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**ENGLISH CULTURAL IDENTITY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE INSIDER AND
OUTSIDER PHOTOGRAPHER**

by

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the degree of MA by Research**

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Abstract

Photography is one of the creative mediums that can be used to communicate ideas between the photographer and the viewer. As much as it will sound as a cliché but most of the times a photograph can be more informative than words. As Pardo and Parr (2016: 10) suggest, “Photography has an unparalleled capacity to reflect and communicate ideas, visually and directly, about the world in which we live.” Thus, photography becomes an instrument which creates a connection between practitioner and the subject allowing to express artist’s thoughts in a creative visual way to share across the public viewer. Photography is one of the visual art mediums, which can be used to draw communities’ attention on the specific subject matter, which in the case of this thesis is English cultural identity.

By using underlying understanding of identity and cultural identity, this paper will examine English cultural identity and representations of this within the photographic practice of Simon Roberts, Martin Parr and Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen. Attention will be drawn towards Simon Roberts’s ‘We English’, Martin Parr’s ‘Think of England’ and Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen’s ‘Byker’ and ‘Byker Revisited’ projects in order to explore plural visions of England from the perspective of insider and outsider photographers. Likewise, this paper will outline and critically analyze author’s practical side of this thesis where it will be essential to compare with Konttinen’s outsider position as well as to describe decision of using chosen photographic process compared to Simon Roberts.



Martin Parr (1995-1999) *Sand Bay, England*

Introduction

To explore and understand how concepts such as identity and cultural identity operate within photography it is crucial to have a detailed sense of psychological and anthropological meanings of these concepts. Within the current circumstance photography functions as a physical record to reach out practitioners' creative vision to the viewer. In doing so, significance is given to the meaning of identity as a concept as coined by Erik Erikson (1994: 208) as well as drawing upon substantiated psychological, social and anthropological research disseminated through writings of Hall (1996), Du Gay (2001), Fathi (2015), Fearon (1999), Gleason (1983), Rutherford (2003) etc. Within the paper's discussion attention will be drawn towards the idea of "us-them", "our-theirs" within English culture as it forms a division within Great Britain, creating a sense of separate identities. As according to Weedon (2004: 19)

"All identities have their own 'others' from which they mark their difference. This assertion of difference is often at the expense of similarities, for example, in the British context, Scottishness and Welshness are often defined in opposition to Englishness and the differences in play are not always apparent to those not directly involved." Weedon (2004:19)

Thus, this paper explores the concept of Englishness as an important part of English culture. By reviewing writings of Easthope (1999), Kumar (2003), Gamble and Wright (2009), etc. on the theme of Englishness there are several facets which reveal a perhaps more nuanced concept of Englishness. Critical discussion will take place around the English sense of traditions, stereotypes and symbols recognized the world over. In addition, a critical analysis around class division and the freedom of speech is also an important part of this paper in its aim to identify the concept of Englishness. This established understanding will then be used to identify the representations of English cultural identity within photography.

Using a comparative analysis between two established photographers Simon Roberts and Martin Parr, this paper will examine photographic representations of English culture. An analysis of Roberts's work within this paper will explore the

notions of identity, belonging and nationhood examined within his home country. Similarly, it will be necessary to analyze Parr's work in relation to the English cultural identity and his satirical style of portraying it. Attention will be drawn towards Simon Roberts's 'We English' and Martin Parr's 'Think of England' photo publications to examine the concepts of cultural identity within English society. By comparing these two photographers, the paper will articulate the similarities and differences between both photographers and their authored ways of representing English lifestyle.

Of equal importance is the review and analysis of Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen's work, which examines English cultural identity, and the notion of belonging. Attention will be drawn towards 'Byker' and 'Byker Revisited' projects as a comparison of Konttinen's work from the period when she moved to Newcastle upon Tyne in 1969 to the stage when she returned to Byker after re-development decades later. "In 1969 Konttinen moved to Byker, where she lived for six years until her house was demolished. She returned over the next decade to continue to document life in the community." (Rhodes, 2016) Additionally, it is vital to discuss Konttinen's role as outsider and how this is reflected in her photography. Furthermore and of more importance it will be necessary to incorporate the chosen methodology and context of the practical side of this thesis. This will be achieved by describing and critically analyzing authors practice and compare it with Roberts', Parrs' and Konttinen's work.

Chapter 1

Understanding a meaning of identity

One of the basic human needs consists of the diverse relationships with the outside world, in the collective life activity, which is implemented through self-identification of the individual with any ideas, values, social groups and cultures. Such self-identification could be determined by the concept of 'identity'. Erik Erikson, the author of 'Identity Youth and Crisis' has described at least three different connotations of the term 'identity'. It is here, Erikson (1994: 208) suggests that,

“So far I have tried out the term identity almost deliberately – I like to think – in many different connotations. At one time, it seemed to refer to a conscious sense of individual uniqueness, at another to an unconscious striving for a continuity of experience, and at a third, as a solidarity with a group’s ideals.” Erikson (1994: 208)

Erik Erikson is a prominent theorist and psychologist to draw attention to the nature and development of identity. “Erikson was the key figure in putting the word into circulation. He coined the expression identity crisis and did more than anyone else to popularize identity. In his usage identity means something quite definite, but terribly elusive.” (Gleason, 1983: 914) Moreover, according to Jahoda (1950, cited in Erikson, 1994: 92) identity is the foundation of any personality and an indicator of its psychosocial well-being.

