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National Identity in Patrick Hamilton's
The Slaves of Solitude

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Abstract: The aim of the essay is to argue that Patrick Hamilton's *The Slaves of Solitude* could be seen as conscious criticism of the prevalent notions of “British national identity” in the 1940s. Based on the premise that national identity is a constructed phenomenon subject to negotiation, the conceptual uses of national identity in cultural senses are analysed. Using relevant non-literary critical material, the essay argues that Hamilton uses the main protagonist of the novel, in relation to the other characters, to illustrate and criticise aspects of national identity in 1940s England. By doing this the essay broadens the discussion of Hamilton to be regarded as a social commentator depicting social concepts of identity.

Keywords: National identity, nationality, collective identity, Englishness, German-ness, differentiation, negotiation, constructed phenomenon

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1. Introduction

Since Patrick Hamilton's death in 1962, not much has been written about his authorship, but in most of the existing research there is an initial discussion why an author is remembered or not. In the introduction to the 2006 publication of Hamilton's *The Slaves of Solitude* (1947), Doris Lessing acknowledges this by stating that “[h]ow wildly an author's reputation may fluctuate can be shown no more dramatically than by the story of Patrick Hamilton” (vii). In recent years there has been a revival of the fiction of Hamilton, and opinions of his authorship differ. In “Confessions of a Heavy-drinking Marxist: Addiction in the work of Patrick Hamilton”, Brian McKenna turns on Andrew Sinclair, who in his book about London's literary life in the 1940s, *War Like a Wasp: The Lost Decade of the 'Forties* (1989), writes of “the restless and seedy novels of alcoholic genius, Patrick Hamilton” (4-5). McKenna claims that “talented as he was, Patrick Hamilton was surely never a genius”, a line of thought seemingly widely recognised by literary critics (Vice, Campbell, Armstrong 231).

Perhaps not as significant as his contemporaries George Orwell, Graham Greene or Christopher Isherwood, Hamilton managed to leave a striking testimony of the life in, and around, London. In “The Saloon Bar Society: Patrick Hamilton's Fiction in the 1930s”, P. J. Widdowson suggests that Hamilton, “at his best, does for pre-war England what Isherwood's *Berlin* [*The Berlin Stories* (1945)], does for Germany. Hamilton, like Isherwood, can, at times, reveal the meaning of ostensibly trivial lives” (81). Whereas the aforementioned writers openly deal with the notion of national identity, Hamilton's fiction deals with this concept in a more discreet manner. Recurring throughout his authorship is the theme of how individuals construct their identity in relation to the concept of national identity in times of great uncertainty. This is clearly visible in *The Slaves of Solitude*, where the pending Second World War forces the characters to consistently reflect on their national identity. When one regards the conceptual use of national identity as a construct subject to negotiation, *The Slaves of Solitude* becomes an interesting addition to the discussion of national identity in England during the 1940s. However, arguably, the most prominent issue discernible in the work of Hamilton is the consumption of alcohol and the social milieu of the institutionalised Public House. Widdowson's “The Saloon Bar Society”, as well as McKenna's “Confessions of a Heavy-drinking Marxist”, contextualise the alcoholism and addiction described. In *The Problem with Pleasure: Modernism and its Discontents* (2013), Laura Frost claims that “Hamilton's characters' pride in living with a superior kind of misery is continuous with modernism's demand that its readers embrace difficulty and discernment” (163), which is coextensive with the work of

other writers at the time. However, Frost continues: “the vehemence of their outsider position entails a rejection of both 'elite' and mass sensory pleasure” (163), indicating that the alcoholism and self-destructive behaviour of the characters in Hamilton's fiction were consciously made to illustrate and critique social conventions.

The dialogue in the novels is often of trivial nature, making the characters seemingly ordinary, but Hamilton still portrays the hardships and desires of marginalised groups of his contemporary society. When describing the “shabby, depressed world” of Hamilton's novels Widdowson concludes that “little of any overt significance happens here” (82). However, Widdowson continues, “Hamilton is concerned with a particular milieu, which begins to take on a mythic status all of its own. And his manner of presenting it is imbued with strong elements of caricature” (82), a clear indication that the works aim to make a succinct comment on the conventional social behaviour of the time. *The Slaves of Solitude* is set during the war and depicts the social milieu of that time. Hamilton portrays this time, and indeed the characters, in a stereotypical and representative manner. Thus, Hamilton's depiction results in a critique of the perceived conception of national identity.

There is a controversy among literary critics as to whether Hamilton himself can be seen as a representative of the marginalised groups often portrayed in his fiction. His personal alcoholism is a well known fact, and as an outspoken Marxist, as is his discontent with the existing social order. In the introduction to Hamilton's utopian novel *Impromptu in Moribundia* (1939), Widdowson writes that the works of Hamilton: “as with so many others of his generation, locate what they see as the inner stagnation and decay of the English middle class between the wars and its responsibility for the condition of contemporary society” (viii). McKenna is critical of the sentiment produced by Michael Holroyd in the 1987 introduction to Hamilton's *Twenty Thousand Streets under the Sky* (1935), where Hamilton is portrayed as a writer concerned with the “defeated classes” (viii). McKenna claims that Hamilton indeed “wrote best about the social milieu of the middle-class southern England, in the voice of a bourgeois Marxist, omnisciently narrating from a socially, politically, and textually privileged position” (Vice, Campbell, Armstrong 232).

