BRAVE ART: SCOTTISH IDENTITY AND STAND-UP COMEDY

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ABSTRACT

Stand-up comedy remains a prevalent form of entertainment in Scotland, with comedians drawing sell-out crowds, and comedy making up the biggest section of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival programme. Moreover, stand-up comedy is recognised by many academics as a form of social commentary that can affirm or subvert cultural norms, or at the very least, provide a social thermometer that tells us what is going on in society. Research on Scottish stand-up comedy can therefore shed a light on how contemporary Scottish identity is constructed and understood. Yet, despite its popularity and potential social significance, few studies have focused on Scottish comedy to date, and none have chosen to analyse Scottish stand-up comedy specifically. The present research addresses this gap and uses discourse analysis to understand how Scottish stand-up comedy articulates representations of contemporary Scottish and British identities. The data for this study includes live comedy performances at the Edinburgh Fringe as well as interviews with stand-up comedians to gain a deeper insight. The findings show that Scotland is largely framed as a postcolonial nation with distinct values (inclusive, left-wing, egalitarian), particularly in comparison to 'Brexit' England. Despite this emphasis on civic nationalism, there are intersectional differences in how people experience Scottish identity, particularly for Scots positioned outside traditional white, heterosexual masculinity, who have to work harder to belong. The Edinburgh Fringe brings to the fore questions of belonging and exclusion as Scots make up a relatively small proportion of the comedy offering. Yet, the Fringe is also identified as a carnivalesque space with subversive potential. By disrupting the taken for granted, and highlighting possibilities for change, Scottish stand-up comedians at the Fringe engage in the political work of (de-)constructing the boundaries of identity and belonging.

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DECLARATION

This is to certify that I am responsible for the work submitted in this thesis, that the original work is my own except as specified in acknowledgements or in footnotes, and that neither the thesis nor the original work contained therein has been submitted to this or any other institution for a degree.

I have read the University's current research ethics guidelines and accept responsibility for the conduct of this research. I have attempted to identify all the risks that may arise in conducting this research, obtained the relevant ethical approval from the University, and acknowledged my obligations and the rights of the participants.

Signed: [redacted] Personal details withheld.

Date: 18/06/2021

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
AFS	Alcohol Focus Scotland
altcom	Alternative Comedy
APSA	American Political Studies Association
BBC	British Broadcasting Service
BCE	Before Common Era
CAQDAS	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
DVD	Digital Video Disc
EIF	Edinburgh International Festival
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
EU	European Union
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IT	Identity Theory
IVF	In vitro fertilization
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender
MSP	Member of the Scottish Parliament
OS	Operating System
PBH	Peter Buckley Hill
PR	Public Relations
RP	Received Pronunciation
SHAAP	Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems
SIT	Social Identity Theory
SNL	Saturday Night Live
SNP	Scottish National Party
TV	Television
UK	United Kingdom
UWS	University of the West of Scotland
WMC	Working Men's Club
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

It is a truism to say that politics has become *comic* (van Zoonen, Coleman and Kuik, 2011, Brassett and Sutton, 2017), and that comedy has become political (Tsakona and Popa, 2011, Holm, 2017, Donian, 2018). Humour is an essential and ubiquitous element of social life, an 'unavoidable aspect of how we approach and understand the world as a site of meaning, politics and life itself' (Holm, 2017, p.8). Stand-up comedy in particular has seen a surge in recent decades. It commands an ever more dominant presence at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe (Friedman, 2009, Venables, 2017, Chortle, 2018) and is considered a lucrative business (Stebbins, 1990, Smith, 2019), albeit one that is precarious and financially uncertain for some comedians (Butler and Stoyanova Russell, 2018).

While comic figures (e.g., the clown, the fool, the buffoon) are certainly not new (see: Laughter in Antiquity), the stand-up comedian of today is

> an aestheticisation of a cultural fact of modern life: a way to toy with, and ideologically place, the indeterminacy of 'who we are' and 'what we appear to be', to play to social perceptions.
>
> (Smith, 2019, p.35)

This makes stand-up comedy an ideal prism through which to explore the issue of national identity. In Scotland, the independence referendum, along with Brexit, have revitalised debates

about who we are as a nation. Scottish comedy can be considered a ‘cultural thermometer’ (Medhurst, 2007) that reflects (and affects) such debates.

1.2 Problem and Rationale

National identity is a pressing issue in these times of ‘identity politics’ (Alcoff, 2006, Wiarda, 2014, Fukuyama, 2018). In Scotland, much of the social science research on identity offers empirical insights into how people negotiate claims to national belonging (Kiely, Bechhofer and McCrone, 2005, McCrone and Bechhofer, 2010, Leith and Soule, 2011, Leith, 2012, McCrone, 2017). Largely relying on survey and interview data, such studies can tell us who people say they are, and how they assess others’ claims to identity. For McCrone, this gets at the performative and ‘tactical construction’ of national identity (McCrone and Bechhofer, 2015, p.25). Yet, for critics like Malešević (2011), such empirical approaches simply offer ‘crude measures of something that is a highly complex phenomenon’ (p. 279), and ‘create “national identities” where they do not necessarily exist’ (p. 280). Though Malešević’s critique is perhaps overly harsh, large-scale surveys and interviews do provide an incomplete picture. Indeed, as McCrone himself notes, they are no substitute for actually ‘being present when people “do” identity’ (Ichijo et al., 2017, p.455).

A wealth of scholarship also exists on the cultural representations of Scottishness in the media and across various artforms (Craig, 1982, Macdonald, 2006, Brown, 2010, 2020), but these too tend to overlook popular forms of ‘low’ culture, like stand-up comedy (Friedman, 2014a, Smith, 2019). Despite its significance both politically (Donian, 2018, Quirk, 2018) and socially (Meier and Schmitt, 2016, Chattoo and Feldman, 2020), stand-up comedy is under-researched compared to other performance genres (Lockyer, Mills and Peacock, 2011). Very few studies in the UK have looked at identity construction in stand-up comedy (Some notable exceptions include: Medhurst, 2007, Colleary, 2015, Fox, 2018, Quirk, 2018), and none have focused exclusively on Scottish stand-up.

It is argued here that stand-up comedy is highly relevant for our understanding of society because it acts discursively as a ‘form of folk “common sense” talk’ (Brodie, 2014, Smith, 2019, p.113). Moreover, we know that popular culture is integral to the ‘imagined’ construction of the nation (Edensor, 2002a, Anderson, 2006, Brown, 2020), and a vehicle for negotiating our own ‘sense of national identity’ (Edensor, 2002b, p.17), but we have very little knowledge of the workings of Scottish stand-up comedy, its political effects, and how we ‘do’ identity

through comedy. This study aims to address this gap, offering a valuable contribution to scholarship in comedy studies and Scottish society.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is twofold: first, it aims to describe, through an analysis of Scottish stand-up comedy, the characteristics of Scottish identity construction; secondly, it seeks to understand the ways in which Scottish stand-up comedy can be political. With that in mind, the research questions have been formulated as follows:

- How does Scottish stand-up comedy (re)produce representations of contemporary Scottish and British identities?
- What are the political elements that can be identified within contemporary Scottish stand-up?

The research questions will be answered through a qualitative thematic analysis of participant observation data and interviews, as outlined in the following section.

1.4 Research Approach

The present research is situated within the interpretivist paradigm. National identity is understood here as a social construction (Wodak et al., 2009, Özkirimli, 2010, İnaç, 2013), and stand-up comedy as a communicative event where identity is negotiated, and societal values can be challenged (Rutter, 1997, Lockyer and Myers, 2011, Brodie, 2014, Smith, 2019). The meaning of (Scottish) identity is understood to be performatively constituted through social interaction, and shaped by discursive practices (Loxley, 2007, Denzin, 2008a, Wodak et al., 2009). These interactions can take the form of performances, such as the live stand-up show, or everyday activities, whereby subjects are analogous to ‘actors’ whose actions are shaped by the social ‘scripts’ of a given context (Goffman, 1956). Identities are thus the effects of repeated practices (Butler, 2002, Loxley, 2007).

Taking this into account, the present study employs two forms of data collection: participant observation of Scottish stand-up shows, and interviews with Scottish comedians. Thirty-eight shows were attended during the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2017 (See: Appendix). Detailed notes were taken, and a thematic analysis of the shows was undertaken. Additionally, six

interviews were conducted with Scottish stand-up comedians, which were also analysed thematically.

1.5 Significance of the Study

While comedy has been 'taken seriously' by a number of scholars (Morreall, 1983, Palmer, 1994, Donian, 2018), the emergence of stand-up as an object of analysis in social research is relatively recent. As Donian (2018) puts it, the 'revered halls of academia have questioned how one is able to formulate critical, serious responses when the discourse in question, through its own admission, is not to be taken seriously' (p. xiv). However, it is important to note that stand-up comedy is always co-constructed with the audience and is therefore a negotiation of shared values and social meaning. That this is done in a playful way arguably makes it even more socially significant: it tests the boundaries of acceptability, and help us challenge or reinforce societal norms – whether or not that is the explicit intention of the comedian (Quirk, 2015). This study makes an original contribution as the only major study to focus specifically on how Scottish stand-up comedians negotiate national identity. The research will be of interest for anyone who wishes to better understand Scottish identity and politics, the stand-up comedy scene in Scotland, or the functions of stand-up comedy more generally.