“There are many formulations of what constitutes a “healthy” personality in an adult. ...Marie Jahoda’s definition, according to which a healthy personality actively masters his environment, shows a certain unity of personality, and is able to perceive the world and himself correctly.” (Jahoda, 1950, cited in Erikson, 1994: 92)

Nevertheless, the term 'identity' seems to become more a cliché. The meaning of identity grows continuously and merges as an extended term, encouraging more disordered and thoughtless usage. Therefore, the contemporary meaning of identity has evolved and does not only refer to the identity of the certain person but also can be adapted to the social aspects of our lives as well as to the groups of people.

Chapter 2

**Cultural identity and the idea of “us-them”, “our-theirs”
within English culture**

According to Weedon (2004: 20) identity is directly linked to a shared culture. As Weedon (2004: 20) argues, "Identity in all its forms, even national identity, is never singular but is plural, fractured and reconfigured by gender, ethnic and class relations. Constructions of identity are always historically specific..." The culture, according to Weedon, can be perceived as an experience gained by the members of the community and transmitted to each other through common interests and influence. Today, the concept of identity is widely used in cultural writings of Hall and Du Gay, Kumar, etc. In the most general sense it means a persons' awareness of belonging to a socio-cultural group, which identify their place in socio-cultural environment and to freely navigate in the surrounding world. Indeed, to identify ourselves, each person needs to order their life, which s/he can only get in a community of other people. As Rutherford (2003: 223) suggests,

"There are at least two different ways of thinking about 'cultural identity'. The first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many others, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common." (Rutherford 2003: 223)

Owing to this, nation groups are united by common language, spiritual and material culture, mentality, historical development, life within a given state system, common territory and economy. The main ethno-constituting aspects of the nation are aspects of culture, language, mentality and national identity. The equivalent of an ethnic community serves a certain idea of the cultural identity of its members. Therefore, cultural identity enables a person to associate themselves with any community. Self-awareness contains a representation of the typical aspects, characteristics and achievements of the community. Ethnic identification involves constant demand in tradition, authority and stereotypes presented in the forms of cultural context. With the concept of national and cultural identity there is also a realization of ethnic interests, reflected in the indispensable attribute of self-identification - the opposition of "us-them" and "your own-someone else's". "There can be occasions in which the crucial boundaries for identity construction are those

around 'us' rather than those around the individual self, and the boundaries between 'me' and 'us' can even disappear altogether." (Davis, 2010: 276) The opposition "your own-someone else's", is one of the underlying cultural oppositions, which form national identity.

By comparing and contrasting positions, the views of the various groups and communities identified in the process of interaction with them, there is the formation of individuals' personal identity – the body of knowledge and individuals' perceptions of their place and role as a corresponding member of the social and cultural group, their abilities and business qualities. In other words, cultural identity is based on the division of all cultures into "us" and "them".

With the concept of national and cultural identity there is an awareness of ethnic interests, reflected in the indispensable attribute of identity – the opposition "us-them", "our-theirs". Today's representation of English cultural identity absorbs those notable changes in lifestyle, which appear today in the culture of everyday life. The vital power of traditions is still considered as the foundation of the spiritual health of the English nation. Following Cameron's (2014) speech to mark the 799th anniversary of Magna Carta he said,

"The values I'm talking about – a belief in freedom, tolerance of others, accepting personal and social responsibility, respecting and upholding the rule of law – are the things we should try to live by every day. To me they're as British as the Union Flag, as football, as fish and chips." (Cameron, 2014)

It could be argued that people of the multicultural and diverse country would like to see the ability to integrate different traditions in their culture, transforming them into their own, to change with society and to adapt to the changes. Postgrad (2017) argues, "But just because our traditions are old does not mean we are not willing to incorporate the new." Therefore, this is part of English culture where for many years England has been considered as one of the most tolerant and diverse countries. However, as Smith (2015) suggests, "Labour candidate Oliver Coppard

described UKIP's policies as “divisive and backward looking” ...” Some such as UK Independence Party still may not acknowledge modernization of England and be given to the old conventions and things that make England outdated.

Chapter 3

The concept of 'Englishness'

It might be suggested that as in the times of the Empire, the heart of Great Britain remains England as opposed to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Kumar (2003: 36-7) argues,

“The English—along with the Scots, the Welsh and the Irish—were urged to see themselves as part of a large enterprise, a political project, that was catapulting Britain into a leading position among world powers. ... In all this the English could not but be aware of their leading role, by the same token, they were equally aware of the need not to trumpet this as an English achievement, but to see it as a joint effort of all the British nations.” Kumar (2003: 36-7)

Since the EU Referendum on 23 June 2016 and the following Brexit, Great Britain as a union of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is going through a new phase of self-determination, the rise of regional identity, which was also revealed, for example, during the referendum of the Scotland's independence in September 2014. Hobolt (2016: 1273) argues, “The results of the Brexit referendum portray a deeply divided country, not only along class, education and generational lines, but also in terms of geography.”