Irrespective of whether Holroyd or McKenna are right in their assertions, it is clear that Hamilton criticises the social milieu prevalent in England at the time. This notion is perhaps most striking in *The Slaves of Solitude*, as a central theme of the novel is how the war affects and alters the everyday life of the characters portrayed, and indeed, their relation to each other. The novel is set in 1943, in and around the Rosamund Tea Rooms, a lodging-house in Thames Lockdon. Thames Lockdon is a fictional village, roughly an hour outside London, where the protagonist Miss Roach has sought refuge from the bombings of the city. The somewhat satirical depiction of ordinary

people in a time of great uncertainty brought about by the war is striking, and, in relation to a prosperous past, raises questions of social and cultural identity.

This essay will be concerned with the depiction of national identity in *The Slaves of Solitude* with a specific focus on the protagonist Miss Roach. Miss Roach is interesting in relation to the other characters since it is through her the actions and lives of the others are analysed. Miss Roach, herself representing a stereotypical aspect of 'Britishness' in being, as Holroyd in the introduction to the novel puts it, "the shy, modest, decent, over-sensitive, thirty-nine-year-old spinster" (xxi), is the tool by which Hamilton criticises different aspects of English national identity. On the basis that national identity is a constructed phenomenon subject to negotiation, the essay will argue that Patrick Hamilton's *The Slaves of Solitude* could be seen as criticism of the prevalent notions of "British national identity" in the 1940s, through the way in which the main protagonist is portrayed in relation to the other characters of the novel.

In order to explore "British national identity", it is necessary to discuss the cultural, as well as historical, significations of the concept "national identity". To accomplish this, the essay will in the first chapter aim to historicise the perceived concept of "British national identity" during the 1940s, and by that attempt to deconstruct the cultural concept. The essay will be concerned with literary texts, as well as relevant non-literary critical material which will be used to discern how national identity is manifested and where in the novel national identity is portrayed and criticised. This will result in a discussion of whether these examples can be seen as representative of prevalent notions of social conduct at the time, or not. In other words, is Hamilton's depiction of national identity in *The Slaves of Solitude* compliant with notions of national identity, or should it be regarded as opposed to the general notion of identity in the 1940s? The essay will examine the conversations and interactions between the characters in the lodging house to illustrate where national identity is depicted. This will enable the abstract cultural concept in *The Slaves of Solitude* to be historicised and analysed accordingly. The second chapter of the essay will relate British national identity in the 1940s to the novel in greater detail by examining how Hamilton uses the main characters, especially Miss Roach, to convey criticism of national identity throughout the book. The essay will argue and provide examples of how Hamilton uses the novel, and in particular, the main protagonist Miss Roach's function in relation to the other characters, to illustrate and criticise aspects of cultural national identity prevalent in 1940s England.

The basis of the discussion is Anderson's view that the nation is an imagined community, and national identity, therefore, a constructed phenomenon. Richard Handler's notion of three discernible instances of the conceptual use of national identity is used to illustrate Hamilton's criticism of the construct. The aim of the essay is not solely to account for the national identity of

the time, but to argue that *The Slaves of Solitude* is a conscious critique of the prevalent sense of national identity. By doing this, the essay will contribute to the revival of Hamilton's authorship and stress the importance of his work as a comment on social structures. Since most existing research of Hamilton is concerned with the portrayal of alcoholism and addiction, this essay will broaden the discussion of Hamilton to be regarded as a critic depicting social concepts of identity.

2. The Concept of National Identity

2.1 National Identity in a Cultural Sense

The concept of national identity originates from the notion of a nation. British historian Hugh Seton-Watson, in *Nations and States* (1977), concludes that “no 'scientific' definition of the nation can be devised; yet the phenomenon has existed and exists” (5). In *Imagined Communities* (1992), Benedict Anderson suggests that “nationality, or, as one might prefer to put it in the view of that word's multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind” (4). Therefore, in order to explore the concept of “British national identity” or “Englishness”, one must first and foremost clarify what is understood by the term “national identity” in a cultural sense.

In “Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship”, John R. Gillis argues that “[n]ational identities are, like everything historical, constructed and reconstructed; and, it is our responsibility to decode them in order to discover the relationships they create and sustain” (4), thus agreeing with Anderson's proclamation of the nation as constructed and imagined community. Gillis even goes further and stresses the importance of analysing and scrutinising the underlining implications of such an identification. Whereas Anderson talks of a constructed imagined community and treats it as a single defined *entity*, Gillis problematises that assumption by suggesting a continuum in the construction of national identity. This remark is supported by Richard Handler in his essay “Is Identity Useful as a Cross-cultural Concept?”, where he observes that “cultures, and social groups – taken at any level of analysis (local, regional, national, transnational) – are now conceptualised in terms of ongoing processes of 'construction' and 'negotiation” (27). “Negotiation” is perhaps a better word to use than “reconstruction” since it presupposes a continually ongoing struggle between often seemingly incompatible aspects of social behaviour

used to illustrate specific national identities. This constantly ongoing struggle is inherently both internal and external in its nature.

