very capable. *Vera* also features a wide variety of people from all classes and from different backgrounds. There are members of the nobility, but also people who belong to the middle class, and people who are so poor that they struggle to make ends meet. Furthermore, Holly is a black woman, and she often provides Vera with important information and clues, as well as assistance. One episode also contains a man called Mr Singh, who seems to be of Indian descent. These different people from different ethnic backgrounds all help to diversify the programme. Despite the ethnic diversity, race is not an important topic in the series. There are no comments about Holly’s skin colour for instance, and the characters simply live their lives. This helps to depict multiculturalism as a regular and normal part of life, that does not require further comment.

The last aspect that will be looked at is family life, as well as the food people eat. Food is an important aspect of any culture, and that is no different in *Vera*. What may be different from other crime dramas, is that Vera is often seen consuming alcohol without eating anything. Take, for instance, the episode “Little Lazarus”. In it, Vera hands out cans of beer to her team. There is also a scene where Vera goes grocery shopping, and buys all kinds of unhealthy foods. Vera is unmarried and lives alone. She is also a workaholic, and when a woman asks Vera if “work comes first”, Vera agrees (“The Crow Trap” 01:09:15-01:09:19). Her life is far removed from the traditional nuclear family that her sergeant Joe has, for instance. It reflects a more modern idea of singlehood and people who do not live in traditional family structures. If Vera would have married and started a family, she would likely also have bought food for her family, because she would have the responsibility to care for them. However, because she is alone, she can eat what she wants when she wants. There is also an episode where a woman adopts a girl, and multiple

episodes contain single mothers. By showing families in such a way, *Vera* shows many different types of families, as well as ethnicities and races, that are all English. It also shows how women in contemporary times have changed the gender roles they fill, and how women can live alone in England.

In short, the cultural aspects of setting, nostalgia, social status, diversity, and family life have been examined in *Vera* in this chapter. The analysis was done by taking those elements from *Midsomer Murders* and then using them to analyse *Vera*. Although these aspects do not all feature with the same frequency or in the same way as in more traditional crime dramas, all of them are present. Nature and the setting frequently feature in the programme. In addition, nostalgia is very important, since *Vera* remarks on it herself, and because other characters show it. Although class differences are no longer as important as it used to be, they have not disappeared. However, social status has also come to be expressed in different ways and is still an important part of English society. Diversity is something that is often present in the drama, while not being expressed explicitly. It has become a normal part of life. Family life is still important as well, even if it has become acceptable for a person to live on their own, including women. Since *Vera* simultaneously contains stereotypes, like the landscape, and more modern aspects, like the different family structures, the crime drama is a combination of modernity and tradition. Nevertheless, even those aspects that can be seen as more modern are still traditional in other ways. Different family structures are accepted, but the scene where Joe happily walks in a meadow in the sunlight, with his wife, children, and dog surrounding him, does show that the nuclear family is still valued as an ideal. This means that in spite of the space *Vera* provides for differences, like those concerning ethnicities and families, it does conform to stereotypes of Englishness. This is also true for gender. On the surface, opinions on the roles of women seem to have changed, but there are still gendered stereotypes in *Vera*. Gender will be examined in more depth in the next chapter.

Gender in *Vera*

Crime has piqued people's interest for a long time. Before the era of television, crime was already popular in many different media forms (Turnbull 20). At one point, even executions were entertainment (21). Although public executions are no longer seen as entertaining, Deborah Jermyn argues that "throughout TV history, crime dramas have featured as reliable 'bankers' for broadcasters seeking to ensure regular return audiences" (2). This is still the case with crime programmes today, which people find entertaining, albeit in the form of fictional narratives. Crime is not only enjoyed by men, but also by women. Unfortunately, the role of women as crime writers, sleuths and audience, in the early days of the genre of crime fiction tends to be overlooked (Turnbull 24). Although male and female detectives both emerged at around the same time, they were treated differently (Irons x). The female detective's individuality was not equal to that of male detectives (x). The detective 'as an urban hero' was almost by definition male (x). These detectives acted like urban cowboys, in that they caught criminals while operating outside of society's norms (x-xi). It was accepted for male detectives to have this individuality, but women were expected to stay within the boundaries of society's norms (x). This meant that women were not deemed to be suitable for police work, because that was not what they were supposed to do (x). The image of the detective as an urban hero started to change in the 1960s, when many female detectives began appearing in novels and on television (xi). In fiction from the United Kingdom, women detectives had still been rare until more recent times (xv). However, that too started to change. *Vera* can be seen as exemplifying this change.