Despite its broad, interdisciplinary relevance, it is important to also note the limitations and delimitations of this study. Firstly, the findings herein reflect the specific context of Scottish comedy at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Other national styles of comedy might have their own distinct characteristics, and the Fringe may reflect a very specific and non-generalisable experience of live comedy since it is performed for an international audience, and thus adapted accordingly. Moreover, the focus here is on what is signified by the performers, which means audience reception is left out (though it should be noted that live comedy is generally responsive to audience reactions). Yet, even this is hardly generalisable, as the interpretations herein do not necessarily reflect the intentions of the performers, or the interpretations of other audience members. Though the time limitations of a PhD did not allow the researcher to conduct an audience reception study, this would certainly be a fruitful area of research in the future.

The six interviews conducted offer an insight into the performer's intentions, but again, they are contextual rather than generalisable insights, especially considering the small sample size. Finding willing participants is challenging when dealing with well-known performers, so the

study relied more heavily on the participant observation phase of the study. Another delimitation of the study is the exclusive focus on *Scottish* comedians, most of whom live in the UK. Future researchers could broaden their sample and include non-Scottish performers who live in Scotland, or indeed Scottish performers who live abroad as a point of comparison.

1.6 Thesis Structure

This research study is presented in eight chapters. Chapter 1 (Introduction) includes the background, rationale, purpose, and significance of the study, as well as its limitations. Chapter 2 discusses the diverging epistemologies in humour and identity research and makes the case for an interpretivist framework that combines discourse analysis and performance theory. The methods for data collection and analysis (participant observation/interviews and thematic analysis) are also outlined in this chapter. This is followed by a conceptual literature review which is divided into two chapters.

Chapter 3 reviews the literature on comedy and humour, from its origins in antiquity, to contemporary definitions. The superiority, relief, and incongruity theories are critically analysed, and an emphasis is placed on the contextual nature of humour, rather than its universal characteristics. The political functions of humour are discussed in relation to aesthetics and affect, with a particular focus on carnivalesque laughter. Finally, the genre of stand-up comedy is examined in light of its national particularities (British, English, and Scottish).

Chapter 4 analyses the scholarship on identity: the notion of the self, the modern concept of identity, and the multi-disciplinary literature on Scottishness. Particular focus is placed on the performative understanding of identity, which see the cohesiveness of the nation, and of the self, as constituted through discourse. As explained in 4.2.3, such narratives can be negotiated and reproduced through stand-up performance. The literature review then looks at the features of Scottish nationalism and the markers of national belonging. Finally, the cultural representations of Scottishness (Tartanry, Kailyard and Clydesider) are critically reviewed, and a hybrid conception of Scottish identity is put forward.

Chapter 5 introduces the findings from the participant observation phase of the study. It looks at how identities are represented by the comedians, with a focus on nation, locality, race, class, and gender. Elements of postcolonial discourse are particularly salient in the performances, as

well as the reinforcement of a left-leaning, egalitarian Scottish ethos. The chapter also examines how the Edinburgh Fringe, and stand-up comedy more generally, are a site for political struggles, especially around what can be said and whose voices are heard.

In Chapter 6, the findings from the interviews are presented. The comedians discuss the political potentialities of stand-up, as well as the constraints that the free market structure of the Fringe brings. When it comes to identity, the comedians emphasise the egalitarian openness of Scottish society, its working-class, socialist values, and its colonial history. The complexities of Scottish identity and politics are also discussed, particularly the diverse local identities, class inequalities, racial exclusion, and political divisions in Scotland.

These themes are examined in more depth in Chapter 7 and situated in relation to the relevant existing literature. The chapter starts with a discussion of how stereotypical representations of Scottishness (Tartanry, Kailyard, Clydesider) are both reproduced and subverted by the comedians, creating hybrid identities and disidentifications. The second half of the chapter examines the Edinburgh Fringe's potential for carnivalesque rebellion, as well stand-up comedy's political aesthetics. The conclusion, Chapter 8, provides a summary of the study, as well as implications and recommendations.

2 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

2.1 Introduction

In order to situate the present research in relation to its methodological and theoretical framework, it is important to first consider the epistemological perspective that informs it. As Crotty (1998) explains, epistemology, i.e., our understanding of the nature of knowledge, is an integral element of any social science research; it entails assumptions about the world that impact on our methodological choices. However, while epistemological assumptions are inescapable, they are often not explicitly addressed by researchers, or are conflated with methodologies or methods (Crotty, 1998, p.3). This thesis makes a clear distinction between epistemology (theories of knowledge), methodology (perspectives guiding the choice of methods) and methods (techniques for collecting and analysing the data). This chapter will outline these three elements in detail, starting with a discussion on epistemology, followed by methodological perspectives, and finally, the concrete research design employed in this thesis.

2.2 Epistemological considerations

In the social sciences, a dividing line is argued to exist between positivism on the one hand—the perspective that meaningful knowledge can only be arrived at through the scientific method—and positivism's 'epistemological others' on the other (Steinmetz, 2005), such as interpretivism and postmodernism. The positivist scientific tradition has been built on strict rules for the accumulation of facts that are 'experienced as being independent of opinion, belief, and cultural background' (Feyerabend, 1993, p.11). This paradigm has been critiqued by various scholars (for an overview of anti-positivist schools of thought, see: Steinmetz, 2005, Anthony Giddens, 2015) as being 'inadequate for the understanding of complex, nuanced, and

context-dependent social processes' (Prasad, 2017, p.4). Such scholars are particularly critical of the historical tendency in the social sciences to mirror the methods of the natural sciences, viewing positivist epistemology as not only problematic but wholly unachievable: 'the idea of a fixed method, or of a fixed theory of rationality, rests on too naive a view of man and his social surroundings' (Feyerabend, 1993, p.18).

Newer brands of positivism, often found under the umbrella of 'post-positivism', make softer claims of certainty and objectivity, acknowledging instead that facts are contextual and theory-laden (Groff, 2004, Danermark, Ekström and Karlsson, 2019). While the earlier school believed we could acquire objective knowledge through empirical observation, post-positivists believe we can uncover approximate truths through similar methods, whilst acknowledging the limitations of this enterprise. Particularly relevant here is the ontological 'realism' that underpins post-positivist approaches. Groff describes this as the assumption that 'the social world is neither voluntaristically produced by, nor reducible to, the thoughts or actions of individuals' (Groff, 2004, p.10). His argument is that the social world is not simply 'constructed spontaneously', as some constructivists imply, but through a process that always builds on existing conditions and beliefs (Groff, 2004, p.19). We can therefore identify essential characteristics even in social constructs. However, essence might be conceptualised in this paradigm as 'nominal' rather than 'real', in other words, the 'manifest features of a thing that we regard as indispensable to our concept of it' (Groff, 2004, p.15)

The post-positivist paradigm is highly influential in the social sciences because it allows us to define and understand generalisable characteristics about social phenomena. Much of the research in humour studies, for example, has taken a post-positivist approach in their attempt to identify the universal characteristics of humour or laughter (Provine, 2000, Lynch, 2010, Martin and Kuiper, 2016, Attardo, 2017). These will be explored in more depth in section 3.2. Though there are valuable insights that can be taken from these studies, the post-positivist approach is deemed here unsuitable for the analysis of the subjective and contextual meanings of identity. In short, this paradigm favours, even if only cautiously, a form of essentialism that is incompatible with the present research.

In direct contrast to positivism lie the postmodern and poststructuralist schools of thought. These two 'post-' categories are in fact distinct, despite their conflation in the literature: postmodernism is understood as a rejection of the grand narratives of modernity (Lyotard, 1984), while poststructuralism is a more specific critique of 'structuralism' (Hawkes, 1977,

Dosse, 1997), which can be, and often is, postmodern. A brief explanation of modernity is warranted in order to understand postmodernism/poststructuralism.

Modernity is often (Hall, 1996, Giddens, 2012, Whimster and Lash, 2014), associated with the meta-narrative of Enlightenment, characterised by progress, reason, and individualism as a basis for epistemological legitimisation. Though the values of Enlightenment are understood by many as a positive development in human history (Habermas, 2018, Pinker, 2018), others have been critical, if not hostile, to these ideas (See for example, the Frankfurt School: Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002, Horkheimer, Adorno and Noeri, 2002). If taken to their logical extreme, critics argue, life becomes 'a purposiveness without purpose' (Horkheimer, Adorno and Noeri, 2002, p.69), which leads at best to an alienated existence, and at worse to a violent reconfiguration of society as a way to counteract this absence of meaning.

These conditions of modernity are significant here because they provide the contextual background to our contemporary understanding of identity and the self (Giddens, 1991, Taylor, 1992, Izenberg, 2019). As Bauman (1996) explains, it is the fragmentation and uncertainty of the modern world that creates the 'problem of identity' (p. 18). This new modernity is characterised by its fluidity: 'solid' social norms of the past, which were thought to limit individual freedom, have been radically 'melted'; in their place, we find a 'liquid modernity' that is malleable but fleeting (Bauman, 2000). Social identity is now a *task* that is 'expected, needed and bound to be performed' by the individual (Bauman and Leoncini, 2018).

The emergence of *national* identity in particular is explained by the modernist school (Gellner, 1983, 1996) as a top-down construction made possible by the industrialisation of society. State powers in the industrial era sought to 'solidify' the association between nation and state, often through suppression of local cultures. Though nations may have pre-modern origins (Smith, 2009, Leith and Soule, 2011), the expected confluence of nation and state is seen as a distinctly modern phenomenon. Modernist thinking is also relevant for our understanding of comedy. For critics like Bergson (1911) and Nietzsche (see: Lippitt, 1992), laughter is seen as a kind of response against the fragmented, mechanical and overly rational modern world (see Identity and Scottishness chapter for a longer discussion on these themes). These critiques of modernity illustrate what Lyotard (1984) refers to as the 'postmodern' condition, which is characterised by an 'incredulity toward meta-narratives' (p.xxiv). Even the nation-state model is weakened in today's 'liquid' modernity (Bauman, 2000, p.185).

