Trouble on the Waves

Socio-political divisions in post-Referendum British theatre

Name: Janis Alexander
Student number: 1000260
Thesis Supervisor: Dr R.H. van den Beuken
                    Radboud University Nijmegen
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Teacher who will receive this document: Dr R.H. van den Beuken

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Signed

Alexander

Name of student: Janis Alexander

Student number: 1000260

Abstract

The post-Referendum United Kingdom is divided by deep-rooted socio-political issues while many different social groups feel misrepresented or unheard in the political arena. As inimical stereotypes pervade the contemporary discourse between these groups, an antagonistic dimension can be ascribed the present political climate. The role of theatre is examined in relation to Brexit-related issues, in which the themes of national identity, issues of race and ethnicity play an important role. Theoretical concepts pertaining to these themes, described in postcolonial theory and political philosophy, have been applied to three post-Referendum theatre productions. The presence of nationalism, racial discrimination, ethnocentricity and transculturation in the plays show a clear engagement with British socio-political divisions in the context of Brexit. The display of emotions in relation to collective and personal identities offer opportunities for alternative modes of identification, which is in agreement with the discursive role of theatre in agonistic politics.

Key Terms: Brexit, theatre, national identity, race, ethnicity, agonism.

Table of Contents

Introduction

After four years of negotiations and postponements of withdrawal, the United Kingdom officially left the European Union on January 31, 2020. While Brexit continues to occupy the headlines of many newspaper articles and magazines, it can be identified as one of the most important events in European politics since World War II. However, the exact scope of its impact, as Öğünç notes, is ''the most contentious topic for politicians, academics and ordinary citizens to be understood, analysed and discussed from the perspectives of politics, economy, trade and even daily life''.[1] The numerous societal ramifications, both within and outside the borders of the UK, add to the high complexity of the phenomenon that is Brexit. In accordance with the Referendum's slight majority of 52 percent of Leavers against 48 percent of Remainers, deep-rooted socio-political issues divide the whole nation on multiple levels, causing a rift between different demographic groups. Recent displays of violence in response to the Northern Ireland Protocol, accompanied by expressions of a profound distrust of the government in Westminster, are indicative of Brexit's communal conflicts.[2] The current positions of Wales and Scotland as countries of the Union are under dispute as well, as future referenda for their own independence are topics for debate. Amidst the voices of discontent, England's hegemony often lies at the core of contemporary debates featured in the media, casting doubt on the democratic order itself. Consequently, different social groups within the UK feel as though they are not being represented or heard in the political arena.[3]

Zooming in on the public discourse revolving around the Leave and Remain camps, polarised viewpoints are not only expressed in relation to their respective political positions. Inimical stereotypes entered the Brexit debate, as unnuanced social categorisations flew back and forth between the two sides. The Leave campaign's rhetoric focused heavily on immigration, explaining the choice to remain in the EU as perpetuating a threat to society. Subsequently, ''terrorism'', ''claiming benefits'', and ''stealing jobs'' were assimilated with the notion of foreignness.[4] In turn, many Remain voters associated Leavers' ideologies with expressions of xenophobia, ignorance and bigotry.[5] Considering the continuation of these

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[1] Banu Öğünç. "Political Theatre in the Age of Brexit: The State of Nation in Monologues." In *American, British and Canadian Studies* 33 (2019): 176.

[2] Heather Stewart. ''Post-Brexit situation in Northern Ireland is fragile, says Starmer'', *The Guardian*, 9 July 2021. https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/jul/09/brexit-situation-is-fragile-in-northern-ireland-says-keir-starmer.

[3] *BBC Newsnight*. ''State of the Union: Scotland'', 30 September 2019. https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p07ppp8s; *BBC Newsnight*. ''State of the Union: Wales'', 5 November 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EdlbVPMnvio; *BBC Newsnight*. ''State of the Union: Northern Ireland'', 17 October 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EdlbVPMnvio.

[4] Kasia Lech. "Claiming Their Voice: Foreign Memories on the Post-Brexit Stage." *Migration and Stereotypes in Performance and Culture*, edited by Yana Meerzon, David Dean, and Daniel McNeil, 2020. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 215-34.

[5] Aleks Sierz. "Dark Times: British Theatre after Brexit." In *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 39.1 (2017): 6; Dan Rebellato. "Nation and Negation (Terrible Rage)." In *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English* 6.1 (2018): 16-7.

hostile and homogenising categorisations in Brexit discourse, an antagonistic dimension can be ascribed to the present political climate. Mouffe, who theoretically examines the organisation and institutionalisation of discursive democracy, reflects upon the influence of antagonism on political debates, and asserts that ''the political is from the outset concerned with collective forms of identification … dealing with the formation of 'us' as opposed to 'them'''.[6] What causes any mode of politics to become antagonistic often stands in connection with a perceived threat to a collectivised 'we'-identity that dominates a certain society. This threat, ''be it religious, ethnic or economic'', turns the 'us' versus 'them' into ''the locus of an antagonism''.[7] A political environment of this kind, in which opponents are determined to eliminate or completely negate the other, gives rise to intolerance and violence, and may even put in jeopardy the value of liberty and equality as core principles of democracy. The significant role of deliberation in political decision-making cannot be safeguarded either, as antagonistic encounters leave little to no room for the exploration of alternative viewpoints.[8]

It is important to note that a general consensus or unity between opposing sides, while avoiding exclusion of any kind, cannot be attained. However, these clashing power relations do not necessarily have to be antagonistic. Mouffe proposes agonism as an alternative democratic model, which prioritises respect among 'adversaries', and pleads for equality and liberty for all political participants.[9] Promoters of this model take into account the central role of confrontation between the 'us' and 'them', as is required in a well-functioning democracy. However, ''they do not put into question the legitimacy of their opponent's right to fight for the victory of their position''.[10] Even though exclusion is inevitable, accepting the existence of many different perspectives, also known as pluralism, within a multicultural society, helps to constitute ''a harmonious and non-conflictual ensemble''.[11] Another aspect that distinguishes the agonistic approach from other models in political theory concerns the constitution of collective identities. Acknowledging the significance of emotions and passions, which Mouffe introduces as 'the affective dimension', is key to understanding the processes of identification within a community. These emotions, rather than displays of rationality, can be mobilised in the formation of political identities.[12]

As can be gleaned from Mouffe's theory, discourse on social division and the unjust distribution of power reverberates beyond politics, resulting in tensions around the concept of identity itself. Questions of social disunity as well as the meaning of Britishness and

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[6] Chantal Mouffe. *Agonistics*: *Thinking the world politically*. London: Verso Books, 2013, 4.
[7] Chantal Mouffe. *Agonistics*, 5.
[8] Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics*, 3, 133.
[9] Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics*, 6-7.
[10] Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics*, 7.
[11] Chantal Mouffe. *Agonistics*, 3.
[12] Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics*, 46-9.

Englishness in the context of Brexit have already been addressed by the cultural sector in various ways. In the wake of the Referendum, several popular cultural products have been developed: poetry centred around Brexit, films like *Brexit: The Uncivil War* (2019), and the new literary genre of 'BrexLit', in which Ali Smith's *Autumn* (2016) holds a notable position.[13] Theatre, too, has responded to the socio-political events and anxieties linked to Brexit. Öğünç points out that Brexit in all its complexity can ''contribute to further conceptions of political theatre'', a subgenre that has proved difficult to define.[14] Regarding the use of generic labels like Brexit theatre, Tronicke warns that these can be too narrow or restrictive, as complex processes are often summarised as singular incidents. In light of this, Tronicke further asserts that multiple dramatical productions have been featuring ''Brexit-related issues'' for many years. The origins of Brexit should be traced back to racism, nationalism and empire nostalgia, which, Tronicke argues, stands in connection with Paul Gilroy's notion of ''postcolonial melancholia''. This notion entails that ''within large parts of the (White) British population an awareness of colonial crimes and the resulting racist violence still lies dormant''.[15] Following Tronicke's argument, then, Brexit should not be seen as the starting point of these socio-political issues, but as a catalyst.