When ascribing certain aspects of conduct or behaviour to a social group we are participating in the negotiation of the identity we are referring to. As Gillis observes, it can be problematic to treat “identity” as a fact “with an existence outside language”, instead a recognition that “identities and memories are not things we think *about*, but things we think *with*”, and that “every assertion of identity involves a choice that affects not only ourselves but others” (5), should be made. Furthermore, referring to the external aspect of identity negotiation Gillis writes: “Every identity, notes Eric Leed, implies and at the same time masks a particular relationship” (4)¹. This enables a relationship between the social group referred to and ourselves, a relationship that consequently, in an indirect manner, is affecting and indeed sustaining relationships between other social groups. Gillis analyses this phenomenon when stressing the importance of objects in identity formation. The discourse of national identity has a tendency of implying that, as Gillis puts it, if the French no longer wore berets “the French would cease to be French; and, if they ceased to be punctual, Germans would no longer be Germans” (4). In other words, the process of identification is contingent on the existence of other identities from which to differentiate. The disarticulation is not necessarily of a rivalling sort, as Anderson remarks when stating that “no nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind” (*Imagined Communities* 7), but it is all the same vital in the construction of national identity. In *The Slaves of Solitude*, disarticulation of identities becomes particularly evident when the German immigrant Vicki Kugelmann is introduced. Despite Miss Roach's initial friendliness towards her, their relationship soon takes a dramatic turn for the worse. The German woman Vicki's use of seemingly “English” characteristics and behaviours provokes resentment ultimately bordering on loathing from Miss Roach. The initial identification falls short of Miss Roach's dichotomisation of their identities. As early as after the first dining at the Rosamund Tea Rooms after Vicki moved in, Miss Roach is contemplating her initial admiration for Vicki:

If this woman (thought Miss Roach, as she sat on the wickerchair and seemed placidly to smoke the last cigarette of the day with her friend) goes on talking about 'beans' and 'gents': if she makes any further mention of 'handling' people or taking people 'in hand': if she combs her hair over any more people's photographs, or flops her body on to any more people's, or, as she was now doing, flicks her cigarette-ash over any more people's bedside tables, then she, Miss Roach, was at some time in the distant future, or even in the very immediate present, going to start to scream or going to start to hit. (131)

1 In “Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship” (published in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*) Gillis refers to remarks made by Eric Leed at Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis in April 1991.

Miss Roach distinguishes her “unadulterated” Englishness from the constructed “accommodated” Englishness of Vicki. After a catastrophic night out with the American soldier Lieutenant Pike and Vicki, Miss Roach elaborates her discontent with Vicki's characteristics, even turning the positive aspects of Vicki she initially approved of into weaknesses. Lying in her bed, she ponders, “[d]id not that original character represent one of the most famous and readily identifiable aspects of the German character – or at least the German fascist character?” (176). Miss Roach has concluded that, in Vicki, even the traits she usually considers to be indicative of a sympathetic character, are essentially fascist. She then continues in a bantering manner “... the exquisite conventional Teutonic change of demeanour! The lightening Teutonic arrogance!” (177). The line of thought goes as far as the revelation that “[i]n short, was not Vicki a Nazi through and through?” (178). Furthermore, Miss Roach herself provides an alternative behaviour to the (in Miss Roach's view) excessive behaviour of Vicki as she “... showed nothing of this, save for a faintly absent-minded look in an otherwise cheerful and cordial countenance, and their cigarettes at last came to an end” (131). In his article “Identity, Heritage, and History”, David Lowenthal argues that: “we confront one another armoured in identities whose likenesses we ignore or disown and whose differences we distort or invent to emphasise our own superior worth” (41). In effect, this process is exactly what Hamilton illustrates as the relationship between Miss Roach and Vicki alters.

Reflecting on the conceptual use of “identity”, Handler discerns three instances of human experience where the concept is referred to. The first instance refers to individuals; everyone has one or multiple personal identities by which they regard themselves. The second instance where a conceptual use of “identity” is present is regarding “collective groups of human beings” (28). In order to differentiate a group from others a collective identity is created and sustained. A group needs to concretise how and by what signifiers they differ from other groups. This is essentially what constitutes the *raison d'être* of the group. The third instance brought up by Handler, where identity is used in a conceptual manner, is in the relationship between the first two instances. He elaborates this as the ways “in which human persons are imagined to assimilate elements of collective identities into their unique personal identities” (28). Interestingly, Miss Roach is not satisfied in only loathing Vicki, but projects her loathing on the “German-ness” of Vicki, and by doing this, increasingly identifies with the “Englishness” Vicki, as a German foreigner living in England, so desperately tries to imitate. This feature can perhaps be explained by Lowenthal as he concludes: “to serve as a collective symbol heritage must be widely accepted by insiders, yet inaccessible to outsiders” (49). Heritage, in the case of Miss Roach and Vicki, consists of the idioms and syntax the latter has adopted. As Miss Roach looks back at the dreaded outing with Lieutenant Pike, Vicki, and her, the first object of her resentment is “[n]ot her [that is, Vicki's] behaviour, so

much as her vocabulary!” (171), as Vicki has consistently used typical English idioms and expressions throughout the night. Referring to Miss Roach as “the English Miss” (169), clearly with a negative sentiment, after using typically English idioms and expressions all night, aggravates Miss Roach further. It forces her to reflect on the implications of the accusation: “Was she (she must translate these odious epithets into dignified English) insular, too correct, puritanical, inhibited; one who by her lack of vitality, or lack of grace, spoiled the carefree pleasures of others?” (172). In effect, she is contemplating whether the negative epithets above essentially are English. Thus, to some extent the adoption by Vicki is bereaving Miss Roach an aspect of her personal identification with England. This can be seen as a clear example of Gillis's analysis that the process of identity formation is dependent on objects of identification. The object of identification is in this case the use of English idioms Miss Roach believes she has an innate right to, as being native English – a right Vicki should not pretend to have. As Lowenthal writes “[n]ational identity requires both having a heritage and thinking it is unique” (47). Once the object of identification no longer has a differentiating potential, it loses its function. However, in order to discuss the conceptual use of national identity in *The Slaves of Solitude*, it is important to account for the general notion of national identity prevalent at the time. The novel was written during the 1940s, and it is therefore necessary to discuss the general views of English national identity during the war in order to make a legitimate comment on Hamilton's illustration of the concept.