The poststructuralist perspective is similarly anti-essentialist, but has a more specific focus. It builds on Saussure's (2011) structuralism, which defines language as a system of signs (semiotics), where meaning is relational and determined by difference (Howarth, 2013, p.9). Poststructuralists agree on the importance of structures and linguistic signs, but question some of Saussure's underlying assumptions (Howarth, 2013, p.38). Derrida's (1988, 1997) deconstructionist approach, for instance, argues that meaning cannot be fully defined at all since structures and signs are never fixed. Foucault (1977, 1980, 1988), on the other hand, draws attention to the relationship between knowledge and power through a genealogical approach that destabilises naturalised discurvise structures.

The poststructuralist view of knowledge put forward by Derrida, Foucault, and others (Barthes, 1972, Butler, 2002, Deleuze, 2004) is particularly relevant for this thesis. Since meaning is understood to be discursively constructed rather than essentially given, then identity too must be contingent and always incomplete, rather than 'transcendental' as previously conceived (Husserl, 2012, Moran, 2016). This 'decentering' of the subject has paved the way for constructivist approaches to nationalism (e.g., Howarth, Norval and Stavrakakis, 2000, Özkirimli, 2010), as well as postcolonial theories of identity, which have been employed in Scottish studies as a way to understand Scotland's imagined sense of nationality (Connell, 2003, Macdonald, 2006, Homberg-Schramm, 2018). Poststructuralism is also relevant here because comedy itself can be viewed as an exercise in deconstruction: it can make the familiar strange and de-naturalise the taken for granted. The comedian can thus be akin to a philosopher who makes us question our assumptions about the world (Nikulin, 2014, Gimbel, 2018).

While this thesis agrees with the ontological tenants of postmodernism and poststructuralism, the present research is not poststructuralist in style (Hacking, 1994, Howarth, 2013). As Howarth (2013) proposes, poststructuralist scholarship is characterised by its concern with 'structure, agency, and power' (p. 1). Although these concepts are arguably featured in any social analysis (including this one), it is not the primary aim of this thesis to offer a critique of the power structures that govern comedy and Scottish identity (although this too would offer an important contribution to knowledge). Rather, this thesis aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the way in which Scottish identity is constructed within Scottish comedy, as well as the political functions of Scottish stand-up. This endeavour is underpinned by an *interpretivist* view of knowledge that sees reality as contingent on our perception and interpretation of shared meanings.

Weber's (2012) theory of understanding (Verstehen) is a key influence in the establishment of the interpretivist school of thought. In Weber's view, comprehending human behaviour occurs not through appeals to generalisable laws, but through a deeper understanding of how actors perceive their own actions and that of others. It is assumed that social actors understand their own reality in subjective ways, though their ability to make sense of the world is 'mediated by the cognitive schema and language that we obtain from our wider societies' (Prasad, 2017, p.14). Positivists are sceptical of the validity of such subjective interpretations – humans are, after all, prone to misrepresenting and misinterpreting things. In a postpositivist tradition, this is addressed with a stronger focus on the accuracy and objectivity of descriptions (Gillham, 2008, Bazeley, 2013a). An interpretivist epistemology, however, challenges the very dichotomy between 'mental/non-mental' or subjective/objective' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p.181). This does not mean that 'anything goes', as some propose (Feyerabend, 1993). Rather, it implies an ontological view of the subject and of social phenomena as 'intersubjectively constituted' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p.178).

Building on this ontological foundation, identities are understood here to be discursively constructed and reproduced through performance and interaction (Butler, 2002, Denzin, 2003). Denzin (2003) illustrates this well as he problematises the distinction between the public self and the private self:

> there is no essential self or private, real self behind the public self. There are only different selves, different performances.... These performances are based on different narrative and interpretive practices
>
> (Denzin, 2003, p.86)

This view of the performative self opens up possibilities for the analysis of stand-up comedy. For example, some scholars have used a narrative approach (Woodrow, 2001, Colleary, 2015) to understand the way comedians develop their comic persona, or how audiences interpret the performance (DeCamp, 2017, Cooper, 2018), while others have focused on the micro elements of interaction (Rutter, 1997, Weaver, 2016). What these have in common is their focus on the contingent, interactional construction of meaning in stand-up. The following section explores the interpretivist paradigm in more depth, and outlines the particular theoretical framework of this thesis.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This thesis is informed by two methodological schools of thought: performance studies and discourse analysis. The rationale for this choice will be outlined in this section, starting with a review of discourse analysis, followed by an exploration of performance. It will be argued that poststructuralist discourse analysis offers important concepts that can aid our understanding of identity construction, such as Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) notion of hegemonic struggle, and Bourdieu's (1991) habitus and symbolic capital, but that these over-emphasise structure over interaction. Critical Discourse Analysis (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999) offers a useful way of understanding discourse in interaction, but it too has limitations since it does not focus sufficiently on practice, and it takes a normative stance.

The present study requires an approach that combines discourse and practice, but looks at these at the micro level, i.e., as interaction. Discourse is seen here through the lens of performance because the stand-up show operates as such (Schechner, 2000). Moreover, as will be demonstrated, performance studies can provide a framework for better understanding identity, which is also performatively constituted in everyday life through an identified stylistic practice (Austin, 1975, Butler, 1997).

2.3.1 Discourse Analysis

This section starts by outlining the poststructuralist strand of discourse analysis, before discussing critical discourse analysis. In the poststructuralist school of thought, discourse is understood as a 'relational system of signifying practices' that encompasses social phenomena (Torfing, 2005, p.9). As Derrida (1997 [1974]) puts it, there is 'nothing outside the text' (p. 163). The Discourse Theory developed by Laclau and Mouffe (1987, 2001) inherits from Derrida the view that meanings are never fixed, and social phenomena are therefore never finished or total. There is always a struggle for hegemony, i.e., to sediment a dominant discourse that excludes other possibilities. Moreover, the self is understood as fragmented, always occupying 'subject positions' that are determined by discourses. Borrowing from Lacan (2005), Laclau and Mouffe (2001) therefore understand the subject as incomplete, unconsciously striving to become whole through their various identities. Such identities are of course, contingent, and negotiated in discursive processes, even though we perceive them to be essentialist.

In line with its anti-foundationalist ethos, there is often a reluctance to delineate a research method within poststructuralist discourse analysis, and this can make it difficult to employ it as a framework. Prescribing a specific way of conducting research or indeed categorising and labelling something as a research programme is seen as a 'powerful rhetorical practice' that tries to fix one meaning while masking others (Edwards and Nicoll, 2001, p.105). This thesis certainly draws on some of the key thinkers in this school of thought, but it places less emphasis on overarching structures of power, focusing instead on the contextualised ways in which identities are discursively constructed in interaction.

Before moving away from the poststructuralist camp, however, another key thinker, Pierre Bourdieu, deserves some further consideration. Though Bourdieu never labelled himself a 'poststructuralist', and seemed to reject the endeavours of 'discourse analysis' (Bourdieu, 1991, pp.28–31), his work develops out of structuralism and finds a way beyond it (Harrison, 1993, p.37). Like Foucault, Bourdieu is interested in questions of power, and sees institutionalised discourses as the basis for relations of domination. However, Bourdieu places a greater emphasis on practice, and develops a new vocabulary to describe the way discursive power operates:

> Any kind of discourse, whatever it may be, is the product of an encounter between a linguistic habitus, i.e. a competence that is inextricably both technical and social (both the ability to speak and the ability to speak in a certain socially marked fashion), and a market, i.e., a system of price formation that contributes to give linguistic production an orientation in advance
>
> (Bourdieu, 2008, p.133).

Bourdieu thus focuses on the constraints around discourse and action. First of these is the *habitus*, which can be described as a set of dispositions acquired in early childhood through socialisation, which shape our practices, perceptions and attitudes. These dispositions are structured, i.e., they are linked to particular social conditions.

The habitus provides individuals with 'a sense of how to act and respond in the course of their daily lives… It gives them a 'feel for the game', a sense of what is appropriate in the circumstances and what is not' (Bourdieu, 1991, p.13). National identity can be understood though this framework, as Wodak et al. (2009) explains:

> National identity is a complex of common or similar beliefs or opinions internalised in the course of socialisation…and of common or similar emotional attitudes with regard to these aspects and outgroups, as well as common or similar behavioural dispositions
>
> (Wodak et al., 2009, p.28).

Similarly, we can look at the divergent socialisation process across social classes, whereby class *habitus* generates norms/resources that include ways of behaving, e.g., codes of politeness (Bourdieu, 1977, Mills, 2017), ways of speaking, e.g., regional dialects vs. RP (Bourdieu, 1991, Savage, 2015), and even taste, e.g., preferences for 'observational' vs 'intellectual' styles of comedy (Bourdieu, 2000, Friedman, 2014a).

Yet, Bourdieu also emphasises the significance of structured contexts (which he calls *fields*) in shaping actions. Drawing on the language of economics, he describes how the distribution of different kinds of resources (*capital*) determines the power relations within a given market (*field)*. Crucially, however, financial resources are not the only form of capital. Bourdieu also highlights the significance of cultural capital (e.g., knowledge and familiarity with legitimate forms of culture) social capital (e.g., network of acquaintances, or membership in a group) and symbolic capital (e.g., reputation and recognition). To give a Scottish example from Kelly's (2007) research, we can observe how the local (e.g., Edinburgh) habitus, in combination with particular forms of cultural capital (e.g., embeddedness in local football culture) result in a tendency towards specific practices and discourses within the field of Scottish football (e.g., a Scottish football identity constituted in opposition to the Old Firm).