Theatre's first and most prominent explicit engagement with Brexit is Carol Ann Duffy's and Rufus Norris's *My Country: A Work in Progress*, performed at the National Theatre in 2017. The extensive display of verbatim drama features excerpts from interviews with people from different regions of the UK, highlighting their personal circumstances and troubles in the debate around Brexit. Conflicting views on immigration, Eurocentrism and nationalism come to the fore. The play was not particularly well received, which Zaroulia links to the reflective nature of the play, performed by several actors who switch between different voices. Since it provides no opportunity for debate amidst the sequence of diverging monologues, Zaroulia claims that *My Country*'s performance verges on antagonistic politics.[16] This, in turn, would be in conflict with what Öğünç describes as the aims of ''political theatre of the post-Thatcher era'', namely ''to establish a dialogue and mutual understanding of the political problems of the age''.[17]

Two other notable examples of theatre's political engagement with Brexit are John

[13] Anne Varty. "Poetry and Brexit." In *Brexit and Literature: Critical and Cultural Responses*, edited by Robert Eaglestone, 2020. Routledge: London, 59-65; Kristian Shaw. "BrexLit." In *Brexit and Literature: Critical and Cultural Responses*, edited by Robert Eaglestone, 2018. London: Routledge, 38-56.

[14] Banu Öğünç. "Political Theatre in the Age of Brexit", 173.

[15] Marlena Tronicke. "Imperial pasts, dystopian futures, and the theatre of Brexit." In *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 56.5 (2020): 663-4.

[16] Marilena Zaroulia. "After the British EU Referendum: When the Theatre Tries to Do 'Something'." In *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Politics*, edited by Peter Eckersall and Helena Grehan, 2020. New York: Routledge, 17.

[17] Banu Öğünç. "Political Theatre in the Age of Brexit", 173.

Maitland's comedy *The Last Temptation of Boris Johnson* (2019) first staged at Park Theatre, and Headlong's and *The Guardian*'s series of internet dramas: The Brexit Shorts (2017). The former involves a highly satirical play entirely centred around the British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. The first part features Johnson's decision to vote leave at his dinner with Michael Gove in 2016, and highlights his motive to do so: to acquire a powerful position in Britain. Fantastical elements are added to the plot as Johnson is accompanied by the ghosts of past Prime Ministers, among whom Winston Churchill, Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair. Following Johnson's opportunistic nature, the second part of the play shows the UK's political future climate in 2029. Around this time, society has fallen into chaos and the condition of his possible return to power involves the organisation of Britain's re-entry into the EU. While this play can be seen as a critical reflection of Johnson's political actions and personal involvement, it does not elaborate upon the divided state of the nation nor focus on the viewpoints of different demographic groups. The Brexit Shorts, on the other hand, much like *My Country: A Work in Progress*, depict a range of societal issues from the unique perspectives of different classes, ages and parts of the UK. In relation to this, immigration and differences in ethnicity and race come to the fore in several short dramas as well. What contributes to the effective representation of socio-political issues within these productions, Öğünç argues, concerns ''the sense of reality'' created by these online videos which ''encourages a virtual dialogue with the audience''.[18]

Considering such different post-Referendum theatrical performances, several questions arise with regard to the intersection of identity, socio-political divisions and theatre. The underlying mechanisms of national identity formation in relation to Paul Gilroy's notion of ''postcolonial melancholia'', the role and techniques of theatre in bringing about effective communication concerning socio-political divisions, and the participatory role of the spectator are all factors in the complex discourse revolving around Brexit. Three post-Referendum plays that also reflect on Brexit-related issues, including expressions of Britishness, Englishness, nationalism and racism, are Mike Bartlett's *Albion* (2017), and the more recent *Death of England* (2020) and *Death of England: Delroy* (2020) written by two black British playwrights, Roy Williams and Clint Dyer.[19] These theatre productions, which engage with the current state of the nation, have not yet received much attention within the emerging academic field of Brexit drama. In order to contribute to this important new topic within scholarly debate, this bachelor thesis seeks to generate more insight in the role of dramatical productions in the context of

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[18] Banu Öğünç. "Political Theatre in the Age of Brexit", 185.
[19] Marlena Tronicke, "Imperial pasts", 664; Arifa Akbar, ''Death of England review –Rafe Spall dazzles in punkish state-of-the-nation address'', *The Guardian*, February 7, 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2020/feb/07/death-of-england-review-rafe-spall-national-theatre-dorfman.

Brexit. To acquire more insight into the depiction of Brexit-related issues in contemporary British theatre, the three aforementioned plays shall be analysed. This has led to the following research question:

In what ways do Bartlett's *Albion*, Williams's and Dyer's *Death of England* and *Death of England: Delroy* engage with socio-political divisions in the post-Referendum United Kingdom?

In order to answer the research question, the formation of national identity has to be explored with the purpose of investigating the importance of Britishness and Englishness within Brexit drama. In addition, the themes of ethnicity and race have to be examined: as discussed above, these are closely connected to Brexit-related issues and featured prominently during the campaign as well. Therefore, the following subquestions have been formulated:

1) In which ways are national identities represented in the plays?
2) How are differences in ethnicity and race portrayed in relation to the socio-political divisions?

Chapter 1 features the theoretical framework consisting of key concepts described within postcolonial theory and political philosophy, after which the synthesised methodology is described. In chapter 2, the three plays will be analysed in relation to socio-political issues with respect to identity formation, while applying the described theoretical concepts. Finally, chapter 3 comprises the conclusions which are drawn from the analyses of the previous chapters, and reflects on possible future research in the academic field of Brexit drama.

1. Theoretical framework and methodology

1.1 National identity and politics

Before analysing the socio-political divisions as portrayed in theatre productions, it is important to examine the discursive role of theatre in accordance with Mouffe's agonistic model. Indeed, Mouffe argues that artistic cultural practices can be critical by aiding in the production of new subjectivities, or new forms of identification. In doing so, theatre as an institution can serve as a public space where collective reflection takes place, while plays can be visualised as agonistic interventions.[20] The ways in which dramatic performances can provide alternatives to the dominant political order, involve ''making visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate, in giving voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony''.[21] This dominant consensus incorporates a restrictive set of subjectivities whose ideologies and modes of conduct convey ''a specific understanding of reality'', which is often articulated as 'common sense' or 'natural'.[22] The role of theatrical performances, Mouffe notes, lies in disarticulating this proposed 'common sense', which can be done by taking an active stance in fostering pluralism in agonistic public places. Featuring diverse forms of speech, such as different accents and languages, can give rise to new subjectivities.[23] However, according to Mouffe, the most decisive role theatre plays in bringing about new forms of identification includes its resources that trigger emotional responses. Reaching people at the affective level is what raises awareness of what was formerly missing in their lives and can generate a desire for change in forming new kinds of social or political relationships.[24]

To acquire more insight in the relationship between theatre and Brexit's socio-political divisions, the constitution of nationhood and the role politics plays with regard to Britain's social tensions merit closer inspection. According to Mouffe, ''When democratic politics does not offer people the possibility of identifying with collective political identities, we witness a tendency for people to look for other sources of collective identification''.[25] For instance, the need may arise for various individuals within a population to identify as a group formed around a religious, regional or ethnic identity. Despite the apparent discrepancy between the political

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[20] Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics*, 87-90.
[21] Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics*, 93.
[22] Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics*, 89.
[23] Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics*, 91-2.
[24] Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics*, 94-7.
[25] Chantal Mouffe. *Agonistics*, 141.

left-versus-right division and these other forms of identification, the latter can be classified as orders. Any given order, Mouffe remarks, can be described as a ''hegemonic configuration of power'' and is thereby political in nature.[26] However, these forms of identification pose problems within a democratic system, as they ''cannot provide the terrain for an agonistic debate''.[27] Nationalism, being one of the key concepts within other plays that engage with Brexit-related issues, can be identified as an alternative mode of identification outside of democratic politics. Connecting nationalistic elements with the articulated 'common sense' of a dominant political order in Mouffe's theory, a further exploration of this concept can shed light upon theatre's engagement with the construction of new subjectivities.

1.1.1 Nationalism

Mouffe states that ''the affective dimension which is mobilized in the creation of political identities'' play a very large role in uncovering the inner workings of nationalistic movements that seek to unify and glorify their own nation above all others.[28] Emotions and passions, which play a key role in identification processes, ''cannot be given a democratic outlet'' when nationalism pervades the socio-political sphere. The reason for this, Mouffe explains, is that nationalism leads to antagonistic modes of politics, and is centred around non-negotiable essentialist identities.[29] Essentialism, as an inherent feature of nationalism, represents a mode of thinking that differentiates between identities on basis of distinctive intrinsic qualities. Due to the prevalence of these intrinsic qualities, Mouffe asserts, emotional conflicts about non-debatable moral values can emerge more swiftly alongside displays of verbal or physical violence. Following Mouffe's paradigms of agonism, expressions of these moral values should always be open to contestation, and no order should claim superiority over others by presenting itself as the only legitimate one.[30] Theatre's agonistic discursive role, namely the disarticulation of the 'common sense', could, in the case of nationalism, correspond to discarding or unsettling the tenets of essentialism.