2.2 British National Identity or Englishness in the 1940s

In *Englishness: Twentieth Century Popular Culture and the Forming of English Identity* (2009), Simon Featherstone asserts that “George Orwell is probably the most influential twentieth-century theorist of Englishness,” the reason for this being that “Orwell offers an explanation of England that mixes populism, patriotism and radicalism in a convincing voice and a supple syntax” (14). Orwell offers valuable reasoning concerning national identity in England during the 1940s. The essays “The Lion and The Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius”, published during the blitz of London in 1941, and “The English People”, written in 1944 but not published until 1947, are particularly interesting in relation to *The Slaves of Solitude*, since the novel was written during roughly the same time (1943-46). Both of the articles provide vivid accounts of the notion of national identity during the time, and, as Featherstone remarks, have been used extensively in reference to this discussion. However, it is important to note that the articles produced by Orwell should not be seen as purely historical accounts. Orwell's writing must be seen in light of his political ambition. In “The English People”, he consciously renegotiates the identity of “the English people” in order to shift the broader national consciousness to fit more with his subjective

meaning of national identity. As this is by no means a trait unique to Orwell, Gillis' notion that every assertion or discussion of identity involves a renegotiation of that identity, as previously mentioned, is once again important to stress (Gillis 5).

In *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Britain 1939-1945* (2003), Sonya O. Rose argues that Orwell's depiction of the Englishmen to be an “ordinary, pub-going, and flower-loving people” is indeed used in order to contrast the British and the Germans and that they, as such, “were not innately drawn to nationalism or to participating in affairs of state” (4). Indeed, Orwell does differentiate by stating that “all the culture that is most truly native [English] centres round things which even when they are communal are not official” (“The Lion and the Unicorn” 294). He elaborates by stating that “the English people are not only indifferent to fine points of doctrine, but are remarkably ignorant politically” (“The English People” 621). Political indifference as a normative sentiment is vividly illustrated by the way Miss Roach is repeatedly tormented by Mr. Thwaites on the grounds of her habit of reading literary political weeklies, a habit that “in the eyes of Mr. Thwaites, was in itself a diseased and obscurely Russian thing to do” (*The Slaves of Solitude* 18).

Even though Hamilton, in many ways, portrays Miss Roach as a point of reference against which traits of English national identity are criticised, he does not contradict the patriotic picture of the people uniting and “smiling through”. In “The English People”, Orwell writes that “[d]uring the bad period of 1940 it became clear that in Britain national solidarity is stronger than class antagonism” and argues that “if it were really true that 'the proletariat has no country', 1940 was the time for him to show it. It was exactly then [...] that class feeling slipped into the background, only reappearing when the immediate danger had passed” (613). However, Orwell comes to the conclusion that “the stolid behaviour of the British town populations under the bombing was partly due to the existence of the national 'persona' – that is, to their preconceived idea of themselves” (614). This assertion is consistent with modern views of the construction of national identity and relates back to Handler's observation of the conceptual use of 'identity' in the relationship between the group and the individual. Rose acknowledges that “the mythical notion that the British of all classes remained stalwart in the face of nightly bombings was actively being created as it contributed to the redefinition of the nation” (3). Thus, during the 1940s, there was in England a conscious process of negotiation in regards to the collective identity of the nation, the same process to which writers like Orwell contributed.

3. *The Slaves of Solitude* and National Identity as a Construct

3.1 The Depiction of Collective National Identity in the Novel

As the previous discussion concludes, the concept of national identity should be seen as a constructed phenomenon continuously subject to negotiation. This negotiation is essentially held on three levels; where the first one is on a purely individual level, the second one on a collective level, and the third one consists of the relationship between the individual and collective level (Handler 28). In *The Slaves of Solitude*, when it comes to national identity, the first level of identification is remarkably uncomplicated. Miss Roach is born in England, therefore she identifies herself as English. Mr Thwaites is also an Englishman, which is why he considers himself to be English. Lieutenant Pike is an American soldier, and identifies himself as American. The only slightly problematising aspect of national identity on the individual level of identification is presented in Vicki. She is a German woman, for the last decade or so living in England. However, as the narrative of the novel consistently follows Miss Roach, the only instance where a negative conflict of identification of Vicki's national self-perception is suggested is when Miss Roach needs to fabricate an aspect of differentiation in order to distance herself from Vicki. Thus, in her mind, Miss Roach creates a conflict between Vicki's native German-ness and her adopted Englishness. It is important to stress that this conflict indeed is constructed by Miss Roach as a means of differentiation, and not as a self-evident fact. Nowhere in the novel does Vicki express an explicit confirmation of Miss Roach's notion. Thus, this is a clear example of Miss Roach as the primary focaliser of the novel.

The second instance or level of identification is on a collective scale. In terms of national identity this refers to the imagined rivalry and incompatibility of different national identities (Lowenthal 41). The characteristics considered to be English are not the same as German characteristics; therefore, Englishness is considered to be innately different from German-ness. As with the previous level of identification, the novel does not really complicate the collective level other than in the case of Miss Roach's personal conception of Vicki's identity. In other words, nowhere, apart from in the case of Vicki and Miss Roach, is anyone of the other characters challenged in their identification. Lieutenant Pike is consistently referred to as the American (or indeed, Miss Roach's American), and none of the native English characters are ever openly questioned in their self-perceptions. Throughout the novel, although criticised, "Englishness" is the normative state of identity, and it is only questioned in the internal contemplations of Miss Roach in

relation to the “German-ness” of Vicki. Hence, compared to the third level of identification, the second level is, for the characters, astonishingly unproblematic in the novel.