Bourdieu's concepts are useful when describing the competing norms, values and resources in the field of stand-up comedy: the predominantly London-based 'tastemakers' at the Fringe whose cultural capital gives them legitimacy to shape the festival; or the symbolic capital of a Glaswegian accent in Scottish stand-up. However, this thesis does not use a Bourdieusian framework; in agreement with Chouliaraki and Fairclough's (1999) critique, it finds that Bourdieu's theory prioritises structure over interaction, and therefore fails to effectively account for change:

> In not recognizing that discourse is inherently constitutive of social life, Bourdieu slips into an objectivist ontology which posits a dimension of the social that is outside the ongoing process [of] signification and constitution
>
> (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999, p.30)

Instead, Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) emphasise the importance of the discursive dimension of practice, for it allows us to conceptualise 'local interactions as sites of struggle of competing and contradictory representations with a potential to change dominant classifications' (p. 105).

Fairclough, who is viewed as one of the founders of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), explains CDA as a 'three-dimensional' framework:

> The aim is to map three separate forms of analysis onto one another: analysis of (spoken or written) language texts, analysis of discourse practice (processes of text production, distribution and consumption) and analysis of discursive events as instances of sociocultural practice
>
> (Fairclough, 1995, p.2)

The value of CDA therefore lies in this holistic and comprehensive attitude to discourse that incorporates the relationship between language, power relations, social practice and structures, and its applicability as both a theory and method. Fairclough's approach in particular has been widely regarded as providing a decisive methodology for the systematic analysis of language by combining textual and sociological analysis.

However, some of the premises of CDA, at least in its original form (Fairclough, 2003), are problematic. Despite recognising discourse as practice, CDA tends to place a disproportionate emphasis on written and spoken texts, which ignores other meaning-making signs (Kress, 2010). Moreover, CDA bases its findings on the assumption that texts have an overbearing influence on the thoughts and actions of the reader – an assumption that some have called 'naïve linguistic determinism' (Breeze, 2011, p.508). Hegemonic discourses undoubtedly shape one's view of reality, but people are exposed to multiple, competing discourses in today's globalised world, and have some agency in how they navigate these. The 'one-way influence

from discourse to thought' that is assumed in CDA therefore seems methodologically misguided as it leads to a circular analysis (Stubbs, 1997, Breeze, 2011, p.509).

Moreover, CDA sets out a normative goal from the outset – it strives to be 'critical' in its endeavours. However, its concept of 'critical' is not without problems (Breeze, 2011, p.498). As some scholars point out (Luke, 2002, Martin, 2004), many CDA researchers view media as ideologically motivated to retain processes of oppression. Consequently, these scholars focus on a deconstruction of hegemonic discourses that is deterministically negative. In other words, analysts know from the outset what they are going to find (Stubbs, 1997, p.2), and place little focus on the transformative functions of discourses (Martin, 2004). To address some of these shortcomings, the framework adopted here combines discourse analysis with performance theory; the latter will be presented in the following section.

2.3.2 Performance Theory

The term 'performance' requires some further clarification at this point, since the concept has multiple, contested meanings (Auslander, 2003, Schechner, 2003). A useful definition is offered by McAuley, who lists the following requirements for an activity to be regarded as performance:

> it must involve the live presence of the performers and those witnessing it, that there must be some intentionality on the part of the performer or witness or both, and that these conditions in turn necessitate analysis of the place and temporality which enable both parties to be present to each other, as well as what can be described as the performance contract between them, whether explicit or implicit. (McAuley, 2010, p.45)
>
> (McAuley, 2010, p.45)

The stand-up show can easily fall under this category. It is intentional, live, and involves a performer, an audience, and the framing of a comic space, 'where the normal rules of daily living are temporarily suspended' (Colleary, 2015, p.59). Unlike other artforms, however, (successful) stand-up comedy needs to appear truthful, even if the performer's authentic self (if such a thing exists) is mediated by the comic frame.

Complicating matters further, the identities that we claim in everyday life are not dissimilar to a performance, as Goffman (1956) points out. Our everyday actions constitute a performance, watched by observers (audience) and other participants (actors) in interactions that are bound by behavioural norms (scripts). Our attempts at self-expression mirror the theatrics of the stage, as we too use props and mannerisms to indicate the 'character' we are playing, thus guiding how our 'audience' sees us (Goffman, 1956, 2017). The main topic under analysis in this study, namely the construction of identity in Scottish comedy, can be situated as performance on both counts: it is a staged performance under the framework of a comic space, but it is also a window into the comedian's offstage self, and this too is performative (Goffman, 1956, Turner, 2001, Butler, 2002).

The question we can pose then is how to differentiate between performance as it applies to the stage, and the everyday, and indeed whether it is even possible to do so. For Schechner (2003), the difference is one of degree, not kind:

> Performance is an inclusive term. Theatre is only one node on a continuum that reaches from the ritualisations of animals (including humans) through performances in everyday life – greetings, displays of emotion, family scenes, professional roles, and so on – through to play, sports, theatre, dance, ceremonies, rites, and performances of great magnitude.
>
> (Schechner, 2003, p.xvii)

Like Goffman (1986), Schechner sees performance as consisting of repetition. Both ritualised activities and aesthetic performances draw on restored behaviour, i.e., 'strips of living behaviour [that] can be rearranged or reconstructed' (Schechner, 2000, p.35).

It is only through the 'repetition of recognisable behaviours' that a performance can be intelligible to its audience (Auslander, 2018, p.88). However, as Gadamer (2004) highlights, this repetition is not a literal replication of the original, rather, 'every repetition is as original as the work itself' (p. 120). Schechner's concept of restored behaviour in performance can also be applied to stand-up, as suggested by Colleary (2015). The stand-up 'material', as she explains, should be understood as 'strips of living behaviour reconstructed or rearranged, elaborated or distorted and independent of the causal systems that made them' (Colleary, 2015, p.49).

In the realm of the everyday, repetition is also a fundamental element of identity construction. As Billig emphasises, 'behaviour and thoughts are never totally created anew, but they follow, and thus repeat, familiar patterns, even when they change such patterns. To act and to speak, one must remember' (Billig, 1995, p.42). Billig draws attention to the social condition that forms identity – to exist as social beings in the world, we must learn existing patterns of behaviour, we must remember and embody what we learn, even as we forget that our actions are repetitions. This point is made in Butler's seminal *Gender Trouble*:

> as in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation.
>
> (Butler, 2002, p.178)

Drawing on speech-act theory (Austin, 1975, Searle, 1979), Butler sees discourse as constitutive, rather than representative, of reality.

The *performative* function of language is first given prominence by Austin (1975), who saw speech (under certain circumstances) as an action in itself, rather than simply a description of things as they are. Unlike Austin, however, Butler broadens the concept beyond linguistic utterances: 'performativity is not just about speech acts. It is also about bodily acts' (Butler, 2004, p.198). Moreover, the radical claim made by Butler and others who favour the performative approach is that identity is something we *do*; it is only through the act of doing that the subject comes to exist. This does not mean, however, that we can freely choose our identity, as this is composed 'within the limits of a small range of viable roles' (Loxley, 2007, p.128). Performativity, as Butler (1993) elaborates, is not 'a singular or deliberate "act," but, rather, the reiterative and citational practices by which discourse produces the effects that it names' (p. 2). There is a similarity to formal theatrical performance here again, as the performativity of identity occurs within the constraints of a social 'script'. Yet, as Schechner proposes, the key difference is one of conscious intention: 'professional actors are aware that they are acting' (Schechner, 2003, p.303).

This distinction between *performance* as deliberate, and *performativity* as unreflexive is not without criticism. Edensor (2002a), who applies performativity to the construction of national

identity, points out that these two modes are 'imbricated in each other': theatrical performance can become 'second nature' and unreflexive, just as mundane everyday actions can be performed critically and consciously (p. 89). Rather than making a distinction based on reflexivity, it might be more useful to think about how a performance is framed. Loxley (2007) points out that a staged performance is often understood as something separate from, and perhaps lesser than 'real life':

> Nothing that happens onstage is ever more than an illusion, so nothing that happens there need have any consequences for real life. The same ontology allows us to see that the actor or performer exists prior to or underneath the role she or he plays; the role is an act that can be put on and put off at will without ever calling the underlying identity of the performer into question (p. 142)

Loxley points to the distinction between the serious and non-serious as the framework through which to understand performance, a distinction that is also central to Austin's speech act theory. If said by an actor on stage, then the 'performative utterance', he claims, is used 'in ways parasitic upon its normal use' (Austin, 1975, p.22).

In turn, critics of Austin have 'de-constructed' this hierarchical sorting of serious over non-serious (see: Derrida, 1988). The philosophical task of identifying an ontology of performance is beyond the scope of this thesis, but the dichotomy between serious and non-serious is particularly pertinent for the study of stand-up comedy, a genre that is notoriously categorised as the latter (see: section 3.4). Comedy clearly has the potential to be 'serious' (Lockyer and Pickering, 2005, Donian, 2018, Chattoo and Feldman, 2020), and stand-up comedy, in particular, purposefully blurs the line between real and fictional (Brodie, 2014, Double, 2014, Colleary, 2015). Yet, humour operates under the framework of 'play', within which normal rules generally do not apply: 'When something is "only a joke", we allow the speaker licence to subvert our usual standards of honesty and decency'. (Quirk, 2015, p.36). Stand-up comedy performance thus uses this non-serious framing in order to engage with the serious: 'it is the status of the comedy gig as a protected world apart which makes interaction that would be censored outside of the performance situation credible enough to be worthy of attention' (Quirk, 2015, p.37). The comic frame is what establishes the stand-up gig as a *performance*.