The English nation makes up the dominant nation of Great Britain. According to Crocco (2008: 40), “Britain can thus be seen as an empire, the former colonized by England, the latter colonized by England’s leadership after the two Acts of Union (1707 & 1801) secured England’s political dominance within Britain.” The territorial differentiation, for example between Northern Ireland and the rest of Britain creates the sense of separate identities. As Gamble and Wright (2009: 1) argue, “Many British people have become much more aware of their separate identity as Scottish, or English or Welsh, and for an increasing number of them this other national identity has come to be regarded as a primary identity, and the British identity only a secondary identity, or even an identity they no longer want.” Following that, one of

the central concepts of English culture can be defined as 'Englishness', which serves as one of the central concepts of English culture.

The concept of 'Englishness' is not an invariable value, but establishes certain frameworks that form the core of this concept remain unchanged and are fixed culturally and historically. To illustrate, Haseler (1996, cited in Palmer, 2004: 8) refers to the idea that "...Englishness has assumed the role of a cultural state - sponsored ideology that has come to represent the uniform identity of the British nation." Owing to this, it is vital to mention some of the crucial aspects that form the concept of Englishness such as traditions, classification and a freedom of speech.

Traditions have their own reasons and purposes. As an example, according to Weedon (2004: 24) "In Western societies both individual and collective forms of identity are closely tied to ideas of national, local and family history and tradition." These traditions, in turn, serve as a reminder for the English people about their history and heritage. Nevertheless, these traditions have turned into symbols and stereotypes associated with England in particular. According to Vulliamy (2015) "Many Brits experience frustration at the number of stereotypes that people enforce on them. And just like most stereotypes they are usually harmless – and often untrue." To illustrate, Vulliamy (2015) has set some of the typical stereotypes associated with English nation. However, Vulliamy (2015) argues that typical "British stereotypes" associated mainly through tourists and non-British are not true and their perspective of English culture is quite warped. The source of information on national stereotypes or national character of the members of the ethnic group as "a peculiar set of universal human characteristics," are stories, national classic literature, folklore, national language and traditions. Therefore, distorted interpretation of these in different cultures lead to a warped vision of English culture, which creates a sort of illusion of the true English identity.

English traditions and national symbols support English people and remind them of who they are and who they become. Some of the traditions, may have no particular value, but their symbolic meaning is an important part of English nation.

However, according to Smith (2017) United Kingdom remains one of the most influential countries in the world, and this is often accompanied by British people faithful adherence to the traditions. To some extent, this makes modern England old-fashioned and backward-looking. Again, UK Independence Party present old dated believes as according to Denham (2014),

“The claim that UKIP represents modern English nationalism is wildly overstated. But there’s no doubt that UKIP appeals to a backward looking sense that everything was better in the past. It’s why their appeal is often strongest in communities that have tended to have lost out from social and economic change over the past 30 years.” (Denham, 2014)

Thus, it could be argued that UK is in the full extent old-fashioned and backward-looking, which serves as one of the reasons for separation across Great Britain and its people today.

Class division is again something that is relevant in modern English culture. This is one of the points, which leads to the current division of the country in general and develop the notion of separation. As Halsey (1986: 29) argues, “...Britons frequently divide themselves not into an upper and a lower but, absurdly, into a middle and a working class.” Furthermore, it is important to mention the role of the monarchy in the modern Britain where the existence of the Royal family itself creates another segregation within the country. According to The Guardian (2000)

“The monarchy remains symbolic of privilege over people, of chance over endeavour, of being something, rather than doing something. We elevate to the apex of our society someone selected not on the basis of talent or achievement, but because of genes.” (The Guardian, 2000)

English society either appreciate and regard the royal family and monarchy or have a solid sense of perplexity of its reality and a substantial reason how monarchy helps the nation. So that, according to Summerskill and Hornak (2001) “More

disquieting for the royals will be the news that 43 per cent think the monarchy will not survive beyond 2051. Only 34 per cent think we will still have a monarchy in 100 years time.”

However, there is one very important characteristic of the British nation, which has been part of English culture, which in the way unites British people in general. The concept of “freedom”, as well as the concept of home, naturally derives from historical factors. As Cameron (2014) states,

“Our freedom doesn’t come from thin air. It is rooted in our parliamentary democracy and free press. Our sense of responsibility and the rule of law is attached to our courts and independent judiciary. Our belief in tolerance was won through struggle and is linked to the various churches and faith groups that have come to call Britain home.”
(Cameron, 2014)

The English idea of freedom is focused on being able to “do what you want” and “say what you want”. As Jones (2011: 269) argues, “Working-class people have, in the past, organized to defend their interests; they have demanded to be listened to, and forced concessions from the hands of the rich and the powerful. Ridiculed or ignored though they may be, they will do so again.” Even though Owen Jones was mainly pointing to the working-class, the freedom of speech is an inherent right of every British person. As defined in section 10(1) of the Act (*Human Rights Act 1998*) “Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.” S/he can be ignored, but somewhat this individual will express everything s/he thinks without the fear of being prosecuted.