However, while there is no discussion of whether the native English characters are English, there is much controversy concerning general behaviour in relation to national identity. Whereas the characters are not questioned, their specific actions and behaviours are continuously subject to scrutiny. The third instance where identity is used in a conceptual manner is in the relationship between the individual identity and the collective identity of a group. Regarding national identity, the third instance or level relates to the constructed and imagined individual version of a broader collective identity and the personal, purely individual identity on the first conceptual level. In *The Slaves of Solitude*, this instance or level is consistently focalised through Miss Roach, in her function as the reflector of the novel. Apart from a few instances – for example, the famous first paragraph where London is likened to a terrible monster breathing in and out – elaborate descriptions of environments are unusual. When they do occur, they function as examples of internal focalisation, as they consistently illustrate Miss Roach's apprehensions. This is another example of Miss Roach's position as the focaliser of the narrative world. The internal focalisation of Miss Roach is only broken in the two chapters following the Rosamund Tea House tenant Mr. Prest. Even though it is a popular notion that he represents a fictionalised version of Hamilton himself, a notion supported by Holroyd in the introduction to the 1999 edition of the book (xxi), the chapters following him does not in any way elaborate the story. The story in the novel would, if those chapters were removed, still be the same. Miss Roach's position as the internal focaliser and reflector in the novel is thus undeniable.

The third instance of conceptual use of identity in *The Slaves of Solitude* is exemplified by the previously used quotation from the novel where Mr Thwaites regards the act of reading literary political weeklies as being “in itself a diseased and obscurely Russian thing to do” (18). This results in Mr Thwaites's projecting his discontent with the Russian war-effort onto Miss Roach, “[h]e had therefore come practically to identify Russia with Miss Roach; and in the same way Russia gnawed at him, he gnawed at Miss Roach” (18). He then continues to refer to the Russians as “*your* friends” when addressing Miss Roach. She, in turn, remarks that she has no more sympathy for the Russians than anybody else. Mrs. Barratt comes to Miss Roach's aid saying that “[y]ou must admit they're putting up a wonderful fight, Mr. Thwaites” (19), claiming that Mr. Thwaites does not appreciate what the Russians do for the English. Here, an interesting change in Mr. Thwaites's syntax does occur. He begins with the “ghastly I-with-the-third-person business” (20), by Miss Roach referred to as a Thwaitesian remark. “‘I Keeps my Counsel’, said Mr. Thwaites, in his slow treacly voice. ‘Like the Wise Old Owl, I Sits and Keeps my Counsel.’” (21). A Thwaitesian remark is when Mr.

Thwaites changes his syntax to a seemingly more traditional or a consciously mocking one. He does this when talking about matters he feels strongly of with people he believes himself to supersede culturally and intellectually. Since none of the other participants in the conversation says anything more, the conversation turns into a loud monologue, where Mr. Thwaites unsuccessfully imitates a Scotsman, ending:

'Oh, well', said Mr Thwaites a little later, briskly returning to his own race and language, and with a note of challenge, 'we'll all be equal soon, no doubt.'

This, clearly, was another stab at the Russians. The Russians, in Mr. Thwaites' embittered vision, were undoubtedly perceived as being 'all equal', and so if the Germans went on retreating westward (and if Miss Roach went on approving of it and doing nothing about it) before long we should, all of us, be 'all equal'.
(22-23)

The change in Mr. Thwaites's syntax indicates an awareness that the remarks presented by both Mrs. Barratt and Miss Roach are not compatible with his general view on how “the English people” as a collective should relate to the war-effort. His traditional view of England is not coextensive with the Soviet society, and therefore, every expression of sympathy towards the Russian war-effort is an “attack” on his notion of national identity. Rose writes in *Which People's War?*, that together with the continually ongoing protests of social and economic disadvantages for the working class the “images of the war effort in the Soviet Union were deployed as a somewhat veiled way of criticising Britain” (44).² By subtly mentioning Russia and portraying Mr. Thwaites's discontent with the Russian war-effort, Hamilton does exactly what Rose acknowledges. Rose continues, “[p]raising Russian effort and accomplishment served as a way to implicitly critique British society while remaining loyal to the war effort” (45). If we accept the previously mentioned claim that every assertion of identity affects not only ourselves but others (Gillis 5), then Mr. Thwaites's reaction can be seen in a different light. Miss Roach and Mrs. Barratt do not explicitly praise the Soviet Union, but at the same time they acknowledge that England and Russia stand on the same side against Germany. As these ideas are expressed by his fellow Englishmen, the discussion inevitably redefines his notion of the collective national identity that is “Englishness”, which provokes him immensely. Interestingly, after the (in Miss Roach's view) poor imitation of a Scottish accent, the nature of the “Thwaitesian” remarks change into a distinctly traditional linguistic manner.

Throughout the novel, this version of the “Thwaitesian” remarks is more common. A few

2 Interestingly, Rose's historical account of the working-class movement during the war stands in vast contrast to the claim Orwell makes in his article “The English People”, stating, “[i]t was exactly then [in 1940] [...] that class feeling slipped into the background, only reappearing when the immediate danger had passed” (613). Viewing the writing of Orwell in light of his political aim (in this case the portrayal of a supposed unity of the British people), and not as an historical account of the time, is important.

days later, again in the dining room of the Rosamund Tea Rooms, Mr. Thwaites is engaged in conversation with fellow lodgers Miss Steele and Miss Roach. Referring to the publicly known fact that Miss Roach occasionally has coffee with the German woman Vicki Mr. Thwaites says: “She [Miss Roach] goeth, perchance, unto the coffee-house,’ said Mr. Thwaites, ‘there to partake of the noxious brown fluid with her continental friends?’” (87). Miss Roach clearly knows where Mr. Thwaites is going with the remark, but is provoked by the elderly man to continue the conversation in this direction:

‘How do you mean?’ she said, ‘my continental friends?’