In order to address the current state of the British nation and contemporary theatrical displays of nationalism more thoroughly, Tronicke argues that Britain's imperial past should be critically assessed: examining texts that explore postcolonial legacies can bring to light the base around which contemporary essentialist beliefs are formed.[31] Taking the connection even

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[26] Chantal Mouffe. *Agonistics,* 17.
[27] Chantal Mouffe. *Agonistics*, 141-2.
[28] Chantal Mouffe. *Agonistics*, 96, 137.
[29] Chantal Mouffe. *Agonistics*, 8.
[30] Chantal Mouffe. *Agonistics*, 17.
[31] Marlena Tronicke. "Imperial pasts", 663-5.

further, postcolonial theorist Leela Gandhi points out that colonialism can be seen as a form of nationalism in and of itself. Continuing this line of thought, Leela Gandhi highlights the distinction between nationalism's external features and its substantial influence on the mental world, as colonialism should be subdivided into the actual physical conquest and the occupation of the minds as well.[32] Accordingly, decolonisation processes can be categorised in the same manner. Prasad claims that, when counteracting the external and mental manifestations of colonialism and nationalism, it is important to consider that these manifestations are often chronologically distinct. Because of this, Prasad declares that contemporary traces of historical colonial encounters must be overthrown effectively ''at the level of the human imagination itself''.[33] Considering this imaginative level, Tronicke adds that Paul Gilroy's notion of 'postcolonial melancholia', which stems from the loss of empire, serves as the ''anchor for imaginations'' leading to specific constructions of Britishness and Englishness.[34] Uncovering the origins of these imaginations is a necessary step in the interpretation of essentialist ideologies within nationalism.

1.1.2 Historical references and empire nostalgia

In substantiating the ideological dimension within nationalism, historical narratives play a significant role. Leela Gandhi notes that a certain ambiguity pervades this kind of nationalist rhetoric, as it propagates ''a forward-looking vision'', but at the same time ''invokes the latent energies of custom and tradition''.[35] Reflecting on this linkage between the future and the past, Mouffe points out the constructive nature of national identities that are established around this rhetoric, which may only appear 'natural' as a result of ''long periods of historical sedimentation''.[36] An important aspect to keep in mind in the formation of these identities, Leela Gandhi claims, is that retellings of history and expressions of nostalgia can be interpreted as compensations for emotional burdens as a consequence of socio-political changes and developments.[37] With regard to these nostalgic sentiments, Tronicke indicates that history should be understood to encompass both myths, legends and memories, as authoritative markers of an imagined past.[38] Articulating previously abstract and global social-political aspects of contemporary times in more concrete and local terms, in which these historical accounts can function as a facilitating factor, may generate imaginations that simplify or even obscure the

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[32] Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial theory*. Columbia University Press: New York, 15, 103, 119, 136.
[33] Anshuman Prasad. "The Gaze of the Other: Postcolonial theory and organizational analysis" In *Postcolonial Theory and Organizational Analysis: A Critical Engagement*, edited by Anshuman Prasad, 2003. New York: Springer, 15-7.
[34] Marlena Tronicke. "Imperial pasts", 665.
[35] Leela Gandhi. *Postcolonial theory*, 106.
[36] Chantal Mouffe. *Agonistics*, 45.
[37] Leela Gandhi. *Postcolonial theory*, 106.
[38] Marlena Tronicke. "Imperial pasts", 664-6.

socio-political complexities of the present, and may even provide a sense of control over them. The presentation of history as indicator of the intrinsic qualities or ideologies of a nation, can be indicative of the essentialist basis of nationalistic speech. Returning to theatre and its discursive function, the presence and application of historical references within plays can become important sources for nationalist forms of identification, since drama can function as an agonistic intervention, through which the essentialist values within nationalism can be contested.

1.2 Ethnicity and racism

Closely connected to nationalism, identity formation and the concomitant effects on politics are questions surrounding race and ethnicity. In the post-Referendum UK, immigration continues to be one of the largest topics of debate, indicative of the entrenched rifts in society.[39] Kumar notes that ''Britain has always been a country of immigrants'', notably identified as such by the influx of different ethnic groups from the former British Empire and the Commonwealth. Within the large variety of peoples from these groups, Kumar explains that black people and Asians from Africa, the Caribbean, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Hongkong ''have provided the dominant challenges to existing identities''.[40] Despite the fact that these ethnicities are outnumbered by more recent white immigrants from Poland and other countries of Eastern Europe, Kumar notes that xenophobic opinions are more often aimed directly at the former.[41] In relation to this, Lech observes that racism in the context of Brexit ''seemed to define ''foreigners'' as all that did not fit the model of a ''perfect Brit'': white, monolinguistic and Christian''.[42] Those who see dangers in the influx of immigrants and those who see opportunities and welcome ethnic and thereby cultural diversity stand directly opposite one another.[43]

1.2.1 Discrimination and ethnocentricity

Factoring in Paul Gilroy's notion of 'postcolonial melancholia', which underscores the contemporary unawareness of colonial crimes and the consequent displays of racist violence in British society, it is useful to examine the context and features of racial discrimination in more detail, as these can be addressed in theatrical performances. Leela Gandhi points out that racial discrimination, involving prejudicial considerations or treatments of individuals or groups on

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[39] Kasia Lech. "Claiming Their Voice", 216.
[40] Krishan Kumar. *The making of English national identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 241.
[41] Krishan Kumar. *The making of English national identity*, 241-2.
[42] Kasia Lech. "Claiming Their Voice", 216.
[43] Kasia Lech. "Claiming Their Voice", 218.

basis of skin-colour or ethnic origins, is often explicitly or implicitly depicted in terms of binary oppositions that have emerged in the context of colonial conquests. These oppositions, Leela Gandhi reveals, can be identified as recurrent stereotypes of the savage versus civilised, foreign versus native, black versus white, and are portrayed as fixed biological conditions.[44] Prasad explains that the perpetuation of these discriminatory stereotypes needs to be recognised as expressions of neocolonialism.[45] When inverting these ''prevailing hierarchies of race'', and thereby uncovering the ''overwhelming and lasting violence of colonisation'', Leela Gandhi claims that it is important to actively refuse the binary oppositions whereupon stereotypes are constructed.[46]

In order to properly acknowledge this ''imprint of the empire on the West'', Prasad claims, ethnocentric perspectives detected in socio-political discourse have to be challenged as well.[47] Ethnocentricity, in this context, incorporates a negative judgement of the customs, practices, beliefs, and especially languages of other cultures, based solely on one's own cultural background. Even though ethnocentricity does not include prejudicial treatments pertaining to physical features, its presence in the political arena often employs essentialism by introducing cultural features as unalterable, intrinsic qualities.[48]

1.2.2 Transculturation

According to Lech, when challenging ethnocentric discourse and racial stereotypes centred around the discourse of Brexit and immigration, what comes to light is ''the actual absence of migrants in the debate''.[49] In claiming their own perspectives, Lech claims that theatre can provide a suitable platform for them, as a means to expand the political imagination. Aligning the aims of postcolonialism and agonism, it can offer the people within the UK and Europe with ''opportunities to shape a multifaceted, multifocal, and pluralistic culture that reflects the diversity of individuals''.[50] The concept of transculturation, Lech asserts, plays an important role regarding the migrants' agencies in the process of invalidating ethnocentricity.[51] Transculturation, in this context, concerns the complex phenomenon of merging cultures that result in new cultural practices and experiences. To escape or ''broaden European geopolitical boundaries'', Lech claims, the mutual transculturation of both coloniser and colonised must be emphasised, resulting in the destabilisation of prevailing ethnic and racist stereotypical

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[44] Leela Gandhi. *Postcolonial theory*, 11, 81.
[45] Anshuman Prasad. "The Gaze of the Other", 10.
[46] Leela Gandhi. *Postcolonial theory*, 10, 81.
[47] Anshuman Prasad. "The Gaze of the Other", 10.
[48] Anshuman Prasad. "The Gaze of the Other", 10; Kasia Lech, "Claiming Their Voice", 223.
[49] Kasia Lech. "Claiming Their Voice", 216.
[50] Kasia Lech. "Claiming Their Voice", 217-8.
[51] Kasia Lech. "Claiming Their Voice", 228.