Chapter 4

**English identity within photographic practice: with the
reference of Martin Parr and Simon Roberts**

While discussing English identity it is crucial to mention English sense of belonging. To begin with, a concept of belonging can be interpreted in many different means. In a way, cultural identity becomes part of the nationhood and creates a notion of belonging and patriotism. As Susan Bright (2007: 11) argues, “Once we begin to think about the nation, and how the nation describes itself through representations, then the complexities, contradictions and challenges of a British national identity come to the fore...” Following this, England appears to be one of the most complex and at the same time fascinating nations, which makes it rather peculiar. It then conceives an attraction to explore the means of belonging within the English society in the context of photography. This sense of belonging can be explored through forms of art and in the artist’s hands photography becomes an instrument in preserving the histories of nationhood. As Stephen Daniels (2010) says,

“Photography’s ‘envisioning’ of England is part of a long – standing and wide – ranging culture of image making in a variety of media, both pictorial and written, expressing contrasting and sometimes conflicting notions of England Englishness as forms of cultural character and identity. In a way, it is curious that despite its being one of the oldest, most densely settled and heavily portrayed countries in Europe, writers and artists still go in search of England as a nation.” Stephen Daniels (2010)

However, the interpretations of the culture within the medium of photography ranges according to the photographer’s way of seeing and perception of English cultural identity. A selection of Simon Roberts’s and Martin Parr’s works assists in analyzing and understanding different visions of two photographers from the same nation: England.



Figure 1. Simon Roberts (May 2005) Victory Day picnic, Yekaterinburg, Urals.

Motherland

Simon Robert's work explores a sense of place, people and their relationship with place. 'We English' project is an examination of the ideas of belonging and memory, identity and place. This project became an extension of his previous exploration of Russia within 'Motherland' series. As Roberts (2009) describes, "*Motherland* was an exploration of, among other things, the Russians' attachment to their homeland. This attachment to a place was somehow mysterious – simultaneously profound and banal – and it led me to think about my own attachment to England." The representation of the nation at leisure was first seen in Roberts' 'Motherland' body of work as illustrated in Figure 1. As Sontag (1977: 57) argues, "...essentially the camera makes everyone a tourist in other people's reality, and eventually in one's own." Arguably, Simon Roberts is more of anthropologist rather than a tourist. As Roberts (2009) describes, "My

formal training as a cultural geographer has certainly influenced my work as a photographer.” The examination of the foreign nation for Roberts has influenced the way he sees England and desire to explore his own home place and answer some of the questions addressed to the notions of Robert’s belonging to the English culture where photography has served as a means of exploration and representation within both of Roberts’ projects.

“Initially, I was simply thinking about Englishness and how my upbringing had been quintessentially English. How much of this was an intrinsic part of my identity? In what ways was my idea of what constitutes an ‘English life’ or English pastimes (if there are such things) different to those of others’?” (Roberts, 2009)



Figure 2. Simon Roberts (May 2008) Woolacombe Bay, Devon. *We English*

Photography became yet another opportunity to represent English nation. It is also about the landscape of England and the way people interact with it. As seen in Figure 2 Roberts is not concentrating on a particular person. Instead, he portrays groups of people and their lifestyle. As Roberts (2009) describes, “Looking at leisure activities struck me as a thought-provoking way of exploring England’s shifting cultural and national identity.”

It is also crucial to mention Roberts’s methodology and the way he uses large format camera to portray landscapes of England. Most of the ‘We English’ photographs represent England from above, which results in catching people into frame. As Roberts (2009) explains in one of the interviews to the Foto8,

“You need to have that higher perspective to show something of people’s relationship with the landscape. So in the picture of Woolacombe – where you get to see the beach going off into the distance – the perspective enables you to show the idea of people creating quite private colonies on a public beach: you can see all the little windbreakers that they’ve got round them and the private spaces.” (Roberts, 2009)

Through using a large format 5x4 camera, Roberts is able to thoughtfully compose the final image, which result in a possibility to capture great details of the English landscapes and people who interact with it. This approach is reflected in Robert’s photographs where the view from above represents a beautiful landscape of England in the everyday.

From the perspective of the photographer, Simon Roberts is able to capture the English nation as a united community. So that, in ‘We English’ project he explores English landscape in particular and the relation of English people to these landscapes through the leisure activities. As Roberts (2008) explains, “My aim is to create a photographic journal of life, specifically documenting landscapes where groups of people congregate for a common purpose and shared experience.”

Thus, English affection in group walks and various outdoor leisure activities makes them unite community.

Moving on, it is also important to analyze Martin Parr's work where he represents English nation as an ironic and an extraordinary. Sooke (2016) suggests that, "Irony, then, is his prime modus operandi as an artist." That is to say, Parr is one of those artists who are able to make ordinary extraordinary. As John Updike (2003: xvii) describes his way of writing, "My only duty was to describe reality as it had come to me – to give mundane its beautiful due." This therefore can be characterized to the Parr's methodology and his use of photographic equipment where Parr uses ring flash to achieve a spectrum of details and a high contrast, thus, the ordinary becomes an extraordinary.



Figure 3. Martin Parr (2000) Badminton, Gloucestershire, England. *Think of England*

Furthermore, Martin Parr possesses his own point of view and particular vision of the world. According to Beetles and Huxley (2015), "He earned an

international reputation for his oblique approach to social documentary, and for innovative imagery...” In 1986 when Parr had started to work in colour, it was a time when representations of Britain have changed. “Photographers were interested in a new kind of Britishness, which they caricatured vividly, and critically, in bright colour.” (Williams and Bright, 2007: 139) Parr’s way of seeing offered a new perspective of English culture. This is reflected in his use both the camera and flashgun lighting along with exceptional composition skills where he is unafraid of taking close-up photographs of people eating (Fig. 3). Likewise, Parr’s use of colour is one of the key concepts within his photographs. Bright colours and high contrast draws attention to each photograph, therefore bringing attention to his subject matter. Saturated colours within Parr’s ‘Think of England’ establish a special atmosphere to the photographs, which is quite ironical. According to Beetles and Huxley (2015), “Martin Parr is widely acknowledged for his photographic projects that highlight, and gently satirize people and their cultures.” Martin Parr’s confidence in showing England from its most cliché point of view makes these photographs defined and exceptional.