‘Why,’ said Mr. Thwaites, ‘dost thou not forgather, of a Saturday morning, with a certain dame of Teutonic origin?’

‘Oh,’ said Miss Roach, ‘you mean Vicki Kugelmann. Yes – I do have coffee with her.’

‘Is that her name?’ said Mr. Thwaites, and here Miss Steele, at her table alone, cut in.

‘Yes. I’ve seen you with her,’ she said. ‘Is it true that she’s coming here?’

‘What?’ said Mr. Thwaites, his amazement knocking him back into plain English. (87)

The fabricated “traditional” syntax gives the impression that Mr. Thwaites claims to represent the traditional “proper” English way of regarding the war-effort, and as Miss Roach does not concur with this notion; she, in turn, is highly provoked by the “Thwaitesian” remarks. The act of inviting Vicki to stay at the lodging-house is an act of such magnitude, incompatible with Mr. Thwaites general notion of how to act in an English manner and support the war-effort, it provokes him back into his natural syntax. Thus, this is an example of where *The Slaves of Solitude* is concerned with the third and last instance of the conceptual use of identity, problematising the relationship between individual national identity and collective national identity.

3.2 National Identity in Relation to Miss Roach

As previously mentioned, throughout *The Slaves of Solitude*, every action or event in the novel is analysed and described through the eyes and mind of Miss Roach. Hence, the use of Miss Roach as the focaliser enables the author to judge the actions of the other characters through her. As the lodging-house gathers a vast variety of people, all in a stereotypical manner, representing some aspect of perceived national identity, the other characters are subject to scrutiny by the reflective nature of Miss Roach. As she consistently has trouble making up her mind and, adding meaning to seemingly harmless comments, Hamilton paints a complex picture of “Englishness” through the reflections of Miss Roach. Once again, the sentiment put forth by Handler, that the conceptualised use of identity is subject to an “ongoing process of ‘construction’ and ‘negotiation’” (27), is valid. The ambivalence in regards to other people Miss Roach experiences, together with her unhealthy low self-esteem, makes her constant endeavours to place people socially a central theme in the

novel. This ambivalence allows Hamilton to investigate different aspects of British national identity without necessarily breaking the established narrative structure.

The negotiation and internal struggle of Miss Roach is perhaps most vividly exemplified by the first real-time encounter between Miss Roach and Vicki described in the novel. They agree to meet for drinks at the closest Public House, the River Sun, and Miss Roach initially regards the evening in an anticipatory manner. While waiting for the late Vicki, she contemplates that going out with a German did not disturb her. “On the contrary, she took a certain defiant and perhaps slightly childish pleasure in her enlightenment in regard to this matter – an attitude which probably had in fact assisted in bringing about the friendship” (62-63). However, after a while the initial amity is rendered by Miss Roach's disapproval of Vicki's comments regarding men and her seductive manners. “Her [Miss Roach's] feeling was one of shame as much as shock – shame at the awful complacency of 'Slow but sure' and at the atrocious narcissistic use of 'your Vicki'” (73). This being the turning point in Miss Roach's assessment of Vicki, every following utterance is subject to negative scrutiny. “Miss Roach now had a definite feeling that this new Vicki Kugelmann was not quite the one she had bargained for, and that the friendship was not likely to develop on quite the lines she had hoped for” (74). The reasons for Miss Roach to initiate a friendship with Vicki are not because she is particularly fond of her, or for that matter, feels sorry for her, but are of a purely selfish nature. Her personal identification as a modern English woman is dependent on a differentiation from Mr. Thwaites, who represents a traditional Englishness. Therefore, she embraces the opportunity to engage with a German, purely in order to live up to her own identity as “enlightened”. Yet, as she realises how little they have in common, she questions herself. The ambivalence becomes evident as her reasoning leads to the following sentiment concerning Vicki:

And why shouldn't she be attractive to men (if she was)? And why shouldn't men take her out (if they did)? And why shouldn't she talk in a rather absurd, old-fashioned, 'foreign', kittenish way about men? Was she (Miss Roach) becoming spinsterish, possessive, jealous, jaundiced, or what? (78)

The realisation of her unjust judgement of Vicki brings her to question her own actions and ultimately her identity as the “enlightened” Englishwoman who invites a German woman for drinks. Hence, a negotiation of her own personality and self-perception is initiated. Interestingly, Miss Roach immediately reflects on her identity in relation to nationality. She deems the way Vicki speaks of men to be “foreign”, which is indicative of Miss Roach's inability to regard Vicki as anything other than through her nationality, her “German-ness”. When Miss Roach in her ambivalence asserts Vicki's positive traits, they are good because they are foreign in contrast to the traditional manners of Mr. Thwaites. However, when asserting the same traits to be of negative

nature, they are so due to the “German-ness” of them. Thus, instead of contemplating the personalities of Vicki and herself, Miss Roach, in effect, contemplates the nationality of Vicki and herself resulting in a renegotiation of the national identity of both persons. At the end of the evening Miss Roach contemplates:

She was, she saw, always having thoughts for which she rebuked herself. It then flashed across her mind that the thoughts for which she rebuked herself seldom turned out to be other than shrewd and fruitful thoughts: and she rebuked herself for this as well. (79)