images.[52] As such, transculturation can be interpreted as the globalisation of cultures and history. In connection to this, Lech argues that ''there is an urgent need for cultural spaces that offer opportunities to contribute to, interact with, and find points of identification with hybrid identities and cultures''.[53] Foregrounding a hybrid identity on all social levels can aid in the deconstruction of the aforementioned binary oppositions pertaining to ethnicity and race. An important component of this hybridity, Lech notes, concerns the representation of spoken language, or ''new languages''.[54] By performing a mixture of languages and accents in relation to the actor's country of residence, theatre can effectuate the re-imagination of communities. Another approach to deconstructing binary oppositions, Lech adds, involves playing with pre-existing stereotypes. The representation of these stereotypes as ambiguous can facilitate the articulation of hybrid identities.[55] Lech points out that the laughter, which can result from these altered stereotypes, may activate ''a subversive potential'', since ''one of the social consequences of laughter is the creation of community''.[56] As a result from this shared understanding, ''a new imagination'' of identity and social relationships ''can cultivate a sense of solidarity through differences''.[57] Lastly, Lech points out that references to personal or collective memories that intertwine the past and the present can give rise to a transcultural experience. This may result in tensions between multiple collective identities, as cultures and histories intermingle, which fuels the imagination for a possible future society that celebrates the hybrid nature of identities.[58]

1.3 Methodology

Mouffe has pointed out that national identities which are formed outside the sphere of democratic politics tend to be problematic and antagonistic in nature. Considering theatre's agonistic discursive role in the production of new subjectivities, Mouffe introduces the disarticulation of the 'common sense' of pre-existing subjectivities, as well as fostering agonistic encounters as two very important steps in the transformation of antagonistic politics to agonistic politics. Expressions of nationalism, which are centred around essentialist identities, can perpetuate antagonism and prevent the realisation of agonistic debates. Unsettling or discarding nationalism's essentialist identities in dramatic productions can be seen as a way to disarticulate the 'common sense'. This can be effectuated by explicit or implicit

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[52] Kasia Lech. "Claiming Their Voice", 225-9.
[53] Kasia Lech. "Claiming Their Voice", 218.
[54] Kasia Lech. "Claiming Their Voice", 219.
[55] Kasia Lech. "Claiming Their Voice", 219, 223.
[56] Kasia Lech. "Claiming Their Voice", 223, 226.
[57] Kasia Lech. "Claiming Their Voice", 217, 226-30.
[58] Kasia Lech. "Claiming Their Voice", 229-30.

mentions of essentialism's origin in imperial nostalgia, or an imagined past, which can be conveyed through historical narratives including myths, legends and memories. Counteracting antagonism surrounding issues of ethnicity and race involves theatre's negation of discriminatory stereotypes and its binary oppositions, as well as challenging ethnocentric perspectives. In order to do so, displays of hybridity in stereotypes, languages and memories can serve as markers of transculturation, while providing alternative identities to the existing dominant political order. As passions and emotion lie at the origin of national identity formations and the production of new subjectivities, it is important to evaluate the theatrical representation of Mouffe's affective dimension in relation to the concepts of nationalism, ethnicity and race as well.

To acquire more insight in how drama mediates social-political divisions in the present-day United Kingdom, it is necessary to conduct a literary analysis to investigate the employment of these concepts in Mike Bartlett's *Albion*, Roy Williams's and Clint Dyer's *Death of England* and its sequel *Death of England: Delroy*. In chapter 2, various textual elements from the three plays are analysed, in order to evaluate how the plays explicitly or implicitly convey expressions of nationalism, and issues of race and ethnicity, as these lie at the basis of Brexit-related issues in the United Kingdom. Firstly, the three plays are examined for references to fictional or non-fictional historical narratives that reflect non-negotiable essentialist beliefs of nationalism. In addition, the essentialist beliefs are analysed to see if they are contested by events, characters and their relations within the plays. Secondly, discriminatory speech or actions, represented as racial or ethnic stereotypes, will be analysed to investigate in what ways issues of race and ethnicity are portrayed in the three plays. Also, the relationships within the plays are examined for possible binary oppositions which may counteract these stereotypes. Additionally, personal relations are analysed for ethnocentricity. Lastly, to illustrate the inner workings of transculturation in the hybridity of identity, the three plays are analysed for different types of language represented in the speech of characters, the instability of ambiguous stereotypes conveyed in personal relationships, and characters' personal or collective memories connecting the past and present.

2. Identity formation in British theatre

Written by Mike Bartlett and directed by Rupert Goold, *Albion* was first brought to the stage at Almeida Theatre in London in 2017. It was followed by many sold-out performances, a theatrical revival in 2020, and even received *The Telegraph*'s award for ''Play of the Year''.[59] As Paul Lewis and Michael Billington claim in their reviews of the play, *Albion*'s success can be connected to its acclaimed status as a state-of-the-nation play, reflecting Britain's divisions in terms of national identity.[60] While the play makes no explicit reference to Brexit, interpersonal relationships accompanied by expressions of grief can serve as allegorical indicators of these larger divisions. In an interview with the *Guardian*, Mike Bartlett himself highlights the intended purpose of *Albion*'s in-depth relations: "It's not an academic debate about the EU, it's absolutely fundamental to who people feel they are in the world. I felt it important to understand the emotional weight of it".[61] By not providing a very specific political context, he adds, *Albion*'s return to the stage in February 2020 allowed for a transformation and renewed relevance of the play. The killing of George Floyd, Bartlett mentions, ''has thrown definitions of nationhood and national identity into further dispute''. Bartlett also mentions the lockdown of COVID-19, claiming that the one thing it has most certainly effectuated is ''to magnify existing issues- of mental health, inequality, class, race, the value of the NHS''.[62]

Not only alluding to, but more explicitly referring to these two events of 2020 alongside the Referendum vote, are Roy Williams' and Clint Dyer's *Death of England* and *Death of England: Delroy*. While the former's opening took place on January 31 in 2020, the latter premiered approximately nine months later, on October 21, 2020. Both post-Brexit plays can be seen as autonomous narratives, as *Death of England* highlights the perspective of a white working-class British man, and *Death of England: Delroy* zooms in on the point of view of a black working-class British man. The two plays are one-man shows, which focus on familial and other personal relationships as other characters are voiced by the two respective protagonists. *Death of England*, Arifa Akbar argues, is ''punkish in its spirit and radical in its endeavour to dramatise white working-class experience. Perhaps all the more so because two

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[59] https://almeida.co.uk/whats-on/albion/3-feb-2020-29-feb-2020.
[60] Paul Lewis. ''Mike Bartlett's Albion-review of BBC live recording'', *One minute theatre reviews*, August 21, 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/oct/18/albion-review-mike-bartlett-almeida-london; Michael Billington, ''Albion review-Mike Bartlett captures nation's neurotic divisions, *The Guardian*, October 17, 2017. https://oneminutetheatrereviews.co.uk/review/albion-almeida/.
[61] Arifa Akbar. "Mike Bartlett on Albion, Brexit and Covid: 'national identity is critical to coming out of this'", *The Guardian*, August 11, 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2020/aug/11/mike-bartlett-albion-play-interview-brexit-covid-bbc.
[62] Arifa Akbar. "Mike Bartlett on Albion, Brexit and Covid: 'national identity is critical to coming out of this'", *The Guardian*, August 11, 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2020/aug/11/mike-bartlett-albion-play-interview-brexit-covid-bbc.

black British playwrights – Roy Williams and Clint Dyer – have written it''.[63] Death and the emotional process of mourning by white British people are explored in more detail to examine the larger state of the nation. In *Death of England: Delroy*, Dyer and Williams explain, they intend to transfer the black experience to the stage by giving black people a voice, and the dangers that go with it.[64] To better understand the socio-political divisions in the context of Brexit, both of Williams's and Dyer's plays can be seen as one since they complement each another.

In the following sections, the theoretical concepts of national identity, race and ethnicity are analysed in Bartlett's *Albion*, and Williams's and Dyer's *Death of England* and *Death of England: Delroy*. In order to better understand the context of the selected scenes in question, plot summaries of all three plays can be found in the appendix.