Comparatively, Roberts strives to portray appealing English landscapes and the English nation literally from a high perspective, whereas Parr has presented English people from the close-up and eccentric point of view. As Roberts (2009) asserts about ‘We English’ work, “I wanted to produce a body of work that was beautiful, where England was rendered in an unashamedly lyrical way, even if the landscape depicted was somehow banal.” In contrast, Bright and Williams (2007: 138) describe how, “The use of colour in British documentary photography gave us a new vision of the nation. Parr’s coruscating fable of middle-class life in middle Britain took its place alongside other pioneering photo series...” Parr’s particular vision of the world is reflected in his work, where he captures traditional aspects of English life. That is to say that it depends on the practitioner use of photography medium and how photographer incorporates creative vision to portray any subject or object. Therefore, Roberts uses large format to represent English communities in groups thus creating a distant feeling between the photograph and the viewer.

Whereas Parr's close up photographs such as Figure 3 establishes an intimate perception between the viewer and the photograph. Teicholz (2016) suggests that,

“As an artistic medium photography presents an interesting dichotomy: At the same time as the images can be imbued with great intimacy, the photographer hides behind the camera and is separated from the subject by the lens; while the images can be casual, or reportorial documentation, or artistically composed and framed, often it is the tension and distance between artist and subject that makes for great art.” (Teicholz, 2016)

It is here where it becomes complex in the case of Parr and Roberts. As photographic practitioners Parr and Roberts emerge as outsider artists who explore country of their origin, which inevitably suggests their insider position. Both photographers were exploring their born place culture, the place where they belong and which is part of their everyday life. In both photographers' works we see different perspectives on English nation but Parr and Roberts have the same role of insider. In the hands of photographer camera is an instrument which separates artist from the subject where practitioner inevitably emerges as an outsider.

Chapter 5

**Being a photographer outsider: with the reference to
Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen**

Following the discussion about Parr and Roberts as insider photographers who explore English culture wherein they have been born, it would be rather peculiar not to mention non-English photographer exploring England. Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, a Finnish photographer who came to England in the late 1960s is a quintessential case to explore.

An analysis of Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen's work has showed that Byker became the subject of the social and photographic study, and more than that, her home. Roe (2008: 309) suggests that for Konttinen, "...Byker became place, rather than space, for Konttinen precisely because she was at rest there and felt 'at home' and safe." Since 1969 Byker community became her home. However, it took her time to make connections with residents and for Byker to become the place where she belonged. It is important to note that the 'Byker' project became an exploration of this community, likewise the search for home as an immigrant from Finland. She clearly states this in the film produced by her and Amber productions (1983), where she says, "The streets of Byker, serene in the morning sun with smoking chimney pots, offered me no Paradise; but I was looking for home." (Byker, 1983) It is not known if she was looking for the home, which would replicate her native homeland in Finland; however, it is clear that Byker became her new neighborhood.

Indeed, Konttinen's timeline in Byker was divided. She was a stranger to the Byker community when she first moved there in 1969. At first, the unfamiliarity can be clearly recognized from her perspective, which is then reflected in her photography. The initial black and white photographs of Byker between 1969-1981 reveal Konttinen as an apparent stranger and outsider. Konttinen's role here is rather the viewer exploring local community and documenting life of the Byker residents. She says, "I roamed around the streets by day and hung about by night: chasing my heartbeats, stumbling in and out of other people's lives; striving to share my excitement through photographs where words would fail me. This was the beginning of my great adventure." (Konttinen, 1983: 6) As an immigrant coming to

the strange country, she sees Byker as a new and exciting place as well as her potential home, which she was striving to find. Moreover, photography became a communicative instrument in making connections with the Byker residents. Byker demolition, which started in 1966 has become a point of connection between Konttinen and Byker residents at that time when she lived in Byker for six years before her house was demolished.

It is critical to note the attention to the residents that Konttinen has put into her work as she emerges as part of the Byker community and when Byker people began to trust her not just as a person but also as photographer. The central part when one of the residents was saying that they belong in Byker reflects the whole idea of belonging and the notions of losing native home as well as a connection between Konttinen and Byker residents. As a Finn immigrant, she knows the feeling of losing native home. It is crucial to mention how Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen addresses the feelings of these people, while their homes were planned to be demolished. Above all, this consciousness has affected the whole community. As Konttinen (1983: 8) illustrates, "Death and demolition clung together in the collective consciousness." The demolition likewise became one of the elements that connected Konttinen with the Byker residents making her one of them. The nostalgia seized Konttinen right when her house in Byker was about to be demolished. She explains, "When my house finally came down with a clean sweep of the swinging ball, I stood and watched gulping at a distance." She goes on, "From that moment I began to miss my downstairs neighbour..." (Konttinen, 1983: 8-9) This is a decisive moment that reflects the relationship she had to her house in Byker and her place of belonging, which she was aiming to find. After all, "One way or another, I had grown to be part of my street, and the community. It had been my first own home, and a real home for me." (Konttinen, 1983: 9) She has experienced the difficult time of Byker alongside with her neighborhood, which makes her the equal member of Byker.