Miss Roach's consistent reassessment of people does in turn lead to a renegotiation of her own national identity. Even though the narrative of the novel is sympathetic towards Miss Roach, Hamilton does not in any sense glorify her. As Widdowson writes in “The Saloon Bar Society”, the way Hamilton presents the milieu he is concerned with is “imbued with strong elements of caricature” (82). Still, the characters of the novel are not vulgar or satirical distorted versions of England in the 1940s, but, as Widdowson continues, “[o]ne is persuaded that the scenes and characters have solid and credible existence” (83). This is true of the depiction of Miss Roach as well. Initially, she is described as follows:

She was only thirty-nine, but she might have been taken for forty-five. She had given up 'hope' years ago. She had never actually had any 'hope'. Like so many of her kind – the hopeless – she was too amiable and tried too hard in company and conversation, and so sometimes gave an air, untrue to her character, of being genteel. (8)

Miss Roach is described as a stereotypical spinster, formerly a Headmistress, but now working in publishing, and pictured as terribly lonely. The fact that she is “trying too hard in company and conversation” consistently allows for Mr. Thwaites to torment her, with the sole outcome that Miss Roach becomes more and more insecure. When reflecting over her Christian name, she refers to it as “the Enid which she so detested and discouraged people from using” (173). David Lodge acknowledges, in his review of *The Slaves of Solitude*, “Boarding-house blues” (2007), published online in *The Guardian*, that throughout the book Miss Roach is only referred to by her first name by others once, and then in the diminutive form “Eeny”. Apart from that instance, she is always referred to as “Miss Roach”. In his article, Lodge states that he personally cannot think of another English novel “whose heroine and principal centre of consciousness is referred to in such a formal style”. This illustrates that it is strange for the narrator to establish the formal distance given by the formal nature of the name, while, at the same time, describing the character with intimacy. Lodge rightly assesses this as confirmation that Hamilton “observes his heroine with respect and sympathy, but not without irony”, and claims that the formal nature of the name “emphasises the heroine's

celibate spinsterhood, the 'solitude' of the title”.

Miss Roach is, at the start of the novel, described by how she walks from the London train to the Rosamund Tea Rooms: “She usually chose the way by the river, however, for the river, being open and flowing and made of water, without her knowing it gave her a sense of briefly escaping, of getting a 'breather’” (3). This is interesting in regards to the analogy at the very beginning of the novel, where London is likened to breathing monster, forcing its inhabitants in and out of the town. Here, on the other hand, Miss Roach experiences a brief feeling of freedom during her involuntary commute journeys. The contrast between the dark allegory and Miss Roach's subconscious relief is striking, and is grounded in the futility of the choice she is forced to make. The only time in the novel when Miss Roach has the opportunity to make a decision without having to make an assessment of the social implications of her decision that would force her to renegotiate her self-perceived identity is when she contemplates whether she will walk by the river or not. The short walk by the river in Thames Lockdon gives her a satisfaction “as one would when walking along a front on a seaside holiday – and this in spite of the fact that she could not see the river” (3). Thus, as Hamilton depicts Miss Roach as a stereotypical character easily recognised in the England of the 1940s, he also, by her constant insecurity and ambivalence in regards to her own national identity and the collective national identity, uses her as canvas on which to criticise other aspects of British national identity. The aspects of identity and “Englishness” illustrated by the actions of Mr. Thwaites and Vicki are set in relation to Miss Roach, and it is through her actions that Hamilton reveals his criticism.

As previously mentioned, Vicki Kugelmann is a German woman living in England presumably for about fifteen years. She is initially described as a victim, subject to the unpopularity Germany suffers on account of the war. Miss Roach feels solidarity with her, and the two women end up having coffee on Saturday mornings. However, as stated earlier, the amity on Miss Roach's behalf is purely selfish and consequently based on her need to differentiate herself both from the other people at the Rosamund Tea Rooms, but also generally from the suburban circumstances of Thames Lockdon. In Vicki, Miss Roach sees a continental woman of her own age discriminated against because of her origins. As Miss Roach identifies as an “enlightened” and cultivated Englishwoman, this identification partly derives from her association with the cultural life of London through her work in publishing. Thus, having coffee with a German agrees with her self-perception. As it turns out, Vicki has no cultural ambitions. She is tied to Thames Lockdon through her work as the vet's secretary, and as Lawrence Phillips calls attention to in *London Narratives: Post-War Fiction and the City* (2006), Vicki, as well as Mr. Thwaites, who enjoys his retirement, both “resent the perceived importance of Miss Roach's employment in London and her connection

to 'high' culture" (30). Contrary to Miss Roach's initial hopes and aspirations, Vicki's move into the lodging-house does not give her an ally against the psychological terror of Mr. Thwaites, but rather provides him with one. Phillips states that "[o]nce she moves into the Tea Rooms, Vicki consciously sets herself in competition with Miss Roach, vying for the attentions of the lieutenant and siding with Mr. Thwaites in his persecution" (24). In effect, and contrary to the belief of Miss Roach, Vicki is not the alien in Thames Lockdon. She has accepted the circumstances of her suburban life, whereas Miss Roach has no aspiration of doing so.