2.1 Nationalism in the divided UK

In this section, the ways in which national identities are represented in the plays are examined (subquestion 1). As described earlier, nationalism is one of the key concepts in theatre productions that engage with Brexit-related issues, which offer alternative modes of national identification outside of democratic politics. Essentialism, which is inherent to nationalism, represents a mode of thinking that differentiates between identities on basis of distinctive intrinsic qualities. This leads to antagonism, which, according to Mouffe, should be avoided in democratic politics.[65] Theatre's discursive role lies in enabling agonistic encounters, which can be done by discarding or unsettling the tenets of essentialism. Since the manifestation of essentialist beliefs within nationalism can be influenced by historical narratives, including myths, legends, memories and empire nostalgia, the representation of these references in the plays can serve as either confirmation or refutation of nationalist identities.

2.1.1 Historical narratives and empire nostalgia

In Bartlett's *Albion*, Audrey's character can be seen as the epitome of nationalism, as imagined historical accounts form the essentialist basis of her identity. The name of the play and its depicted garden refer back to the founding legends of England, as well as Arthurian legends.

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[63] Arifa Akbar. "Death of England review – Rafe Spall dazzles in punkish state-of-the-nation address", *The Guardian*, February 7, 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2020/feb/07/death-of-england-review-rafe-spall-national-theatre-dorfman.

[64] Clint Dyer and Roy Williams. (*Interview National Theatre*) October 20, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYeJ-qjHFY0.

[65] Chantal Mouffe. *Agonistics*, 3,133.

This already forms a connection between an imagined past and its continuing influence on the present. On several occasions throughout the play, Audrey idealises and recounts the exploits of World War I soldier Lawrence Weatherbury, mostly in relation to her plans for the garden. Weatherbury, like Audrey, was disliked in the neighbourhood, because he also would not let anyone beside his gardeners enter Albion. Audrey seeks to continue Weatherbury's tradition by labelling the garden as the model for all English ones, referring to ''the genius and the glory (…) What this country was built on''.[66] Interpreting the garden and its fences as a microcosmic representation of contemporary England in connection to the nostalgia and idealisation of its imperial past, Audrey can be said to represent a neocolonialist perspective. Midway through the play the garden is in full bloom, then progressively starts to overgrow and eventually withers and rots. This visual transformation can be interpreted as a critical dimension, displaying the the British socio-political climate at large. Being unable to maintain the garden at the end of the play, Audrey and her family are forced to move out of the house and its garden, by which *Albion* may comment on the incompatibility of nationalism and democratic politics.

Delving deeper into this analogy and Audrey's obsession with Weatherbury and Albion, the nationalist rhetoric of World War I is evoked by the assimilation of Audrey's son James to Weatherbury. James, who was killed by a bombing in Iraq, also died as a soldier and made, in Audrey's words, ''the ultimate sacrifice for England''.[67] Audrey scattered his ashes in the 'Red Garden' inside Albion, which draws attention to, as Tronicke rightly argues, the interconnectedness of Englishness and a mourned past, the personal and the political.[68] The idyllic and rustic countryside of England, featured prominently in nationalistic poetry of World War I, such as Rupert Brooke's ''The Soldier'', becomes the very site of Audrey's identification, as she declares: ''This is everything. Myself. My family. James. My past. My future. I don't want anything else but this piece of land''.[69] The essentialist basis underlying the glorification of Weatherbury and his garden is depicted more clearly when Audrey responds to her friend Katherine's question on what she is doing with her life: ''I'm sticking to a set of values. Holding the line. Or we'd have chaos. We'd lose what men died to protect. And if I'm the only one. If that means I'm on my own then so be it''.[70]

While these values seem to persevere through the constant invocation of historical narratives, the play can be said to undermine Audrey's nationalistic speech in her relationship with Anna, her almost daughter-in-law. When Anna asks for Audrey's personal motivation in the restoration of the garden, she cannot provide a substantial answer:

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[66] Mike Bartlett. *Albion*, London: Nick Hern Books, 2020, 99.
[67] Mike Bartlett. *Albion*, 43.
[68] Marlena Tronicke. "Imperial pasts", 666.
[69] Mike Bartlett. *Albion*, 123.
[70] Mike Bartlett. *Albion*, 105.

Anna ''So what are you going to do with it?''

Audrey ''Restore it.''

Anna ''All of it?''

Audrey ''In time.''

Anna ''Why?''

Audrey ''What?

      Well.

      It's important.''

Anna ''To who?''

Audrey ''Everyone. All of us.''[71]

The brevity of Audrey's response, seemingly devoid of passion, reveals the unquestioned nature of her own ideals, and, by extension, part of her national identity. In view of the protagonist's grief for James alongside mourning for the past empire, the role of historical references in a nationalist identity may in part lie in the simplification of complex emotional factors, which cannot be easily expressed in words. Even though Audrey's retellings of Weatherbury's history in connection to James can lend some weight to her motivation, opportunities to explain the relevance for upholding these values of the past in the here and now seem to be deflected. Anna, who can be seen as a threat to this preservation, is later on in the play asked by Audrey to leave Albion and the village entirely.[72] Accordingly, Anna's interrogation can be interpreted as a subtle disarticulation of Audrey's nationalist vision as the 'common sense'.

Another notable example of Audrey's attempt to revive the past involves her garden party for a few of her relatives and direct neighbours. This 1920s-themed gathering, involving an Agatha Christie-style murder mystery game, illustrates the generalisation of Audrey's nostalgia. Audrey, immediately after her arrival at the Oxfordshire country house, reminisces on her childhood memories of Albion, most likely situated in the 1970s.[73] Presenting these two distinct timelines as congruent points to the imaginative value of essentialist identities. Anna, acting as a foil to Audrey, underscores the atrocities of the era: ''The 1920s were awful. War across the world, women having to fight for the vote, racism, rape, murder, child abuse (…) - I'm just saying I have no idea what she's doing! Why she's trying to pretend this whole place hasn't moved on?''.[74] A sense of reality, as expressed in Anna's speech, stands in direct

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[71] Mike Bartlett. *Albion*, 18-9.
[72] Mike Bartlett. *Albion*. 84-5.
[73] Mike Bartlett. *Albion*, 14.
[74] Mike Bartlett. *Albion*, 61-2.

opposition to Audrey's nationalist imagination. Audrey's speech is portrayed as problematic, as she never directly responds to these comments made by Anna, leading to frustration, conflict and tensions between these two characters in particular.

While *Albion* mainly engages with English nationalism in an allegorical manner, displaying legends and war history as markers of essentialist identities, Williams's and Dyer's *Death of England* and *Death of England: Delroy* also depict nationalism through the use of allegory, but are at times more explicit in its representation. In both plays, Michael's father Alan, much like Audrey in *Albion*, can be seen as the embodiment of England and its nationalism. In *Death of England*, the setting of Alan's death is related to one of England's most popular cultural traditions: football. Michael refers to the semi-final game he watched with Alan in a pub while contemplating on the latter's words from before the Brexit referendum: ''we're going to get our country back, immigrants out, all of that (…) Nationalism…Brexit and then came the World Cup''.[75] By bringing up Brexit, nationalism and football in this manner, Michael explicitly establishes a connection between politics, identity, and collective and personal emotions, through which the game can be explained as a metaphor for the current state of the British nation. While recollecting the game between England and Croatia, Michael brings to light how Alan's ideals can be reflected by the success of the team: ''he was desperate for some English glory. Not his own glory, not something that he had earned himself…worked for himself…made himself…proxy glory. The kind where all you have to do is shout a bit and you can claim you did it, type of glory. He wanted it, he needed it. Nationalism… (…) he wanted to feel better than the rest, more powerful, more dominant…like the old days…''.[76] The representation of English glory as rooted in 'the old days' may generate memories of its football victories from decades past, as well as imperial nostalgia. By considering the implied longing for colonial prowess, Alan's Englishness can be said to rely on historical memories which portray the 'real' English as invariably triumphant, steadfast and superior.

Preceding Alan's death in the pub, he is suspicious of Michael's vote for Remain and the turn of the match to the disadvantage of England. His passing can then be said to affect the socio-political and cultural domain as well. However, no radical changes in the relationships between the characters of the play are conveyed in the following scenes, seeing as the suddenness of Alan's death, or nationalism, has a lingering effect on Michael and the other members of his family. When Michael explains to his mother and sister Carly what happened to Alan, his mother's response conveys no expressions of grief. Instead, it becomes apparent

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[75] Roy Williams and Clint Dyer. *Death of England*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020, 11-2.
[76] Roy Williams and Clint Dyer. *Death of England*, 12.

that she shares her husband's nationalist ideals. When Michael, in fear of her reaction, declares to look after her and the family, she replies: ''What do you believe in Michael? Tell me? What do you stand for, like your dad stood for, what do you believe in?''[77] Leaving no room for Michael's uncertainty, this fragment, by analogy, calls to attention the chronological distinction between decolonisation as both a physical and mental process. Michael himself does undermine Alan's Englishness at several points. For instance, in a drunken state during an emotional outburst at his father's funeral, he states: ''English players are so rubbish, we've been rubbish since 1966''.[78] The consequent conflicts between him, his family and Delroy illustrate that a complete negation of Alan's values can complicate personal relationships and lead to hostilities. Finally, the hold of nationalism is again exemplified when Michael scatters his father's ashes on a football field, which can be interpreted as a visual representation of its lasting impact.