As a current crime drama, *Vera* provides the viewer with information about what English identity and Englishness are seen as in contemporary times. However the possible role that *Vera's* gender may play in the portrayal of Englishness in *Vera* has not been examined yet in this thesis. That is, therefore, what this chapter will look at.

Women were seen as being unsuitable for police work (Irons x). In the UK, women were only allowed to work for the police after the suffragettes won that right in World War I (Jermyn 31). However, this change did not mean that women and men worked under the same conditions. Women worked fewer hours and earned less money than their male counterparts

(31). On top of that, women only dealt with children and other women, and London even had a separate police department for the female police (31). This only changed in 1973, when a law enforced full integration of women into the police department (31). Even so, the world of the police is chauvinistic, so true equal opportunities did not just start to open up after the law had been passed (Jermyn 1-2). Due to this, women like Vera may come across opposition, not because of their actions but because of their gender. Gendered treatment could influence how Vera chooses to present herself, and it could therefore also influence the way in which Englishness is presented. In this way, a female detective may address the problems that women face in modern society (Irons xii).

There are many different ways of looking at gender, but the source that will be used for this thesis is Vicky Ball's "The 'Feminization' of British Television and the Re-Traditionalization of Gender". Ball argues that television has traditionally been a feminine medium (248). Televisions were seen as such because of the context in which they were used (248). Televisions can for instance be used to watch family-friendly entertainment with the whole family. Even so, there were still many programmes, such as crime dramas, with male leads. The number of male leads began to change with the 'feminization' of British television (248). Feminization of television means that there is an increased amount of television programmes about the female experience during prime-time television (248). This can for example include genre, space, and discourse (248). Ruth McElroy explains how "placing women as detectives enables writers to examine how women perform their professional identities both in the field and in the station" (41). *Vera* would therefore also be able to say something about the experience of women in relation to their identity. However, while progress has been made with the de-traditionalization of television by putting women in lead roles in prime-time programmes, a move in the opposite direction was made as well, namely that of re-traditionalization. Re-traditionalization of television means the opposite of traditionalization; it shows how some traditional norms and values of television may be returning. When women knowingly choose to engage in something like a white and traditional wedding, they are also potentially re-traditionalizing themselves in relation to normative rules and gender roles that pre-date feminism (Ball 250). This means that these women choose to accept these older norms and roles even when they could choose

something more modern. In *Vera's* case, re-traditionalization may influence depictions of Englishness, because it potentially underpins the notion that England is rooted in history and the past.

In order to look at gender in *Vera*, and also to determine whether *Vera* contains elements of re-traditionalization, the series will be analysed by looking at different elements. The first element is Vera's occupation as a chief inspector. Being an inspector is Vera's role for most of the episodes, and it is as an inspector that many of the other aspects, such as interactions with her male and female co-workers, happen. This may especially be true because women were once not allowed to work equally alongside men in the police force. Although women had already been given the right to join the police at the time when the crime drama first aired, Vera is an older woman who could have started at a time when career opportunities for female police officers were not as common as during *Vera*. The exclusion of women from the workplace, as well as their marginalisation, possibly influences Vera's behaviour, and is important to look at (Jermyn 8).