A brief digression will be taken here in order to elucidate the disciplinary boundaries of this research. As other comedy scholars observe, 'any analysis of a text which provokes laughter

must come to terms with a huge body of critical work' (Craig, 2001, p.18). Craig's words ring true as this thesis grapples with literature from a vast number of academic fields. At the same time, research is usually shaped by the requirements and norms of one's disciplinary home – after all, academic research is also 'performative' (Gergen and Gergen, 2016). The present study is situated in the social sciences, even while it borrows insights from the arts and humanities. This disciplinary distinction is made by Schechner (2000), who points to the 'two realms of performance theory':

> (1) looking at human behaviour—individual and social—as a genre of performance; (2) looking at performances—of theatre, dance, and other "art forms"—as a kind of personal or social interaction. These two realms, or spheres, can be metaphorically figured as interfacing at a double two-way mirror. From one face of the mirror persons interested in aesthetic genres peep through at "life". From the other side, persons interested in the "social sciences" peep through at "art" (p.296)

To take Schechner's expression, it would be apt to say that this research 'peeps through' at comedy in order to understand the social world. Performance theory offers a way to think about identity as active and interactive and is therefore fitting for the study of identity in stand-up. Having established the theoretical framework for this research, the following section will outline the particular methods used for data collection.

2.4 Data Collection

The methods for data collection in the present research include participant observation of Scottish stand-up shows with detailed fieldnotes (observational data), and interviews with Scottish comedians (interactional data). While it is common for stand-up comedy shows, particularly those by big name comedians, to be recorded and produced for television, DVD, or streaming, stand-up is typically a live experience that relies on the unique interaction between individual audiences and the performer (Rutter, 1997). This is echoed by Brodie (2009a), who argues that a key element of stand-up comedy is the illusion of 'intimacy'. This consequently calls for an analysis that is not mediated:

> To divorce the stand-up text from the context and texture of performance… raises the problem of de-contextualisation…any study of stand-up comedy [must] consider not only the verbal text but also its performance context.
>
> (Brodie, 2009a, p.154).

It is the live comedy performance in its original context that must be analysed if one is to fully capture the experience of the show and the multimodal meanings at work.

At the same time, since this research is concerned with how the comedians construct meaning in their performance and present a framed self (Goffman, 1956), the use of interviews was also deemed important. This study therefore triangulates two different methods of data collection (Denzin, 1978, Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). This combination of methods is compatible with the interpretivist epistemology of this thesis, and has been used extensively in stand-up comedy research (see for example: Craig, 2001, Woodrow, 2001, Rodrigues, 2013). While participant observation allows the researcher to experience the show and take field notes, the interviews provide first-hand knowledge of how some comedians view their own identity, their comedy, and the role of stand-up. Each of these methods will be outlined in more detail below.

2.4.1 Participant Observation

The observational data for this research was collected at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival 2017. For the selection of shows relevant to this project, an analysis of the Edinburgh Fringe catalogue was conducted by searching for 'Scottish' stand-up comedy shows. The complexities of defining 'Scottish' or 'stand-up' were acknowledged and taken into account during this iterative selection process. In line with the interpretivist paradigm outlined above, this research does not wish to impose categorisations. Rather, the goal is to understand how people relate to societal categories. Thus, it was the comedian's (self-)identification as a stand-up comic and as Scottish that was used for the selection process. Relevant shows were identified by using the online catalogue for the Edinburgh Fringe, which included a filter for both 'stand-up' and 'Scottish'. This selection method was by no means perfect, but considering the incredibly large number of comedy shows at the Fringe festival, it provided a systematic way of identifying relevant shows. The results were screened for errors as some shows categorised as 'stand-up' or 'Scottish' by the catalogue did not match the self-description of the artists themselves.

During this phase of the study, the researcher's role was one of participant observer. Using Spradley's (2016) taxonomy, we can categorise ethnography based on 'degree of involvement' (p. 58). According to this view, the level of participation ranges from 'passive', when the researcher is present 'at the scene of action but does not participate or interact with other people to any great extent' (Spradley, 2016, p.59); to 'complete' – when the researcher is actively involved, and studying a situation in which they are already 'ordinary participants' (Spradley, 2016, p.61). The level of participation here lies between 'passive' and 'complete', but is skewed in the direction of observation. While there is no interaction with other audience members as part of this research, the researcher is not simply an outsider looking in, but takes on the role of an audience member and therefore participates in the activity under study.

Considering the lack of research on Scottish stand-up comedy, the objective of the observation phase was to cast a wide net and attend as many relevant shows as possible in order have a general overview of the field. Thirty-eight shows were attended during the course of the Edinburgh Fringe 2017 (see Appendix for list of shows), and detailed fieldnotes were taken during and after the performances. Of course, it is impossible to record everything that happens in a comedy show, so some selection is needed. With regard to the observational notes, special attention was paid to the following:

- 'Thematic' elements - what topics are covered and how; which topics are the most salient?
- 'Interaction' elements - how does the comedian interact with the audience? How much of the show derives from interaction? How do audiences interact with the show (heckling, interrupting, unpredictability)?

Aside from these broad guiding principles, the observations were flexible rather than systematic. As Sapsford and Jupp (2006) point out, a less structured approach to participant observation serves to 'minimize the influence of the observer's preconceptions and to avoid imposing existing preconceived categories' (p. 62). As the research progressed, however, patterns and ideas started to emerge, which shaped the analysis of the shows – these will be outlined in section 2.5.

2.4.2 Interviews

This study used semi-structure interviews as a second method of data collection. A total of 6 semi-structured interviews were conducted between 2017 and 2019, with Scottish comedians

who performed at the Fringe in 2017. Most of the interviewees were approached by the researcher in person after their Fringe show, aside from two who were contacted online after a recommendation from another interviewee. The sample includes a mix of gender, race, and localities. They are four males and two females, and four white and two non-white participants. The localities represented are Glasgow (4), Perth (1) and Edinburgh (1). This variety is roughly proportional to that of phase one, as the Fringe shows also consisted of mostly white, male and Glaswegian comedians. The small sample size reflects the methodology of the research, which is qualitative and exploratory in nature. A smaller sample has the benefit of providing rich insights that are not possible with larger numbers.

Additionally, the researcher is weary of an over-reliance on interviews. Academia, much like the media, tends to favour the idea of 'interviews as a means of discovering and revealing secret personal realities behind public facades' (Hammersley, 2003, p.119), so much so that we have become what some (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997, Silverman, 2017) call an 'interview society'. This stands in contrast to the performative view of identity taken in this thesis. Following Denzin (2003) and Atkinson and Coffey (2003), the interview is thought of not as a window into the authentic self, but as a performative action. Interviews are one of the sites where biographical work can take place, but they are not a 'privileged encounter' (Whitaker and Atkinson, 2019, p.621). Colleary's (2015) study of identity in stand-up comedy echoes this sentiment, with the comic persona being viewed as a continuation, rather than a break from the authentic self (see: 4.2.3). The interview, much like the comedy stage, is an opportunity to 'give a sense of yourself as a narrative identity' (Colleary, 2015, p.98), but both are shaped and constrained by the distinctive characteristics of the situation.

One major difference between the stage performance and the interview is that the latter is conducted for the purposes of research, and participants have the choice to remain anonymous. While anonymity is common in social science research, some have argued for a more open and flexible approach:

> interviewees, who have spent their time and provided valuable information to the researcher, may want, as is usual in journalistic interviews, to be credited with their full name.
>
> (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2018, p.28)

The participants in the present study opted to disclose their identity, and welcomed the chance to present their viewpoints openly. This is in line with ESRC guidance on research ethics, which allows interviews to be attributed provided that correct procedures are followed to ensure participants have been given all necessary information and the option to consent (ESRC, 2015). In accordance with the UWS (2017), European Commission (Iphofen, 2012), and Political Studies Association (APSA, 2012) ethics guidelines, every effort has been taken to ensure that participants have sufficient understanding about the research project and about their consent options through the use of participant information sheets and written consent forms, the use of which is compliant with GDPR regulations. The ethical approval confirmation from UWS and the consent forms used with research participants can be found in the Appendix.

The instrumental purpose of the research interview also produces specific power relations. As Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) point out, there is always an asymmetry to the research interview – not necessarily because of any 'intentional exertion of power', but as a result of the structural positions of each actor (p. 38). The researcher determines the interview topics, asks the questions, and has a 'monopoly of interpretation' (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2018, p.38). These characteristics may influence how participants respond to the interviewer. Some of this can be mitigated by giving participants some freedom in the process. For example, interviewees had a say in the choice of location and time for the interview, most choosing a quiet café in the afternoon.

Such logistic decisions are not inconsequential (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002, Gubrium, 2012). By including participants in the process, we can democratise the interview interaction, allowing both interviewer and participant to become 'partners … in consolidating the knowledge' (Gubrium, 2012, p.210). The interviews were semi-structured, ensuring that the main topics of interest to the thesis (national identity, and the political function of comedy) were covered. However, the participants had a lot of room to shape the interview and to discuss elements of identity and comedy that mattered to them. The methods for the analysis of the interview data are outlined in detail in the following section.