Death of England: Delroy does not focus as much on nationalism as it does on issues of race and ethnicity. It is, however, in one of his soliloquys that Delroy seems to connect the consequences of racial discrimination to nationalism. After his arrest by the police on basis of racial profiling, he arrives at the hospital where he is sent away by Carly, who was giving birth to their daughter. When Michael meets Delroy in the hallway, a few weeks after their physical encounter, Delroy explains to Michael why he voted for 'leave'. In a state of emotional distress, he presents the English as follows: ''Wid yer 'God Save the Queen', wrap yourselves around the Union Jack, we survived the Blitz, hands up if you won the war, tek it up the arse from the US of A, Pukka Pies bullshit! (…) I said it, how I felt, not what I knew but how I felt…not what I thought but what I felt…''.[79] Images of imperial nostalgia in direct relation to history of World War II are evoked and refuted by Delroy. Even though his excess of grief voices unmediated thoughts, his stereotypical presentation of the English can disarticulate nationalist identities and pave the way for a new subjectivity.

2.2 Ethnic and racial British relationships

This section analyses how differences in ethnicity and race are portrayed in relation to socio-political divisions in the UK (subquestion 2). As previously described, it is important to draw attention to the traces of colonial crimes and racism in contemporary British society, as this unawareness lies at the basis of the continuation of racial and ethnic discrimination. The manifestation of discrimination in stereotypes can be contested by deconstructing and actively excluding binary oppositions. Another concept that conveys the lasting impact of colonial

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[77] Roy Williams and Clint Dyer. *Death of England*, 19.
[78] Roy Williams and Clint Dyer. *Death of England*, 23.
[79] Roy Williams and Clint Dyer. *Death of England: Delroy*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020, 32-3.

encounters is ethnocentricity, which involves the prejudicial, negative judgement of other cultures' practices, customs and beliefs, based on one's own cultural background. As a means to tackle displays of ethnocentricity as well as racial stereotypes, the plays' depictions of transculturation in the hybridity of identity can shed light on the possible function of theatre as an agonistic intervention. Different types of language, ambiguous stereotypes and collective memories connecting the past to the present can all serve as markers of hybrid identities.

2.2.1 Racial and ethnic discrimination

While *Albion*'s main focus does not lie on explicit discriminatory stereotypes, Tronicke justly highlights ''Audrey's casually racist suspicion of everyone and everything that is not English''.[80] Her control and glorification of the garden and its history receive an extra meaningful layer in connection to imperial nostalgia when analysing its name. Albion, which translates to 'white land', places Audrey's undertakings more directly in the context of neocolonialism. Promoting whiteness as the norm between the borders of the garden, Audrey can be seen to perpetuate the exclusivity that reverberates in current discourses on immigration and race: ''This is our little piece of the world, and we're allowed to do with it, exactly as we like''.[81] This sentiment can be seen as the microcosmic representation of Britain's or England's position concerning the legislative influence of the European Union in Brussels. Another implicit representation of white supremacy can be detected in Audrey's obsession with the Red Garden, a place of tribute to the soldiers of World War I, and the part of Albion where James's ashes were scattered. ''It's about blood'', Audrey explains, which can be said to strengthen a symbolic connection between the garden and its Englishness, and genetic purity.

In contrast to *Albion*, both *Death of England* plays incorporate many instances of overt discrimination. Michael, in *Death of England*, reflects on a memory from his childhood, involving one of the many confrontations between his father and Delroy's mother, Denise. After Michael and Delroy had pulled down a sign at their school and were seen in the park by Denise, she takes Michael to his father's stall and relates an earlier conversation: ''your little boy called me a black bitch. To mi Face!''.[82] The language between them is problematic, as the rest of their verbal exchange is filled with other hostile categorisations pertaining to differences in race. The earliest sign of systemic discrimination can be identified in this scene as well:

Denise   ''My boy will get the blame for this. You know that, my boy will get the blame.''

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[80] Marlena Tronicke. "Imperial pasts", 665.
[81] Mike Bartlett. *Albion*, 92.
[82] Roy Williams and Clint Dyer. *Death of England*, 8.

''And she was right, I knew it, Dad knew it, we all knew it.''[83]

This acknowledgement of the pervasive institutional discrimination within British society can also be interpreted as a foreboding of Delroy's later arrest and prosecution in *Death of England: Delroy*. When Delroy is suppressed by the force of the police officers, his words remain unanswered when he attempts to explain the circumstances in his haste to take the Overground. In an emotional response to this case of racial profiling and violence, Delroy relates: ''finally I was just a number, another black man who got fucked by the police (...) an animal in a fucking cage (...) I picked up the paper-thin, spunk-riddled mattress and leaned in against the wall and I pounded it, pounded the shit out of it. *CUNT! CUNT! CUNT! CUNT! CUNT! CUNT!*''.[84] Denise, in response to Delroy's account of the arrest on his temporary release, states he should have remained calm and kind. Instead, she argues, he gave them the stereotypical black man: ''another mouthy black''.[85] While in custody, Delroy himself points towards the incongruity of this stereotype, as he stresses his profession and social life in accordance with the British laws and customs: ''I'm a bailiff, I take people's tings away from them, but it's legal, it's a job (...) I pay my tax. I abide by the law''.[86] In both plays, the position or social status of Delroy can be identified in the context of the 'foreigner', 'migrant' or 'other', even though he is born in England.

2.2.2 Ethnocentricity

Ethnocentric views in *Albion* are presented to the audience via Audrey's interactions with her university friend Katherine, who is also an internationally acclaimed writer. When the famous novelist first enters Albion, she immediately establishes her transcultural, cosmopolitan knowledge and values: ''Just come back from South Africa, and I found myself walking through the hills, searching for something (...) But you have to keep looking don't you? Only way you'll progress''.[87] The products of these transcultural experiences are the stories and characters in her books. Audrey, however, is initially unaware of Katherine's status as an author, and also criticises her works. As Katherine tries to explain her vision of a well-functioning society, she is interrupted by Audrey:

Katherine ''There should be tax policies which encourage distribution of wealth.

Audrey ''Yes, alright-''

Katherine ''Everyone should have good quality education, health care, housing-''

[83] Roy Williams and Clint Dyer. *Death of England*, 10.
[84] Roy Williams and Clint Dyer. *Death of England: Delroy*, 19.
[85] Roy Williams and Clint Dyer. *Death of England: Delroy*, 21.
[86] Roy Williams and Clint Dyer. *Death of England: Delroy*, 19.
[87] Mike Bartlett. *Albion*, 27.

Audry ''You're naive Katherine (...)''

Katherine ''You don't know anyone who earns less than the average salary-''

Audrey ''Can we stop please?''[88]

By rejecting Katherine's cosmopolitanism in favour of nationalism, Audrey can be said to display ethnocentricity, as she makes judgements on basis of her middle-class socio-cultural background. Audrey's aversion towards these cosmopolitan values becomes apparent when Katherine points out the reasons for Audrey's disregard of their friendship: ''-because I don't have children like one is supposed to. Don't live in one place, I don't like men. I don't live a life that you understand or approve of, so you just put me in a generally 'eccentric' place and move on''.[89] By revealing Audrey's motives and inattentiveness, Katherine also deconstructs the protagonist's ethnocentric beliefs.

While *Death of England*'s characters do not express ethnocentric beliefs explicitly, *Death of England: Delroy* clearly depicts values of ethnocentricity in Denise's disapproval of Carly, Michael's sister and Delroy's girlfriend. Delroy describes his mother's viewpoint as follows: ''she just thought…after all the years of mistreatment, disrespect, all the centuries of colonialism, that I should wanna date someone who really understood that''.[90] Even though Carly's difference in skin colour as well as the connection to her nationalist father Alan form the background of this comment, Denise provides arguments for her case by referring to Jamaican cultural practices:

Denise ''*Her?*''

Delroy ''She said, sipping on her *Wrey & Nephew* for fuel.
Yes, Mum!''