Vera is the main authority in her team, and her subordinates have to obey her. Vera can be very strict in her behaviour towards her staff. She can be so strict, in fact, that her sergeant Joe calls her 'Mussolini' at home ("The Crow Trap" 00:54:19-00:54:38). She has worked hard for the position she now occupies, and she expects the same effort from her team. She becomes impatient when her staff do not immediately start working on their next assignments after a briefing, and she sometimes also becomes irritated when she asks for updates and receives none. In addition, she wants her staff to work seemingly as much as possible. When Joe has time off to spend with his family, she is annoyed that he is not going to help her with the case. When Joe's wife is about to give birth, Joe is on duty. Although Vera allows him to leave, she talks about the case throughout the episode in such a way that she makes Joe feel he has to stay. She also does not accept any kind of disobedience from her staff and she becomes angry when Joe refuses to do something because he does not think it is the right thing to do. This kind of behaviour illustrates how dedicated Vera is to her cases. However, Vera does not just expect this kind of dedication from her staff, but also from herself. She always seems to be engaged in work of some kind. When her father passes, there is barely any time to scatter his ashes before

she is called upon to solve a murder. When she wants to move into her father's old house, it is dirty and has to be cleaned, which takes time as well. Vera usually only has time to relax at the very beginning and end of an episode, because she never has free time when she has a case. She even agrees with a lady that "work comes first" ("The Crow Trap" 01:09:15-01:19:17). This may also be because a female detective sometimes has to give up wants and needs that a male detective may take for granted, in order to make a career (Irons xvi). For example, as head of her team, Vera does not just want to spend a lot of time on each case, she has to do so, because she is responsible for everyone. Not all people in her position have no free time, but spending a significant amount of time at work makes it much harder to maintain a relationship with a partner. For Vera, having both a busy job and a relationship is very difficult, but for a man, this may not be as much of a problem. It is more socially acceptable for a man to work long hours than for a woman, because women have traditionally been expected to accept their partner's work hours (Irons xvii). This was at least in part because women used to be homemakers while their husbands went to work. However, while that has changed, values do not always change as fast. As a result, these traditional values can still be found in society today.

While Vera deals with more established values as a female detective, her behaviour does not always reflect this. Throughout the programme, there are several instances where Vera becomes very emotional over a case, a suspect, or something that is happening to her on a personal level. When she becomes emotional in those moments, the emotions are very visible. Her expressions, tone of voice, and actions all become less professional as well. Although many protagonists in crime fiction have been male, there are several attributes that society sees as 'good' attributes for detectives, that have culturally been thought of as 'female' (Jermyn 29). These are attributes like the ability to listen, attention to detail, 'reading' people, and multitasking (29). Although these attributes could be seen as being more feminine than masculine, male detectives in crime fiction have not been called feminine. Jermyn explains the difference between logic and emotion. What is called 'having a hunch' or a 'gut feeling' could also be called 'feminine instinct' or maybe also 'a woman's intuition' (30). In this way, the language for men and women respectively, can be gendered and different depending on the gender of the detective. As such, it may actually help a detective to solve cases if they can, at

times, become less objective and more emotional. In fact, there have been detectives who followed their intuition or emotions to successfully catch a culprit.

In Vera's case, though, she may be getting too emotional at times. When a detective gets physical with someone, such as embracing a victim to comfort them, the detective crosses a line (Jermyn 44). Doing this "breaches 'proper' distance and professionalism" (44). The emotions that such a moment evokes are "at odds" with rationalism (44). Vera has several moments where she crosses the aforementioned line. In the episode "Hidden Depths", she sits down next to a high-school girl who was sitting on a bench all by herself. Vera offers her food, and after the girl declines the offer, Vera moves the food in front of the girl's face in what could be seen as a joke. Afterwards, Vera begins to talk to the girl about the victim, because the two knew each other. When the girl starts to cry, Vera puts an arm around her and pulls her closer to comfort her. Although this may seem harmless to the viewer, who knows that Vera has good intentions, and that the girl seems to be comfortable, her mother does not know this. The mother happened to be passing by in a bus, when she saw Vera talking to her daughter without any supervision. She got off the bus and quickly took her daughter away from Vera. She then angrily said: "nothing's clean, is it?" implying that Vera does not shy away from talking to anyone whether they are adults or children, and that it is unacceptable what Vera did (00:56:19-00:56:20). If Vera had arranged to talk to the girl under supervision from a parent, or had at least let the mother know she wanted to talk to the girl, the mother might not have been angered. Vera would then have remained professional enough to distance herself emotionally from the girl, so that she could have been objective, as she was supposed to. Since Vera was not able to remain professional enough to keep that distance between herself and the schoolgirl, she followed her emotions rather than rational thought. This makes her less of a traditional detective than Barnaby would be, but at the same time it re-traditionalizes her gender expression.