Nonetheless, Konttinen began her journey in the Byker as an outsider. To illustrate this, Konttinen (1983: 6) states, “Adopted again and again with undeserved generosity, yet remaining outside, and not belonging.” She was able to build strong relationships with the community and eventually became part of it. However, she remained an outsider observing Byker community through the lens of the camera. As already stated, Sontag (1979: 57) importantly says, “...essentially the camera makes everyone a tourist in other people’s reality, and eventually in one’s own.” Photography became the artistic device that helped to build strong relationships with the residents. These relationships became a key in finding Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen’s own sense of home in Byker.

As Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen says, “Being a foreigner gave me one advantage: I could be nosy, and be forgiven. Many doors were opened for me that would possibly have remained closed to another photographer, and invitations extended to the kind of hospitality and intimacy that would normally be reserved for family only.” (Konttinen, 1983: 6) Konttinen became an observer of Byker community. Moreover, she was able to pay attention to the individual stories, which gave her an insight to the understanding of Byker people. Konttinen has an ability of sharing personal stories, inspirations and aspirations of Byker people. The subject of intimacy has been present in the stories of the residents even before Byker demolition. However, one might argue, that her early photographs are not as intimate as opposed to the ‘Byker Revisited’ series. Namely, the reason for that could be the relationship with the residents, which at that stage were still building up. She was a stranger, an outsider and perhaps at that time people of Byker were not confident to be represented in Konttinen’s photographs. The excuses of residents that Konttinen heard in response to be photographed were different. Consequently, this explains the distrust towards Konttinen and relationship to her as a stranger. In the ‘Byker’ film (1983) Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen has included the voices of residents who declined to be photographed, illustrating the relationship to Konttinen as a stranger, which thus makes her an outsider.

After several years since Byker demolition, Konttinen returned to Byker and made a documentary 'Today I'm with you'. This film, is an exceptional comparison of Byker 1983 and 2010. One of the elements that can be encountered is that Konttinen hardly appears in the first 'Byker' film, which showed Byker in 1983. It is only her voice as narrator that can be heard. However, you can see almost everywhere she goes in the 'Today I'm with you'. The viewer can have an insight into the behind the scenes of photographs that Konttinen has made. This film gives an opportunity to know her better as a photographer and creative. 'Today I'm with you' gives an insight of how Konttinen works with the camera, equipment, lighting and most importantly, the subject. Since 1969 when Konttinen lived in Byker and photographed the initial residents, she has retained the important skills of making relationships with people. It is important for her to understand what will be the best way to capture a person. After that follows the most important part of Konttinen's job as a photographer. As Konttinen describes, "By the end of the project I also began to get the feeling that it was me who was making the gift." (Today I'm with you, 2010) There is always the notion of giving something back. She meets her subject and gives him/her a gift, which is usually a photographic print of them or their family. This gestures creates a stronger bond between her and new Byker residents.

At first, being an outsider gave Konttinen an opportunity to get to know Byker from the different perspective as someone who has come from the different country. Eventually she became part of the community. For Konttinen, coming to Byker meant a search for a home as mentioned before. However, she also understood that she was just the stranger. This can be certainly seen in her early photographs of Byker, especially those depicting empty streets where it feels that she was alone around this town (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen (1983). Gordon Road, *Byker*

As an immigrant student, it would be expected of her to be rather anxious because of the new place, people, language and culture. However, being a photographer and most importantly a creative, facing life changes, made her enthusiastic, which led to the excitement she felt towards the exploration and documentation of Byker and its community. As Konttinen (1983: 6) says, “I roamed around the streets by a day and hung about by night: chasing my heartbeats, stumbling in and out of people’s lives; striving to share my excitement through photographs where words would fail me. This was the beginning of my great adventure.” Photography became an important instrument in overcoming anxious feelings, which would strike Konttinen as an immigrant. Eventually, Konttinen was more welcomed into the Byker community and ultimately it became her home. As Konttinen (1983: 6) states, “My work in Byker became known, accepted and assisted, and my collection of photographs, poems, reminiscences and memories began to grow.” Thus it can be suggested Konttinen’s transition of Finnish outsider photographer to the insider Byker resident.

When back in Byker, after redevelopment in 2010, Konttinen notes changes in the community and the major one is people that live there now. In comparison to 1969 there are more asylum seekers from different countries, which appear in her later photographs of 'Byker Revisited'. Her images emerge as diverse representation of various nationalities as it can be seen in Figure 5. Konttinen has approached to portray new residents and their families paying more attention to their cultural belonging which is developed through photographs of residents in traditional dressings or postures. Konttinen got to know and support most of the re-developed Byker residents as if she would support herself, back when she arrived in Byker and stood on top of the Byker Hill looking for a home.



Figure 5. Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen (2007) Asylum seekers family from Lebanon.
Byker Revisited

A connection that she made in old Byker is reflected in the photographs presented in the photo book 'Byker Revisited' when she has revisited Byker a few years later and documented the current community. According to Hodgson (2013), "She returned to document its very different, post-renovation (and now multi-cultural) face in Byker Revisited forty years later, with colour portraits shot around the controversial Byker Wall housing development which replaced the community she knew." When she visits Byker again in 2010, the photographs appear to be more intimate. This can be seen in Figure 6 of the Hill family. Eventually, the close relationships between her and Byker people, which she was able to build upon time, helped her to approach the current residents after demolition. Consequently, this intimacy has been visualized in her photographs of Byker residents presented in the 'Byker Revisited' book. What has not been visualized in Konttinen's early photographs is now captured within the current 'Byker Revisited' project.