Denise ''But she can't cook jerk chicken (...)
Ackee & saltfish? Fried dumpling? Plantain? My Jamaican patties?'' [91]

By drinking the traditional Jamaican rum and emphasising Carly's inability to cook traditional Jamaican dishes, Denise projects her British-Jamaican cultural identity onto Delroy. However, he has never been to Jamaica and clearly identifies himself as British: ''I'm a black man. Of West Indian descent, claiming some kinda Britishness...on the account that I was born here (...) I'm a product of this country!''.[92] Ethnocentricity, in this sense, gives rise to the idea that

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[88] Mike Bartlett, *Albion*, 65-6.
[89] Mike Bartlett, *Albion*, 102.
[90] Roy Williams and Clint Dyer. *Death of England: Delroy*, 8.
[91] Roy Williams and Clint Dyer. *Death of England: Delroy*, 9.
[92] Roy Williams and Clint Dyer. *Death of England*, 5.

identity is unalterable and shared by relatives, as Denise articulates, but which Delroy himself negates in his speech.

2.2.3 Transculturation

In order to repudiate discriminatory racial or ethnic stereotypes as well as displays of ethnocentricity, *Albion* can be said to portray transculturation through the relationship between Audrey's daughter Zara and Katherine. Zara, who feels trapped in rural Oxfordshire, longs to return to the cosmopolitan London. Her relationship with Audrey is troublesome, as her mother misinterprets her desires and thoughts. When Zara meets Katherine, however, she feels inspired to become a writer as well.[93] After a while, Zara and Katherine become lovers, and Zara chooses to live with Katherine in London, much to the chagrin of Audrey. Zara's literary engagements allow her to explore intercultural relations, which makes her more reluctant to return to Albion. Katherine, who later visits the country house and its garden on Audrey's birthday, comes without Zara, and explains ''She doesn't like it here. She says the people are small-minded''.[94] In *Albion* then, the language portrayed in fiction can implicitly function as a marker of hybrid identities, as it fosters the extension of Zara's cultural knowledge, especially in comparison with Audrey's ethnocentric worldview. Even though Audrey lays the groundwork for the break-up between Zara and Katherine, transculturation did become possible as such relationships were temporarily explored, enabling the construction of new subjectivities.

An additional transcultural element can be located near *Albion*'s ending, namely in the depiction of Audrey's grandson and Anna's son Stanley. As Anna's departure from the stage with a baby carrier is followed by Stanley's future appearance, the play seems to reflect on the possible future of a new generation:

Matthew   "Mrs Walters! Tell them to stop.

There's a rose. It survived the war.

We have to keep it!"

"*Darkness. Soil. A battlefield*

From the darkness appears STANLEY,

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[93] Mike Bartlett, *Albion*, 27-9.
[94] Mike Bartlett, *Albion*, 94.

Dressed in slightly futuristic body armour, holding a gun.

Audrey turns and looks at him." [95]

Matthew, Audrey's old gardener, points towards the survival of a rose in Albion, which may be a reference to the continuation of Audrey's mode of nationalist identification founded in empire nostalgia. Since Stanley appears in a futuristic war uniform, a memory combining multiple temporalities is brought to the stage. *Albion*, by analogy, thus points to the consequences of contemporary British power relations and nationalist discourse, which inevitably lead to irreconcilable differences and violence between ethnic groups. The hybridity of identity conveyed through this image can be interpreted as a foreboding by which the spectators of the play may re-assess their own socio-political relationships.

In both *Death of England* and its sequel, the hybridity portrayed in language can engender transculturation on several different levels. By featuring different varieties of English in the dramatic monologues of the protagonists, a new cultural form of representation is constructed. For instance, when Michael speaks of Denise in *Death of England*, he describes her speaking ''in that half cockney half patwa way'' and also mimics the accent himself in the recollection of her speech.[96] Both Michael and Delroy as narrators of all the other characters in their respective plays convey this hybridity through speech, and the shift in focalisation itself, from Michael to Delroy, produces pluralistic perspectives. Regarding these different perspectives, it is important to note that these are mainly formed in the imaginations of the audience, since the actions of the play are not visualised but described in words.

Another important component of transculturation in the depiction of language involves literature. Rizwan Murad, the Indian restaurant owner in *Death of England*, reveals to Michael his friendship with his father Alan. Being led into a room that belonged to Alan, Michael discovers the hidden multicultural interest of his father: ''I never saw my dad read a book in his life, yet there they were. Loads of them, history books, history of Britain (…) Salman Rushdie, *Satanic Verses*. *Crime & Punishment*, Owen what? Owen fucking Jones/chavs. The demonstration of the working classes…Akala!!! What the fuck is this about?'' [97]. In a voice recording left to Michael, Alan distances himself from his overt racism, showing to his son a different, previously unknown side to his identity: "I don't think immigrants are to blame''.[98]

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[95] Mike Bartlett. *Albion*, 123.
[96] Roy Williams and Clint Dyer. *Death of England*, 7.
[97] Roy Williams and Clint Dyer. *Death of England*, 32.
[98] Roy Williams and Clint Dyer. *Death of England*, 36.

Like in *Albion*, literature can be understood as a means to effectuate new social relationships and transculturation.

To disarticulate racial stereotypes more specifically with components of transculturation, the relationship between Carly and Delroy has to be examined. Michael explains in *Death of England* how Carly told ''one bad joke after another about him being 'coloured''', but he also mentions that ''Carly was full of shit though. She had the serious melt for Delroy from the moment she clapped eyes, can't get enough of him, all that racist lark was a front cos she knows Dad would lose his nut''.[99] After Alan's death, however, her language is still filled with racial stereotypes. When Delroy arrives late at the hospital, Carly, in a state of rage declares ''You're the same as all of dem. Grow up, Delroy! Just grow the fuck up will yer…you're not in South Africa, bruv, you're in Hackney''.[100] She sends Delroy away from the room, after which he reflects on his encounter with the police. In his address to the audience, Delroy makes it clear that he cannot escape ''the racist picture of a black man'' he has now become.[101] During his imprisonment, Delroy speaks to Carly again via a video-chat, when she says: ''I ain't gunna say how much I miss the way my skin tingles all over whenever you touch me. Whenever you hold me in your arms. Whenever I think of our weekends at together in Blackpool (…) no I ain't saying any of that''.[102] Carly's praeteritio depicts him as a desired person, adding ambiguity to the preceding stereotypical depiction of Delroy. As a result, the stereotype can be disarticulated, indicating the hybrid nature of identity.

Finally, similar to *Albion*, *Death of England: Delroy* incorporates a child at the end of the story, which can be interpreted as an instance of transculturation. While no future image of Delroy's daughter is brought to the stage, Delroy reflects on her future when he mentions to see her on a computer screen with Carly. She shares facial features with Alan, whom he remembers for his racist remarks. However, Delroy now also describes Alan as a father, who took both Michael and him to football. He then examines their relationship, and decides to take a different stance in the future: ''And there he is on the face of my child we've knitted…woven together for ever… that is a fact. An irrefutable cast-iron fact. My history was our history and I had to own it…without anger or hurt, I have to forgive''.[103] The connection between past and future memories establishes a hybridity which allows for a new mode of identification, as well as tolerance, which can be re-imagined by the play's audience.

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[99] Roy Williams and Clint Dyer. *Death of England*, 11.
[100] Roy Williams and Clint Dyer. *Death of England: Delroy*, 23.
[101] Roy Williams and Clint Dyer. *Death of England: Delroy*, 24.
[102] Roy Williams and Clint Dyer. *Death of England: Delroy*, 39.
[103] Roy Williams and Clint Dyer. *Death of England: Delroy*, 43.

3. Conclusion

In this thesis, Mike Bartlett's *Albion*, and Roy Williams's and Clint Dyer's *Death of England* and *Death of England: Delroy* have been analysed for their engagement with socio-political divisions in the post-Referendum United Kingdom. To answer the research question, concepts pertaining to national identity, race and ethnicity, described within postcolonial theory and political philosophy, have been applied to the three plays. This examination has led to several conclusions regarding the intersection of identity, socio-political divisions and Mouffe's agonistic role of theatre.