The re-traditionalization can also be seen through anger. When Joe does not obey Vera, she loses her temper and raises her voice at him. She also does this when she learns that one of her subordinates had leaked information to someone. Although she was rightfully upset over the insubordination and the leaking of information, it is especially important for a leader to

remain calm in such situations. Leaders have to keep their teams together in order for the team to function properly and work efficiently. Failure to do so can cause a delay, which could then mean that a culprit would have enough time to commit an otherwise preventable murder. Furthermore, in the second episode, Vera picks up a stack of paper and throws it in her subordinate's face. As mentioned, women were originally barred from the police because they were deemed to be too emotional and frail to handle police work. By exhibiting this behaviour, Vera is being too emotional to maintain professionalism, and she has hurt people's feelings with her outbursts. Such behaviour could potentially damage a case. An example would be if the angry mother had chosen to file a complaint with the police department about the questioning of her daughter without her knowledge. These examples show that although Vera can be professional, she also exhibits a stereotypical emotional attitude.

Vera does not have a conventional family like her sergeant, Joe, but family is still something that she struggles with. Vera's mother died when she was very young, so she does not remember much about her. She also had a troubled relationship with her father, who was not always there for her, as he was very preoccupied with his love for birds. The absence of a maternal figure in her life could help explain why Vera has trouble with children, or with her own femininity. Due to her mother's death, she did not have a role model to teach her these things, and she also did not have as much stability in her childhood as children need. Another problem that further complicated the relationship between Vera and her father is motherhood. Vera does not have children, and her father knows this. However, in "Telling Tales", directed by Peter Hoar, he has apparently been lying to his friends that he has two grandsons named Alan and Kevin (00:48:52-00:48:56). Vera then states that her father had been lying to his friends about his "perfect family" (00:49:18-00:49:22). She further adds that he must have been bad-tempered so often because he really wanted to have grandchildren (00:49:25-00:49:29). Vera seems upset over her father's feelings, and may even feel guilt over the situation. This further shows that her inability to have a successful family life as a woman potentially makes her feel inadequate. She even reveals that loneliness is "not for the fainthearted" ("Hidden Depths" 01:27:06). This means she must understand what loneliness feels like, and that she does suffer from her lack of a family. Although Vera does not have a family, she does have friends and

colleagues.

Vera calls the people she cares about affectionate words, such as 'pet' or 'love'. Using words like these shortens the distance between Vera and the other person because of how informal it is. This can also be seen when she calls Joe a "good lad" even though he is an adult ("The Crow Trap" 01:21:44-01:21:45). Her informality is further shown through the other word choices that Vera makes. She may use words like "skint" for someone who is poor for example ("Little Lazarus" 00:12:29-00:12:30). Words like these are not as formal and signify that the people she talks to are close enough to Vera for her to be informal.