Figure 6. Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen (2006) Lee Hill, teacher and Betty Hill, mental health nurse and artist. *Byker Revisited*

Meanwhile, community changes. It is not just the working class English community anymore. It is a mixed-race neighborhood and the evidence to that are the representations of them shown by Konttinen in the 'Byker revisited' illustrated in Figure 7. According to Phipps (cited in Hodgson, 2013) "Byker is a community that has always been changing and moving; there are people from all over the world there." It can be argued that these mixed raced families are the reflections of Konttinen back in the 1960s when she was a stranger to Byker. She becomes a paradigm of the immigrant survivor.



Figure 7. Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen (2007) Kayleigh Stewart with grandmother Lyn Stewart and baby Cody. *Byker Revisited*

Chapter 6

**Author revealing English cultural identity through
photographic practice**

Author of 'My England' project moved to UK in 2008 for a chance to get a good education and have a better living life. For ten years of full resident life in England author of this thesis was able to successfully integrate within the English lifestyle. Despite the successful adaptation to the local lifestyle there are still some glimpses of a foreign outsider being interested in local culture, traditions, accents, people and places. As a result, photographs presented in the photographic project 'My England' consequently are outsider practitioners' curiosity about England and its people as well as the opportunity to share other people's views about English culture including native English and people who has come to England for better lives. Some of them show typical 'afternoon tea England' but some of them reveal England from its non-stereotypical perspective showing immense English landscapes and countryside. That is to say, that the practical side of this work reveal that each person represent English culture equally in their own way and from their own perspective. As a result, they happen to live in one Medway community over the years where they acquire new traditions and connections, which they share together. Inevitably these ideas can be compared between the context of photographic works of Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen. Similarity between both becomes apparent since both projects focus on the particular communities: Medway and Byker. By portraying UK citizens along with foreign nationals living in the UK it was influential to show the contrast between the outsiders who came and live here many years and between those who was already born in UK. Similarly to Konttinen's 'Byker Revisited' project where artist portrays diverse cultures of re-developed Byker community. Furthermore, to bring attention to both sides as according to Pitlane Magazine (2018) foreign nationals contribute to the culture of England. "Contemporary Britain is very much shaped by past instances of immigration, as well as more recent ones. There have been notable changes to British society as a result of the mass immigration of individuals from different nations and of different ethnicities at different points in history." This contrast shows the modern transformation of the English diverse culture where foreign nationals play a big role in English culture. This contrast also demonstrates the viewer how foreign nationals perceive English culture from within while being outsiders. Portraits represent

people who live in England no matter if they are UK-born or foreign nationals mixing together with still life and landscape photographs depicting some of the English attributes, seaside and countryside. Inevitably, together these become fundamental elements that bring together those aspects of national identity that make up English culture today.

Decision to depict participants in the form of the portrait photograph was made with intention to introduce viewers to the interviewees in the form of the visual record. Furthermore, it is important to note that the portraits presented in 'My England' exhibition are accompanied with the audio recording of each project participant. So that, when the viewer comes to exhibition s/he will be able to look at the portrait and at the same time listen what this subject that is portrayed said. This use of mixed media techniques enables the viewer to become part of the conversation and have a sense of dialogue between those portrayed on the photograph.

As part of the qualitative research the number of questions have been selected to find out what UK-born and foreign nationals think of the current English cultural identity. Some of the answers reveal the clichéd perception of English culture whereas some present England from a non-stereotypical point of view. All of these perspectives are combined in one place in the form of the photo publication, which can be perceived as a result of this project's extensive research about English cultural identity. Constructed questions of these interviews come from the undergone project theme research. These questions combine ideas that were stressed during the research. Some of the answers to questions in the interviews may be perceived as a reminder that modern England is going through the cultural identity crisis as there is no specific answer to questions like 'What does it mean to be English?' or 'British or English?' etc. All participants had a chance to reveal their own honest opinion on these questions. Some of the answers left uncertainty on the aspect of 'British or English'. The following creative solution reflected the research of Parr's works, where in Chapter 4 it was analysed in the context of English clichés

that form the whole perception and vision of the English cultural identity. As a result, to direct project in more specific path it was made a decision to ask all interviewees what they associate with England and then include these answers in the form of the still life and landscape photographs accompanying participant's portraits that in opinion of interviewees in the best way represent English cultural identity thereby focusing on English and not British as undergone research reveals that this topic is quite slippery and answer to the question may not always be specific. The responses received were somewhat a gathering of some of the clichéd English elements that Martin Parr reflects in his works. Consequently some photographs depict those clichéd attributes of English culture as it can be seen on Figure 8.



Figure 8. Irina Novoslavska (2018) Union Jack. *My England*

Moving on to the second part of this project, which is photographic exhibition it is important to analyse and reflect on the importance of it as part of this research project. Decision to create photographic exhibition was drawn upon the idea of representing project outcomes to the local Medway residents. The idea of solo

exhibition became an opportunity to create a space where local communities both UK-born and non-UK nationals would be able to familiarize themselves with the questions of English cultural identity and to be able to ask themselves further questions on this matter.