In "The Lion and the Unicorn", Orwell writes that "England is the most class-ridden country under the sun. It is a land of snobbery and privilege" (303). This could be hard to argue with, and gives an explanation to why Mr. Thwaites and Vicki are hostile to the "snobbish" employment Miss Roach obtains. Even though she herself does not represent the upper-class, she consistently values "high" culture in London in favour of the "lower" life that is lived in Thames Lockdon. Orwell continues by claiming that "in any calculation about it [that is, England] one has got to take into account its emotional unity, the tendency of nearly all its inhabitants to feel alike and act together in moments of supreme crisis" (303). Even though the novel is set during the Blitz of London, the supposed "supreme crisis" is not visible for the most part of the book. For the characters at the Rosamund Tea Rooms, the war is an abstract entity, although affecting them greatly in terms of food shortage and "Black-out" regulations. However, effects of the war are not substantial enough to prevent them from experiencing an every-day life. Thus, as the time when Vicki is introduced in the lodging-house cannot be described as a time of "supreme crisis", there is no need of unity within the lodging-house. This alters when the crisis does occur. Mr. Thwaites's accident on the stairs following the row between him, Miss Roach, and Vicki, provokes Vicki's subtle accusation that Miss Roach was to be blamed for the accident. This causes the others at the lodging-house to unite against Vicki. The result is an alienation of Vicki and her immediate eviction from the lodging-house, as well as some sort of understanding between Miss Roach and Mr. Thwaites. During the drive in the ambulance to the hospital in Reading after Mr. Thwaites' (soon to be) fatal fall on the stairs, Miss Roach tries to comfort him: "[a]nd he let her hold his hand, looking into her eyes, and still groaning. But in a more peaceful and resigned way, she thought, or liked to think" (287). Later in the hospital, as Mr. Thwaites realises that he is about to die, he mentions Miss Roach. "'Dame Roach?' he said, in a hopeful tone, 'Dame Roach?' And then, as if at last satisfied, ' Dame Roach!' These, actually, were his last words." (291). That his last words are "Thwaitesian" remarks, but finally positive in regards to Miss Roach, illustrates the final understanding between the two, in contrast to Vicki. Hence, Orwell's thesis on unity based on nationality in times of supreme crisis appears to be accurate here. In the novel *Hamilton* seems to be suggesting that the crisis affecting

people seldom is of an abstract kind. When the crisis affects people in a direct manner the collective national identity converges with the individual perception of national identity, resulting in a strong sense of unity.

4. Conclusion

On the basis that national identity is a constructed phenomenon subject to negotiation, this essay has attempted to illustrate how Patrick Hamilton uses the main protagonist in *The Slaves of Solitude* in order to portray and criticise the prevalent notions of national identity in England during the 1940s. As Richard Handler states, the negotiation of identity is essentially held on three levels: a purely individual, a collective, and in the relationship between the individual and collective level (28). In the novel, “Englishness” is the normative identity, the characters are not questioned in their identity on the first level of the conceptual use, but rather on the third level. Hamilton continuously problematises the characters' relationship between their own perception of individual national identity and the collective national identity.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the continuous process of renegotiation of national identity in *The Slaves of Solitude*, is only discernible in Miss Roach's internal contemplations and ambivalence towards Vicki and her “German-ness”. Miss Roach distinguishes her “unadulterated” Englishness from the constructed “accommodated” Englishness Vicki represents, and by doing so, increasingly identifies with the “Englishness” Vicki, as a German foreigner living in England, tries to imitate. Hence, as the process of identification is contingent on the existence of other identities from which to differentiate, Hamilton illustrates this by the way the relationship between Miss Roach and Vicki alters. As Gillis notes, the process of identification is dependent on an object of identification (4). In the case of Miss Roach and Vicki, this object of identification consists of the use of English idioms Miss Roach believes she has an innate right to, as being a native English – a right Vicki should not pretend to have. Lowenthal's sentiment that national identity must both consist of a defined heritage and a belief in the uniqueness of that heritage provides a clear explanation for the resentment Miss Roach feels towards Vicki. Once the object of identification no longer has a differentiating potential, it loses its function, which places Miss Roach in a state of constant internal renegotiation of her national identity in relation to the

collective national identity she presupposes to personify. Miss Roach's constant reassessment of people does in turn lead to a renegotiation of her own national identity. The aspects of identity and "Englishness" Hamilton illustrates in Vicki, and indeed Mr. Thwaites, are always put in relation to Miss Roach, and it is through her actions that Hamilton reveals his criticism.

Even though Hamilton portrays Miss Roach as a point of reference against which traits of English national identity are criticised, every aspect of British national identity portrayed in the novel is not subject to negative scrutiny. He does not contradict the patriotic picture painted by writers like George Orwell, of the people uniting and "smiling through" during the hard times of the Second World War. Hamilton concurs with Orwell's sentiment of unity based on nationality in times of supreme crisis, but illustrates that a crisis affecting people in this manner seldom is of an abstract kind. He suggests that the crisis is rather a very near and intimate one. When the crisis affects people in a direct manner, the collective national identity converges with the individual perception of national identity, resulting in a strong sense of unity. In *The Slaves of Solitude*, that crisis does not consist in the war, but in the fatal consequences of Mr. Thwaites' dramatic fall down the stairs in the Rosamund Tea House.

The aim of the essay was not solely to account for the national identity in the 1940s, but to illustrate that *The Slaves of Solitude* could be read as a conscious criticism of the prevalent sense of national identity. By relating the novel to the modern discourse regarding national identity as a construct subject to negotiation, the essay broadens the discussion of Patrick Hamilton to be regarded as a social critic, depicting social concepts of identity relevant today. When discussing the writings of Patrick Hamilton, it is inevitable to mention the neglect his work has suffered, still there has in recent years been a revival of his authorship. It would be interesting to further study why Hamilton's writing is deemed more and more relevant.

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