However, while Vera shows closeness to her staff and other people she knows in her personal life, she is not good with children. She has shown to care about them, and she is also capable of being tender around them, such as when she embraces the school girl when the girl is sad, but she does not know what to do with younger children. When Joe asks Vera to look after his young children for a while during an emergency, the result is a drawn out scene in a car where Vera awkwardly tries to communicate with the children, but fails. When Joe asks Vera to be a godmother to his new born child, Vera also does not directly answer Joe, but rather seems to want to avoid answering him, if at all possible. Joe even states, when he asks her to be the godmother, that he knows she does not like children, but he wants to ask it anyway ("Hidden Depths" 01:26:17-01:26:22). When Joe does not get a response from Vera, he changes the topic to the case they were working on, and Vera immediately becomes interested and responsive. Her inability to communicate properly with young children and her avoidance of Joe's question could also reflect Vera's sadness about not being able to live up to her father's wishes. If she were to accept the position as godmother, she would help take care of a baby while being reminded that she never had a child herself.

Vera's behaviour around food and drink does not help her live up to her father's expectations either. She can frequently be seen consuming alcohol throughout the series. She drinks alcohol both in private, with friends, or with suspects or victims of the case, if she is offered any alcohol. Instead of cooking healthy meals that a mother with a family cooks for her children. Whenever she does do anything with food, there are often unhealthy foods involved, such as when she offers the school girl cakes, or when she goes grocery shopping, and ends up

with a cart filled with junk food and alcohol. Since Vera lives alone, she does not have anyone to take responsibility for except herself, and this illustrates a kind of bachelorette lifestyle that is not consistent with traditional depictions of family life. As she lives by herself, she is often alone. There are also male detectives who are loners, but the implications change when the lone cop or detective is female (Jermyn 55). This is because the lone woman's "very being and legitimacy as a woman" is being questioned in that case (55). Her style of dress further illustrates the implications.

Vera dresses in a dishevelled way, indicating that she does not care much for her appearance. Gender can also be expressed through styles of dress, but Vera's style is so unkempt, that it makes her look much less feminine. When a little girl asks Vera why she dresses "like that", Joe cannot help but smile over the comment, as if to say that Vera's lack of care for her appearance is something worth laughing about ("The Crow Trap" 00:15:31-00:15:40). Vera's clothes also confuse the girl as to what her job is at first, because Vera and Joe do not wear uniforms, but rather their own, plain clothes. However, while Joe does not wear a uniform, he still looks professional enough to be presentable as a police officer. Therefore, Vera's style of dress may actually damage her reputation, as it makes her seem less professional, to the point where the girl questions whether Vera even works for the police.

Even though Vera may not act very feminine in the classic sense, there are still a number of instances where gender is directly mentioned in the series. Vera drives a car that matches her appearance. Jonathan Bignell states that, since Vera is the daughter of a farmer, the car matches both her appearance and the setting in "a bleak, mainly rural Northumbria" (58). Vera calls the car 'she' even though it is an old hummer and it was "a devil to get her started" ("Telling Tales" 00:07:35-00:07:38). The car can be seen to symbolize Vera, who is also older, and not very feminine. When she visits the house of a couple, the husband owns a shiny red car while the wife drives a more formal-looking black vehicle. Vera sees these cars and then comments "He gets the lady car, does he?" to show she thinks the car may not be suitable for a man ("Little Lazarus" 00:47:18-00:47:21). The husband then retorts by saying "I'll swap you, if you like?" (00:47:21-00:47:23). Vera made a remark about the husband's choice of car, but she does not drive a car that 'suits' her gender herself either. This small exchange shows that English

society has ideas about which kinds of cars are suitable for certain groups of people. When people do not drive cars that are designated as suitable, society will form opinions about them.

Vera may also speak in a gendered way about her female subordinate Holly. When Holly comes up with a new piece of information Vera needs, she turns to Joe and says “Smart girl, Holly. Hard work and an open mind. I was just the same when I was her age” (“Hidden Depths” 00:41:19-00:41:28). Joe huffs to this in response, and either does not believe it or is not happy with Vera’s praise of Holly. Although gender is an aspect of *Vera*, identity and Englishness are important as well.