Firstly, the ways in which national identities are represented in the three plays have been investigated. *Albion*'s protagonist Audrey Walters is featured as the embodiment of English nationalism, while in both of the *Death of England* plays, Alan Fletcher, father of Michael, takes on this allegorical role. The relationships between these and other characters in the plays display conflicts on basis of essentialism, and can be interpreted as antagonistic. Tensions in contemporary British society are metaphorically depicted in the microcosm of England as the garden in *Albion*, while the connection to extra-theatrical politics in *Death of England* is made explicitly by referring to the Brexit vote, nationalism and football. To counteract Alan's and Audrey's non-negotiable essentialist values, historical references, which explicitly or implicitly represent imperial nostalgia, are rejected by characters acting as foils to them. By refuting this ideological dimension, the unawareness of the Empire's colonial crimes in the current British population surfaces, which is adduced by Tronicke as the origin of Brexit-related issues. The withering garden in *Albion*, as well as the failures of English national football in *Death of England*, can serve as an illustration for nationalism's failed mode of politics. In doing so, all plays incorporate emotions of grief and personal loss, which are aligned with nostalgia towards an imagined former British Empire. One aspect of drama's discursive role, as described by Mouffe, lies in the verbal and physical expression of emotions, which also plays an important role in the formation of national identity. Since nationalism cannot provide a democratic outlet for these emotions, the display of excessive grief indicates the need for an alternative, agonistic political model.

Subsequently, the portrayal of differences in ethnicity and race has been investigated in relation to British socio-political divisions. Whereas Audrey in *Albion* symbolically foregrounds whiteness in her management of the garden, *Death of England* and *Death of England: Delroy* display overt expressions of racial discrimination towards Delroy in personal relations as well as on an institutional level. Ethnocentricity is also featured in the plays,

foregrounding multiple ethnic perspectives. To counteract these ethnocentric values as well as racial stereotypes by means of transculturation, *Death of England* and *Albion* engage with language in literature, while *Death of England: Delroy* employs different variations of English and display a shift in focalisation from Michael to Delroy. Through this, the audience receives an in-depth perspective, forming new subjectivities in their own minds. Within the context of immigration, which both Tronicke and Lech underscore as one of the most contentious topics in post-Referendum UK, the image of the 'migrant' as 'foreigner' is evoked in Delroy's position in society. The ambiguity of this image in *Death of England: Delroy* undermines this foreign and racist stereotype by revealing its binary oppositions, which, as Leela Gandhi states, aids in the inversion of existing hierarchies of race. This inversion can be compared to the disarticulation of a 'common sense', which Mouffe introduces as an important step in the articulation of alternative identities to a pre-existing order. By the formation of hybrid identities regarding these stereotypes, Delroy, in accordance with Lech's theory, claims his own identity and conveys the black experience that Roy Williams and Clint Dyer wished to communicate to the audience. Both the endings of *Albion* and *Death of England: Delroy* focus on transtemporal memories, which both incite the audience's imagination with regard to future socio-political relations in contemporary Britain.

Zooming out on theatre's discursive role in fostering agonistic encounters, as represented in these three post-Referendum plays, theatre as an institution provides a platform for different conflicting viewpoints with regard to race, ethnicity and different modes of identification within the construction of national identities. Especially in the context of Brexit, bringing to the fore the British black perspective in immediate connection to white British perspectives, drama engages with transcultural, pluralist perspectives. By voicing the many different people, either as a one-man-show actor or several performing actors, an overall agonistic environment is established during the performance, allowing for 'a non-conflictual ensemble' between political participants. Accordingly, the discourse environment, in agreement with Mouffe's theory, can be altered. As the political is brought closer to an emotional and personal level, through the depiction of familial experiences, the affective side to political dialogue can be examined more easily: it reveals what lies at the base of national identity formations in the multicultural British society. Within theatre, Mouffe's agonism is enabled at the imaginative level, by which a link between Leela Gandhi's decolonisation as a mental process can be established. As such, drama cannot immediately effectuate agonism at the political level, but may generate a desire for systematic different structures in response to

the wide-spread visions invoked by empire nostalgia.

Even though this research only comprises three Brexit dramas, it may provide insight in the influence of theatrical performances on socio-political divisions and questions surrounding collective and personal identities, and can still be seen as a small contribution to the academic debate on Brexit-related issues in theatre. Possible future research may explore the Welsh, Irish and Scottish regional identities as well, seeing as English nationalism was the focus of the three plays in this thesis. This can lead to a better conception of Britishness at large in response to the current state of the nation. In addition, investigating the generic qualities of theatre, by focusing on its form and techniques in relation to a play's content, can add to the academic knowledge on the intersection of political theatre and Brexit.

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Appendix

1) Plot of *Albion*

Bartlett's *Albion* is centred around the character of a middle-class woman, Audrey Walters, her family, neighbours and staff members. Not long after their son James died as a soldier in Iraq, Audrey and her husband Paul sell their former house in Muswell Hill in London. They purchase a country house in Oxfordshire, locally famous for its garden named Albion. The garden's origin can be traced back to Lawrence Weatherbury, a veteran of World War I, who set up a memorial for the fallen soldiers there, and was later buried there himself. Fully preoccupied with restoring the ill-maintained garden to its original state, Audrey, unlike the previous owner, does not allow it to function as the public site for parties, weddings and the village fête, which results in tensions between her and the neighbouring villagers. In addition, Audrey disregards familial and other personal relationships, notably those between her and her daughter Zara, her university friend and famous novelist Katherine Sanchez, and her dead son James' partner Anna. When Zara and Katherine start a lesbian relationship, to the great dismay of Audrey, they leave the country house. After some time, due to the influence of Audrey, Katherine ends her relationship with Zara, who moves back to the countryside with Audrey and Paul. Running parallel in this drama is the influence of Audrey on her almost daughter-in-law Anna. Audrey claims the possessions of her son James for herself, including his ashes. Anna stays in the country house to be near James, especially when Audrey has scattered the ashes in the 'Red Garden' inside Albion, and she herself turns out to be pregnant with James's child. The play ends with Audrey and Paul being forced to sell Albion and the house, due to financial circumstances.

2) Plot of *Death of England*

Williams's and Dyer's *Death of England* features protagonist Michael Fletcher, a white working-class man, who voices the other characters in his story. After the death of his father Alan, Michael inherits his business and sells flowers at a stall. When thinking about a sign for his business, Michael reminisces on his friend Delroy, whom he has known since his childhood. During the many encounters between his father Alan and Delroy's mother Denise, Alan expresses many racist remarks. Delroy's mother was born, like Delroy himself, in England, but she has African-Caribbean roots. Since the Referendum, Michael recalls, Alan had become more outspoken about his nationalism, saying things like 'taking back the country' and 'immigrants out'. The influence of Alan on Michael becomes evident throughout the play, as

can be inferred from Michael's lie to his father about his vote for 'leave' in the Referendum. Alan dies of a heart attack during an England football match, while sitting next to Michael. After this event, Michael is confronted with conflicted feelings concerning his father and his own identity. At Alan's funeral, Michael, in a state of drunkenness, is spiteful towards his memory of him. During a speech, he confronts the funeral attendees, consisting of his family and friends, with England's nationalistic character and hypocrisy. In particular, he addresses Delroy, pointing out he will never be truly English. Delroy, in response to this, fights Michael. Subsequently, Rizwan Murad, an Asian restaurant owner, approaches Michael at the funeral and invites him to a room above the restaurant that belonged to his father. There, Michael discovers another side to father's character, in which racism seems to be less important.

3) Plot of *Death of England: Delroy*

Like *Death of England*, *Death of England: Delroy* is a one-man show, but now the focalisation has shifted to the character of Michael's best friend Delroy, a British black working-class man. The story mainly takes place during the COVID-19 lockdown, and starts off with Delroy being drunk. He relates his conversation with a man, who asks after his profession as a bailiff. It becomes clear that Delroy has been convicted for a crime he did not commit, and therefore wears a tag. While his girlfriend Carly Fletcher, Michael's sister, is in labour, Delroy speeds towards the hospital and intends to take the Overground. At the tube station, the police take him into custody for four hours, on basis of racial profiling. After his temporary release, Delroy arrives at the hospital, where Carly turns him out of the room in a state of anger before he has the chance to explain his delay. In court, Delroy defends himself while swearing, pointing out the injustice towards racial minorities and the misrepresentation of black people. He specifically reflects on the Windrush scandal affecting his mother, Denise. The last scene of the play shows Delroy found guilty by the court, not knowing when he is able to leave prison. After a video call with Carly and his daughter, Delroy eventually realises that, by being a father now, he has to forgive injustice and vows to fight for his child.