Exhibition consisted of three important elements, which were printed medium format photographs, audio interviews allocated to each specific interviewee stand and a photographic book, which became a collection of the whole exhibition and the opportunity for the viewer to read interviews on the paper.

First of all, decision to use medium format photography was made after extensive research and analysis of Simon Roberts's works. As it was reflected in the Chapter 4 of this thesis Roberts is known for his use of large format camera to be able to capture the big scene of the group of people. One might ask, why this particular research project haven't used the same camera and technique? While Roberts's work and methodology has worked as an inspiration, after consideration of some personal artistic preferences and practicality of the medium it was important to reflect on authors' own practice in the opposite way. So that, it was clear that large format camera is too bulky and very inconvenient to use in some spaces, especially if the photographed person lives in a small house. The inconvenience of the size and the complexity of the use of large format camera would make it difficult to communicate between the subject creating a barrier and resulting in more complex way to achieve the intimacy which occurs between the portrait and the viewer. On the opposite side, it was decided to preserve the quality of the photographs once they will be printed for the exhibition without the loss of the compactness of the system. Digital medium format system became an ideal option for this. Another important point to consider and which certainly becomes an opposite to what Roberts does is to take close up or 3/4 portraits instead of long distance or group portraits. Reason being, to create the intimate connection between the viewer and the close-up portrait, while preserving an excellent quality to be able to produce large exhibition prints. However, Figure 9 presents one of the images from the authors project that depicts a group of people on the beach, which

consequently reminds of the Roberts's methodology and English nation affection to the outdoor lifestyle.



Figure 9. Irina Novoslavka (2018) Botany Bay. *My England*

Second element of this research project exhibition was the use of audio recordings played separately in the headphones, which have been allocated to each portrait. Exhibition was structured in the way that the viewer would come up to each portrait and listen to the interview of the portrayed person. The context behind this was to create a connection between the viewer and photographed subject. In this instance, close up medium format portraits would be accompanied with the voices of interviewees preserving their speaking manner and accents.

Last, but not least, third element of exhibition which was a photographic publication was presented to the public as an exhibition context summary and the collection of all photographs presented in one place.

The practical side of this work, which consist of photographic exhibition and photographic publication, are a logical outcome from the undergone research that includes investigation of the English cultural identity and the current debate on cultural identity crisis. Photographic book and an exhibition named 'My England' give an opportunity for the public viewer to familiarize with representatives of Medway community, which include UK-born citizens along with foreign nationals who became part of the English community in Medway area. The title of the book suggests that people who participated and answered a number of interviewed questions present their own perception of England and that for each participant England can be something that for some people it can become completely different.

Conclusion

Social and cultural changes of the modern Britain affect the English national identity today. The search for national identity in Great Britain these days is relevant to the English nation more than ever. Not surprisingly, if you ask an Englishman: “What is English culture?” he will not be able to answer or would mention the stereotypes of the English culture such as fish and chips, afternoon tea and the Queen which are so familiar to the world. But what does it really mean to ‘Be English’ now and do these stereotypes still matter in the modern England? What, if anything, makes Britain ‘Great’? The practical side of this research project is dedicated to the study of the English traditions, the current worldview of the English society, the perception of the English culture and plural – opinion how it might look like in the future. The opinion of English and non – UK residents is something that composes the current portrait of English culture and what makes England indifferent and eccentric.

This research paper and analysis of the practical side of this research project has been drawn mainly towards the idea of the photographer as outsider but reveals some aspects of insider as with the case of Martin Parr and Simon Roberts. The photographic works of Roberts and Parr serve as a visual example of English cultural identity articulated from the perspective of the photographers from within. In short, as Williams and Bright (2007: 163) argue, “Photographing Britain is a complex endeavor – one that tell stories about the self, about other people, about the contradictory nature of life on this small island.” It is a way of seeing and representing that gives two contrasting perspectives on the English nation. Nonetheless, Simon Roberts and Martin Parr share the same desire to represent their home country and photograph the mundane of English culture, where inevitably Roberts and Parr belong.

In one of *The British Journal of Photography* issues Peter Hamilton (2010) puts an emphasis towards the idea of outsiders’ mission as, “Perhaps some of the most acute observers of Englishness are foreign. An outsider can stand back from the society and look at it dispassionately, finding equally odd and worthy of note the

things the locals take for granted.” (Hamilton, 2010) That is to say, that Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen as a Finn inevitably has an outsiders’ vision, while documenting Byker community. However, photography is an essential part that resemblance Konttinen as outsider practitioner. Konttinen’s mission as an outsider photographer was to explore the Byker community, where essentially she became part of it. From the other hand, it is important to understand that she was a foreigner and was looking for a home. While exploring Byker residents she has become one of them and the demolition of Byker has also affected her as it affected Byker people.

The complexity of English identity, the existence of the diverse, sometimes competing visions of the past, present and future of the English people and England is a sign of England’s shared culture, survivability and adaptability in this world. Photographic practice in this sense serves as a strong creative instrument, which helps to visualize England while reminding the English of their traditions, freedom of speech and history. There is a vast chance for UK to maintain or revive their status of “Great Britain”. Not only as a status but also as a substantial value of this status and at times photography is immense creative mechanism in achieving this.

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