Vera and *Midsomer Murders* have differences in the way they portray Englishness and English identity. However, that does not mean that *Vera* is less English than *Midsomer Murders*. When people think of England, they often think of England’s rich past. This is because England is rooted in its past. It is also in part because England has nostalgia for its own rural past (Bergin 90). This can be seen in *Midsomer Murders* with its setting in a rural area. *Vera*, however, is set in a more urban area in a different time, which is important to note. Due to the time in which it is set, *Vera* also conveys modern values of Englishness, rather than just traditional ones. *Vera* struggles with expectations of motherhood and of not being able to meet those expectations. However, that situation is one that many women in modern times face. It has become more and more common for family structures to be anything but nuclear. These different structures can include divorced couples, teen mothers, blended families, same-sex relationships, or even singlehood. In contemporary times, these types of relationships are all possible, and they are more accepted than in the idealized past that people may long for.

Gender and identity cannot be seen as separate entities, because gender is integral to identity, just as culture is. This is also true for race and multiculturalism, which are important and everyday topics. England now harbours people of many different cultures, ethnicities, and skin colours. These people are just as much part of English society as the descendants of the Anglo-Saxons are. Gender and identity are important for both family life and multiculturalism. Holly has a darker skin colour, and she is also a woman, yet none of that is important in the programme. There is one instance where Vera needs Holly because of her gender. At one point, Vera needs information from a female suspect, and she asks Holly for help and not Joe. This is

because, as a woman, Holly can “play the sister chord” to gain the trust of the suspect (“The Crow Trap” 00:52:44-00:52:49). Apart from this one instance, however, Holly’s gender and race are never mentioned. Even for Vera herself, although gendered comments are sometimes made by- or to Vera, these comments do not concern her ability to do her job properly. If such comments about her work are made, they have nothing to do with her gender, but with her actions and decisions. Gender is still relevant, as seen with Holly and Vera’s father, but women in *Vera* are judged by their actions and by who they are, rather than what they are. In this way, *Vera* portrays family structures, gender and race, as something that is part of English everyday life and of English society. It therefore also shows that differences in these aspects are just as much part of English identity and Englishness as its heritage is part of this identity.

In short, although Vera is not a traditionally feminine woman with a family life, she can be very emotional and act on her emotions as well. She occasionally comments on gender, and the people in her surroundings also comment on her appearance and behaviour, because she does not act conventionally. Furthermore, Vera also still deals with the traditional expectations that her father had for her, to become a mother and start a family. Vera works very hard, and barely has any time to work on a social life or relationships outside of work. As she is an older woman, she started working for the police when traditional values were even stronger than they are today, so her lack of traditional femininity in her gender expression, could also be a reaction to these times and to the expectations that society placed on a woman like her. Even so, for all its modernity, *Vera* does contain elements of re-traditionalization. This means that some values about Englishness, like the English family life that Vera’s father wanted for her, are present in the programme. At the same time, there are elements of modernity and emancipation in *Vera* as well. As such, *Vera* shows a contemporary image of England and Englishness, that is a combination of tradition and modernity.

Conclusion

The goal of this thesis was to investigate the question in what way *Vera* (2011) portrays Englishness and English identity, and what role gender plays in this portrayal. In order to properly analyse in what way Englishness is represented in this programme, the older television programme *Midsomer Murders* was used. It is understood by many people as a stereotypical representation of Englishness, and can as such be used to examine whether *Vera* is also stereotypical. *Midsomer Murders* is still being aired today in many countries, and it is said to have “potency as an international symbol of ‘Englishness’” (Bergin 84). The programme was analysed to see what it is that makes the programme English. The aspects that I have focussed on in this light are setting, nostalgia, social class and mannerisms, ethnic diversity, and family and food. These aspects were then used to examine English identity in *Vera*.

Unlike *Midsomer Murders*, *Vera* is set in an urban area in the present, and the protagonist is a middle-aged unmarried woman. The initial hypothesis therefore expected *Vera* to be a more modern programme, that portrays modern values. However, it was also hypothesized that in spite of its modern setting, *Vera* also exhibits more traditional values that may be found in older crime dramas as well. Lastly, it was hypothesized that in spite of emancipation, gender plays a role in this portrayal of English identity.