2.5 Data Analysis Methods

As described in the previous sections, this study utilises two methods: observation and interviews. The data from the participant observation phase entails – 1) Notes taken during the performances, and 2) Promotional material. Data from the interviews includes 1) Interview

transcripts and 2) Interview notes. The first step in the analysis is to integrate all the data in one place. As advocated by various scholars (MacMillan, 2005, Lewins and Silver, 2007, Ryan, 2009, Saldana, 2009, Friese, 2012, Bazeley, 2013b), the process of analysing qualitative data can be facilitated through the use of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). The use of software was indispensable here, as it allowed for a more efficient and systematic analysis of the data.

A number of CAQDAS were considered for the present research, including Nvivo, Atlas.ti, and MAXQDA. The Atlas.ti software was deemed to be the best option, both for practical reasons (full version available for Mac OS) and for its functionality. As MacMillan (2005) notes, the majority of CAQDAS 'creates distance by lifting discourse out of context' (p.5). By contrast, the functionalities and user interface in Atlas.ti encourage the researcher to work more closely with data in context (Friese, 2012, Paulus and Lester, 2016). For example, Atlas.ti has built-in tools to facilitate transcription. Audio files can be uploaded and linked to text. Images can also be imported and linked to text in a similar way. This means coding occurs both on the transcribed text and the audio file. CAQDAS software is viewed here primarily as an organisational tool - it cannot perform the analysis. Atlas.ti offers a way to more efficiently and transparently integrate and code data, find patterns, and visualise/present findings.

Once the data was integrated into the Atlas.ti software, a 'thematic analysis' was conducted. The term thematic analysis is understood here as a general procedure, which involves reducing the data into coded segments, identifying themes, and searching for patterns, commonalities and differences (Saldana, 2009, Bazeley, 2013a, Flick, 2014). The coding procedure draws on techniques outlined by Saldana (2009), Friese (2012), and Bazeley (2013b), who propose the following steps: identifying units for analysis (segmenting); labelling segments (coding); organising codes into a coding scheme (categorising); identifying patterns across codes (building themes).

Thematic analysis can, as Maxwell and Chmiel (2014) point out, result in de-contextualisation. However, considering the high number of shows that comprise the data set, this method was vital as a way to reduce the data to a manageable amount. A thematic analysis that looked first at the discursive content of the shows allowed the researcher to focus on 'selected aspects of meaning' that are relevant of the research (Schreier, 2014, p.170), and to find patterns across the different stand-up performances. This process was both concept-driven and data-driven; in the initial stages the researcher looked for segments in the data that resonated with theories of

nationalism and Scottish representation. However, other concepts and meanings emerged from the data during the analysis. One example of this is the discourse of masculinity, which challenged traditional understandings of the Scottish male.

In line with the interpretivist epistemological grounding of this thesis, however, it was important to consider not only *what* is said, but *how* it is said. This required a closer reading of the texts. Identity is viewed here as a discursive process that takes place through interaction. As Goffman (1956, p.155) explains, 'when an individual appears before others, he wittingly and unwittingly projects a definition of the situation, of which a conception of himself is an important part' (see also: 4.2). The analysis of the data therefore needed to focus on the positionality of the performers (particularly in relation to race, gender and class), and the varying techniques employed by them to present their own narrative identity. For racial minorities, for example, their presentation of self often involved anticipating and negotiating 'misrecognition' (Muñoz, 1999).

The analysis of the political functions of comedy also required a discursive and performative approach. In this process, the resources used by the performers and their effects were the focus of analysis. For example, one performer's use of photographs on stage stood out as a semiotic practice that constructed a deeper level of 'intimacy' (Brodie, 2014) during the live show. The performers also employed discursive strategies to 're-familiarise' or 'de-familiarise' (Martin, 2015) the audience with particular discourses. Overall, the analysis of the comedy shows in this thesis offers an interplay between the macro-level, (content across the data set), and the micro-level (meaning within a given performance). The findings from the data analysis can be found in chapters 5 and 6. These are then discussed in more detail in chapter 7. The following section will outline the approach taken in the review of the literature.

2.6 Approach to Literature Review

The nature of the present research poses a set of challenges when it comes to reviewing the academic literature. Firstly, the research topics (national identity and stand-up comedy) are not confined to one particular discipline, and consequently require an engagement with literature from a wide range of social science and humanities subjects. Secondly, key concepts such as nationalism, humour, identity, and political comedy are heavily contested. Finally, academic focus on both Scottish identity and stand-up comedy remains largely unexplored at present, thus making the list of previous empirical research a very short one.

As a result, the researcher opted against a 'systematic' literature review (Jesson, Matheson and Lacey, 2011, Boland, Cherry and Dickson, 2017). The approach taken here does not restrict the search to a pre-determined protocol, nor does it aim to provide a basis for intervention of a specific problem. The goal is instead to provide an overview of the relevant concepts and how they have been understood across disciplines. The literature search relied on a combination of database searches (e.g., ProQuest, JISC, JStor) and the snowballing method, i.e. using the bibliography of relevant texts to identify further literature.

The literature review is split into two main sections: 1) Humour and Comedy and 2) Identity and Scottishness. The first section (Chapter 3) looks at different ways of understanding the phenomenon of humour from a historical perspective before reviewing current scholarship. The second section (Chapter 4) looks at identity across disciplines, from conceptions of the self and (social) identity more generally, to national identity and Scottish identity in particular.

3 HUMOUR AND COMEDY

Despite its omnipresence in our lives, and its value as an experience, humour remains notoriously difficult to define and to explain. As Palmer (1994) observes, the challenge may lie in the fact that humour does not possess a set of common qualities: we can laugh at something that was not intended to be humorous, and recognise a joke without finding it funny. An almost endless stream of words could be conjured up to describe humour, all with slight differences in meaning - joke, jest, wit, satire, parody … defining terms can quickly become an insurmountable task. Indeed, some commentators (Horton, 1991, Olson, 2001, Stott, 2005) have even embraced the impossibility of definitions, declaring comedy to be 'precisely *a certain freedom from definition*s' (Olson, 2001, p.6). There may be some truth in Olson's claim – in fact, researching humour can leave one more perplexed than ever before; yet the attempt is necessary if the term is to be used in any meaningful way.

The terms comedy, humour, and laughter are understood here as different but interrelated. Following Palmer's (1994) nomenclature, the term 'comedy' is reserved for texts or performances that have a formalised comic aspect. Comedy is thus a genre that employs humour. A longer discussion on the genre of comedy and stand-up can be found in 3.4. Humour is broader than comedy since it involves anything that is 'actually or potentially funny, and the processes by which this "funniness" occurs' (Palmer, 1994, p.10). Laughter is broader still, since it can occur for reasons other than humour (e.g., embarrassment, politeness, etc.). While the link between humour and laughter is not taken for granted here, it is clear that the two overlap. Humour is generally understood as that which invokes laughter, or at least that which 'attempts to produce laughter' (Billig, 2005, p.179). In everyday life, we tend to view laughter as a 'product of humour' (Scott et al., 2014, p.618), and humour as an expression of the (intentional or unintentional) 'comic elements of life' (Meany, 2016, p.169).

Yet, as this literature review will demonstrate, laughter is not just a physiological response to comedic stimuli; rather, it fulfils various social and psychological functions (Zupančič, 2008, Scott et al., 2014, Watson, 2015). Comedy itself is in constant motion - our understanding of, and attitude towards, comedy cannot be divorced from the spatial and temporal context in

which it is situated (Brodie, 2009a, Lockyer and Myers, 2011). In sum, it is necessary to understand humour in order to analyse comedy, and in order to understand the concept of humour, we must also understand laughter. Taking these broad definitions as a starting point, this chapter will discuss the different ways in which comedy and laughter have been conceptualised in the literature, focusing on its philosophical, psychological, linguistic and social dimensions.

3.1 To Laugh or Not to Laugh: The Philosophy of Humour

In the field of philosophy, the distinction between seriousness and play, between the tragic and the comic, has been a significant focal point. These two forms of discourse have not always been given equal weight, however. In fact, as Zupančič (2008, p.3) observes, philosophy has tended to adopt a 'contemptuous attitude towards comedy'. While many great thinkers have commented on comedy and laughter (Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Kant, Nietzsche, to name but a few), their discussions on the topic were brief. The exception here is Aristotle, who dedicated the second part of his *Poetics* to comedy – though we now only have fragments of this lost book (Watson, 2012). It is not until the 20th Century that philosophers start engaging with comedy in more depth.

Recent years have seen a rise in comedy scholarship (for an overview, see: Marx and Sienkiewicz, 2018, Wilkie, 2019), as well as changing attitudes to comedy itself. As Billig (2005) points out, contemporary society has adopted an overwhelmingly positive view of comedy and laughter, pushing aside its 'less pleasant faces' (Billig, 2005, p.10). This development is seen by some as symptomatic of a moral 'imperative of happiness, positive thinking, and cheerfulness' endemic in our current modern, capitalist society (Zupančič, 2008, p.5). Such changes – if indeed we are seeing a rupture with the past – have implications for our understanding of the self and of the social world. Laughter is, after all, naturally social (Bergson, 1911), and stand-up comedy in particular, requires social interaction (Rutter, 1997).

To better understand this supposed shift, the following section will focus on the conception of laughter in antiquity. This might seem an odd place to start considering the contemporary timeframe of this research. However, it is in ancient Greece that one finds the invention of comedy in its dramaturgical form, as well as the roots of Western academic thought on laughter. Delving into this history can help us to understand the changes and continuities to the concepts

of humour and comedy, shedding light on how these operate in the specific context of modernity.