When Englishness was examined in *Vera*, the results showed that, although not all of the aspects feature as prominently as in *Midsomer Murders*, they are all present. For example, although *Vera* is set in an urban area, nature and landscapes still feature prominently in the programme, and there are even episodes where nature plays a major role in a conflict. Family relationships and race are depicted as more modern in *Vera*, since Vera’s team has people of both genders and multiple ethnicities. Unconventional family structures can also be found in every episode. As such, *Vera* is not as similar to programmes that adhere to traditional, nuclear, family structures. However despite those differences, traditional family values, especially in relation to gender, are still present in *Vera*. An example of this is Joe’s family. At the start of the series he has a wife, two children and a dog. His wife is pregnant with their third child. Vera’s father also wanted her to have children, and Vera felt pressure to comply, as well as sadness that she could not live up to his expectations. As a result, Vera feels pressure to conform to the

traditional gendered expectations of becoming a mother.

Vera neither dresses nor behaves in a feminine way. She can be harsh to her subordinates, openly drinks alcohol on the job, and is unmarried. At the same time, she uses pet names like 'pet' and 'good lad' for her subordinates and children she meets, and she often becomes very emotional, even to the point where she loses some of her professionalism. She also deals with the pressure from her father, who lied about having grandchildren because she could not give him any. This behaviour illustrates how, while *Vera* does contain many elements of modernity, it also deals with re-traditionalization. On top of that, Vera exhibits stereotypically feminine behaviours and values, like being emotional rather than rational, and she feels pressured by the traditional expectations that a woman should get married and have children.

My initial hypothesis, therefore, may be said to be confirmed by the evidence I have provided. *Vera* is a recent programme, but does not only show contemporary values that could be considered modern. Older values, that could be seen as more traditional, are still present in the programme. For instance, the pressure on Vera to get married is a more traditional value, while being allowed to stay unmarried can be seen as more modern. In this way, *Vera* portrays England and English identity as a combination of these more traditional values and more modern values. *Vera* does its best to normalize cultural differences and gender, as characters are not judged by who they are, but by what they are. At the same time, gendered comments occasionally still happen, but those comments only serves to show that identity changes neither suddenly or never at all. It changes gradually over time. In addition, both the past and the present play an important role in the programme, and they both shape English society and identity.

Vera responds differently to situations than a man might be expected to respond. This is due to her emotional disposition. In a gendered binary, emotional reactions are seen as female, while logic and rational thinking are seen as male (Jermyn 30). This stereotype may not just affect women, it may also affect men. Vera's portrayal of English identity could differ from that of a male protagonist in a similar, contemporary situation, due to the expectations that society has for men. There was no space in this paper for that question however, but future research could look at it instead. Another question that further research could attempt to answer is

whether male protagonists in contemporary crime dramas have changed how they conduct their investigations, from, for example, a more rational approach, to a more emotional method. Other research might also focus on race and English identity in crime dramas. *Vera* has shown that race and ethnicity can be normalized, to the point where it is not relevant to the cases that Vera takes on. This could be different for other crime dramas and may be worth looking into. Lastly, comparing the first season of *Vera* to the most recent season could also be interesting. Both *Vera* and *Midsomer Murders* have been running for several years, and *Vera* is even expected to release a new season in 2019. The changes within these series from the first episode to today could be very interesting for further research to look at. When a series grows to have multiple seasons that have been created over several years, the programme may begin to reflect change in society within the series. This could for instance be new forensic techniques and different interrogating strategies, but the changes could also involve important social or political changes, such as Brexit. Since crime dramas can provide information about identity and values, comparing *Vera* as it was in its early days to what it reflects in the latest season, helps chart which changes are happening in society, as well as depicting how people may react to these changes. Such information is useful in understanding how identity and Englishness change over time.

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