3.1.1 Laughter in Antiquity

Early philosophers have often been categorised as being *agelastic* (opposed to laughter), or at the very least, as holding laughter with some degree of suspicion (Halliwell, 2008). Pythagoras, for example, was said to abstain from 'laughter and from all means of seeking popularity with others, such as jokes and vulgar anecdotes' (Diogenes Laertius 8.19–20). Some also extend the agelastic charge to Plato (Halliwell, 2008, p.277), who described laughter as founded in 'malice' (Philebus 360 BCE, in Romanska and Ackerman, 2017), and Aristotle who saw jokes as a sort of verbal abuse (*loidorēma)* in his *Nicomachean Ethics*.

The agelastic leanings of early philosophy may very well be due to the prevalence of the 'superiority' theory of laughter at this time. While not a fully-fledged theory as such, at least not at this early stage, the idea that humour is a reflection of misplaced feeling of superiority over others - laughing at those who are seemingly inferior, or at their misfortunes - can be found in the writings of Plato and Aristotle alike. Comedy for Aristotle is an imitation of the 'ridiculous', of 'men worse than the average' (Poetics, in Aristotle, 1995, p. 2319). Laughing at the 'ridiculous' is also invoked by Plato in *Philebus,* where he describes it as a sort of 'wickedness'.

Contemporary critics (Morreall, 1983, Critchley, 2002) claim that this superiority theory largely dominated academic thought on laughter up until the 18th Century. Yet, at closer look, it becomes apparent that no attempt is made by ancient philosophers to construct an overarching theory of laughter, and moreover, that laughter itself served a variety of functions at this time, some of which were seen as positive or benign. Rather than a condemnation of laughter altogether, it would be more accurate to say that implicit distinctions were made between 'good' and 'bad' types of humour - a distinction that is intimately linked to social norms and ethics.

In childhood, laughter was understood to be an integral element of 'play' - it was associated with youthful innocence and 'make-believe' (Halliwell, 2008, p.21). As such, it could serve a didactic role by aiding cognitive development, as advocated by Plato in *Republic*: 'don't use force to train the children…use play instead', for 'nothing taught by force stays in the soul' (7.536a). While the laughter of childhood may be acceptable, there was a persistent concern

with less innocent uses of humour. In describing the character of the young, Aristotle claimed they are 'fond of fun, and therefore witty', but the latter trait is defined as 'well-bred insolence' (*Rhetoric,* 2.12, 1389b10–11). There was a further concern with the mocking type of laughter that is 'aggressively derisive of others', typically expressed by male adolescents (Halliwell, 2008, p.24). In other words, while play could serve a didactic purpose, laughter in youthful behaviour such as hubris, or vulgar and distasteful mockery of others was perceived rather negatively.

The connection between laughter and youth also informed a different but related discussion: that of the dichotomy (and hierarchy) of seriousness and play. As one moved into adulthood, the expectation was that more serious matters take precedence over play; the idea that one can deal with serious issues through play was refuted by Plato: 'if we intend to acquire virtue, even on a small scale, we can't be serious and comic too' (*Laws* 7.816e). Yet, Plato acknowledged that it is 'impossible to understand the serious side of things in isolation from their ridiculous aspect, or indeed appreciate anything at all except in the light of its opposite' (*Laws* 7.816e). Here we start to see the implied hierarchy of seriousness over play – a hierarchy that was also applied to the genres of Tragedy and Comedy.

A few significant differences between Tragedy and Comedy can help to illustrate the values attributed to the serious and the comic. Both the Old Comedy of Aristophanes and the New Comedy of Menander could be characterised by a happy (and improbable) ending that celebrates human triumph. Conversely, Tragedy focused on the demise of the hero, thus illustrating the complexities and limitations of human existence. Comedy tended to focus on the lives of ordinary people; Tragedy on the nobility. Comedy questioned authority and tradition; Tragedy reinforced it. Comedy concerned itself with social relations and communities; Tragedy on the individual (Nikulin, 2014, Romanska and Ackerman, 2017). Tragedy concentrated on individual free will and moral character, and the inevitable consequences of one's actions. Unlike the comic hero, who progresses through chance and good fortune, the tragic hero was destined to suffer for their mistakes.

Because of their intrinsic differences, the genres of Tragedy and Comedy evoked different reactions from the audience. Tragedy elicited in the observer a reflection over their own actions:

> Given that disaster through error can befall those better than us, we should realise how much more easily it could befall any one of us. If we value the prospect of happiness, we should fear and be on our guard against error
>
> (Kieran, 2013, p.22)

By contrast, Comedy offered no such lessons according to some critics (Stolnitz, 1955, Feagin, 1983, Feagin, Maynard and Maynard, 1997). In Stolnitz's (1955) evaluation of the two genres, the comic plot lacks plausibility, the comic character lacks complexity, and the comic struggle lacks moral reflection in comparison with tragedy.

An even harsher critique was posited by Plato, who denigrated comedy on various fronts: 1) comedy is an imitation of becoming, and therefore, a betrayal of the true; 2) comedy imitates 'base' human actions, and therefore cannot contribute to social morals; 3) comedy can, through ridicule, threaten the foundations of social order; and lastly, 4) comedy does not lead to reason, but prevents it, invoking pleasure instead (Nikulin, 2014, pp.6–7). Aristotle also appeared to favour tragedy over comedy since the former imitates the 'best' in people, while the latter imitates the 'worst' (Nikulin 2014, p. 7). A similar sentiment is later echoed by Hegel, who claimed that Tragedy corresponded to the 'sublime' and Comedy to the 'vulgar' (Hegel cited in Nikulin 2014, p. 30). In this sense, Tragedy was elevated to a higher status, a position that it arguably still enjoys to this day.

The relationship between play and seriousness can be further explored as the relation between body and mind. In Plato's *Republic,* a distinction is made between three parts of the soul: reason, spirit and appetite. The spirited part relates to emotions, particularly anger against injustice; it is the part of the soul that leads one to act courageously (*Republic,* 442.b). Appetite on the other hand, is less noble; it does not follow reason, lusting instead after 'indulgences and pleasures' of the body (*Republic,* 439.d). Finally, the rational part (should) rule over the other two - it seeks truth, and thus knows what is 'advantageous for each part and for the whole soul' (*Republic,* 442.c).

In Plato's depiction of the 'just' (and by extension, 'happy') man, the three parts of the soul must operate harmoniously, 'like three limiting notes on a musical scale - high, low, and middle' (*Republic 443.d).* Being ruled by the 'low' part of this scale, namely the appetitive part of the soul, leads one down a path of 'injustice, licentiousness, cowardice, ignorance…vice'

according to Plato (*Republic* 444b). What is significant here is that, since the pursuit of true happiness (rather than hedonistic, temporary happiness) is thought to necessitate restraint with regard to physical and emotional urges, play cannot be viewed as an appropriate goal - a point also emphasised by Aristotle in *Politics* (8.3, 1337b36–1338a1). Laughter of play can at best offer a counterbalance or distraction to the tensions of adult life, but like a fine wine, it is to be enjoyed in moderation, since its excess can be harmful (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2.7, 1108a25).

If we are taken in by Plato's mind-body hierarchy, laughter is relegated to the realm of bodily impulses. Indeed, comic performances often drew attention to parts of the body through 'grotesque' humour, to use Bakhtin's (1984) concept. This was particularly common in Satyr plays, for example, where giant phalluses were used as props (Halliwell, 2008). Unlike Bakhtin, however, Plato saw this kind of comedy as impeding critical thought, rather than being an expression of it. The mind-body dichotomy is also found in Aristotle's writings. He describes the comic (or "buffoon") as having an involuntary urge to find gratification by eliciting laughter in others. The observer too suffers from an involuntary 'burst' of laughter, but such outbursts are seemingly more 'pardonable' (Halliwell, 2008, p.314), since they are (presumably) trying *not* to laugh, unlike the buffoon who actively seeks laughter from others. Freud (2003) later explains such involuntary urges as a release of supressed energy (see: 3.2.1), but for Aristotle and Plato, the concern is with social morality, as evidenced by their distinction between laughter (body) and serious discourse (mind).

A key issue that emerges here is the relation between laughter and social roles. Laughter is evaluated dependant on the persons involved, i.e.: who can joke (laugh-maker), who can laugh (listener/observer), and in what social contexts? And, conversely, what does joking or laughing in particular social contexts say about one's character? For Aristotle, some forms of humour 'befit a free man and others do not' (*Rhetoric*: 1909 edn: 197). In an unequal relationship (e.g., child/adult), the wit of the young is equated with insolence. By contrast, when used amongst 'equals' in a philosophical debate, wit became a useful rhetorical device (Halliwell, 2008). Light-hearted joking amongst friends was likewise permissible. While this could involve mocking, it would be a playful rather than threatening activity if participants were of equal status (Halliwell, 2008, pp.310–311). However, the dividing line between malice and play was rather thin, and operated alongside strong societal 'sensitivities to shame and dishonour' (Halliwell, 2008, p.22). Consequently, ridicule was taken seriously, even recognised as a

punishable form of public abuse (Halliwell, 2008, p.26), or a ‘weapon’ to be used against adversaries (Halliwell, 2008, p.325).

These early writings on comedy, although not extensive, have been highly influential. Not only do they sketch the foundations of a superiority theory of laughter, but they also point to the inherently social meaning of humour. To the question of what laughter is, we can find a variety of answers: it is childhood play, educated wit, ridicule, playful mockery, or bodily pleasure, depending on the social context and the actors involved. For those higher up the social ladder, laughter could be a tool used for relaxation, or to instruct or discipline others. On the other hand, laughing too much or playing the buffoon implied a lack of self-control that broke with the decorum expected of a ‘civilised’ free man. Despite its significance, humour remained subordinate to serious discourse. This is evident both in relation to the dramaturgical genres of comedy and tragedy, the latter of which is privileged; and in relation to laughter and reason, the former being an expression of bodily pleasure, and the latter of the intellectual mind.

Rather than viewing this hierarchy of seriousness over play as simply a question of taste or preference, or worse, as the result of an objective analysis of the moral and aesthetic value of each, it is possible instead to understand it as emblematic of a meta-narrative of the self. The mind and body, as presented by Plato, are in conflict: while we ought to pursue knowledge through reason, the body can hinder and impede this task, forcing us to ‘examine other things through it as through a cage’ (Plato, cited in Pomerleau, 1997, p.12). Moreover, the good life, as presented by both Plato and Aristotle, is centred on a moral imperative of self-control. In other words, we ought to pursue things because they are good, not simply because they are pleasant. If we understand the self in this way, then tragedy, much like philosophy, can fulfil the role of freeing us from our bodily prison. Unlike comedy, which engages our base pleasures, tragedy engages our intellect, our search for enlightenment. As Ridley puts it, tragedy grapples ‘more directly than any other artform with philosophy’s own most fundamental question: how should one live?’ (Ridley, 2005, p.408).

Yet, this conception of the good life, while still in existence today, competes with a more dominant narrative in modernity: that of individualist success and happiness. The modern subject (see: 4.1) does not search for a ‘transcendent good’, they search for renewal; in comedy, we find this reaffirmation of the self:

> comic well-being, which is achievable, is an assertion of love and the good life that comes as a resolution of a conflict at the end. Yet, as life itself, this good is in need of constant reproduction… unlike tragedy, which is the celebration of death, comedy is the celebration of life
>
> (Nikulin, 2014, p.ix)

For Nikulin (2014, p.ix), it is comedy that can provide us with the answer to philosophy's biggest questions, for comedy itself is a 'philosophical enterprise' (and vice versa).

We no longer (for the most part) see comedy as an impediment to reason, as Plato did. Such a divide is unsustainable if the full absurdity of life is considered, for both are part of the same larger frame of reference: 'the tragic and the comic are not polar opposites, or mutually exclusive, but subtly and sometimes almost paradoxically inter-linked modes of experience' (Lippitt, 1992, p.48, See also: Halliwell, 2008, p.337, Plant, 2009). In many ways then, the dividing line between the tragic and the comic could be pronounced dead (though, ironically, pronouncing things dead is in itself an 'expression of the modern subject', as Nikulin (2014, p.42) observes). The move towards an ideologically positive view of comedy is not without its problems, however, as Billig (2005) warns us. Indeed, the body-mind conflict might no longer be located exclusively in the divide between the serious and the comic, but it exists nonetheless in the 'split between intellectual humour and physical humour' (Dynel, 2013, p.90). This is notably explored by Friedman (2013, 2014b, 2014a), who argues that comedy taste is an expression of social distinction, and thus a reinforcement of social stratification.

Moreover, despite the omnipresence of humour today, we do continue to strive for a separation between serious and comic discourse, though perhaps now reframed as a concern with offence and humour (Lockyer and Pickering, 2005). The distinction is needed precisely because comedy supposedly affords certain liberties. If, as Nikulin (2014) claims, comedy is indeed a philosophical enterprise, it must allow us to re-examine our understanding of the world. Nothing is off-limits as long it operates under the guise of comic intent, as 'there can be no drawing of lines within comedy' (Jacobson, 1997, pp.37–38). Yet, it is sometimes hard to discern if those who claim that 'anything goes' are in fact proposing that comedy, by its very nature *cannot be offensive (i.e., the claim of offence is illegitimate)* because it is 'make-believe' (Jacobson, 1997, p.34); or if comedy carries with it the *right to offend*, precisely because it engages with serious topics in a critical way. In both cases, a fundamental question to ask is:

what qualifies as the comic frame, within which 'anything goes'? In short, what *is* humour? For only after exploring such definitions can we think critically about its functions (and the limitations thereof).

3.2 Defining Humour

Research on humour can be categorised into two distinct types: *universalist*, i.e., those devising an essentialist theory that captures all instances of humour in a given area; and *descriptive,* those who present more detailed descriptions of the specific type(s) of humour under investigation. While universalist theories agree with the claim that humour is dependent on 'cultural codes' which may differ 'from society to society and across time' (Billig, 2005, p.188), they nonetheless believe in the underlying 'essence of the humorous phenomena' (Attardo, 1994, p.2). The universalist perspective is analysed in this section, looking at how scholars in various fields have defined the essential characteristics of humour. The discussion starts by outlining the psychological theory of laughter as relief (Spencer, 1863, Freud, 2003, Morreall, 2009). This is followed by an examination of the incongruity theory and its critiques (Nerhardt, 1976, Latta, 1999, Kulka, 2007).

3.2.1 Relief Theory

The universality of humour has traditionally been studied from a psychological perspective, to understand the cognitive processes that underlie the production and/or reception of humour (see for example: Goldstein, 1972, Suls, 1983, Latta, 1999, Martin, 2007, Morreall, 2009). One of the foundational schools of thought in this domain is the 'relief' theory of laughter, first introduced by Shaftesbury (1820 [1709]), and further developed by Spencer (1863), and Freud (2003 [1905], 2001 [1927]). For Spencer (1863), nervous energy always requires some form of physical release. Just as anger may produce a clenched fist and fear may cause us to run, laughter is thought to be the physiological manifestation of the nervous energy that arises from certain types of incongruity. Unlike anger and fear, however, the movements of laughter 'have no object' (Spencer, 1863, p.111), they are simply a release of pent-up energy.

Freud too provides a comprehensive 'relief' theory that sees laughter as linked to an 'economy of psychical expenditure' (Freud, 2003 [1905], p. 38). He distinguishes between three aspects of laughter: joking, the comic, and humour. In *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious,* Freud dedicates most his time to describing the processes of joking, which he defines as an 'activity that aims at deriving pleasure from psychical processes' (Freud, 2003 [1905], p. 91).

He further differentiates between innocent jokes, which have no ulterior aim, and tendentious jokes, which for Freud can either be an expression of aggression, as in the case of hostile jokes, or sexual desire, as in the case of obscene jokes (Freud, 2003 [1905], p. 92). While innocent jokes need only a joke-teller and a listener, tendentious jokes always involve three persons: the joke maker, the object of the joke, and the observer. Moreover, tendentious jokes are more likely to produce sudden bursts of laughter, Freud argues, precisely because they provide a release for our feelings of lust and/or aggression, which must ordinarily be repressed. The mental effort we commonly spend on suppression is no longer needed, and is released through laughter (ibid, p. 142-143).

Freud makes a distinction, however, between jokes, which he sees as resulting from repressed energy, and comedy, which does not necessitate intent: 'the joke is made, comedy is found' (Freud, 2003 [1905], p. 175); any situation, object, or person that elicits laughter can be considered comic. A common example is the *naïve* comedy typically found in children, i.e., when someone is funny without knowing it, because of their lack of inhibition. Since we, as the observer, are drawn into the naivety of the comic, the energy expenditure that commonly used for our inhibitions becomes superfluous and manifests itself through laughter (Freud, 2003 [1905], p. 187).

Freud also makes a distinction between comedy and humour, the latter being a 'means of obtaining pleasure in spite of the distressing affects that disturb it' (Freud, 2003 [1905], p. 220). A situation that would usually elicit pity, for example, can become humorous when we realise that no sympathy is needed. The affect, in this instance pity, becomes surplus energy, which leads to laughter. In all instances of laughter, pleasure is thought to arise from the saving of energy expenditure. In joking and the naïve comic, the energy saved is that of suppressing inhibitions; in other comic situations, one is saving in thinking energy, while in humour, we save in expenditure of feelings (Freud, 2003 [1905], p. 226).

The main problem with Freud's theory, as Lippitt (1995a) highlights, is that it is based on various unsupported assumptions. For example: that tendentious jokes always produce more pleasure; that this is so *because* of their supposed purpose; that pleasure can be measured through laughter; that senses of humour are more or less universal; that hostile or obscene jokes are a safe or acceptable way of releasing repressed feelings. In fact, as Eastman (2017 [1936]) points out, the notion that obscenity and aggression ought to be supressed is not universal, but particular to some societies and time periods (p. 260). In contemporary society, both sexuality

and aggression are ‘ideal standards against which some people are in suppressed revolt’ (Eastman, 2017 p. 251).

Critics argue that Freud’s convoluted model of psychical energy economics lacks evidence at best, and coherence at worst (Lippitt, 1995a, Gimbel, 2018). However, Freud’s theory has influenced others, who have taken the idea of laughter as ‘release’ in different directions. Some examples include ‘cathartic’ (Cohn, 2016, Willett and Willett, 2019, Steele, 2020) ‘affective’ (Bruns, 2000, Webber, 2013a, Holm, 2017) or ‘carnivalesque’ (Bakhtin, 1984, Taylor, 1995, Crichlow, 2013) laughter, all of which are discussed in more detail in section 3.3.2. Before that, however, we will look at incongruity theory, which offers one of the most commonly accepted definitions of humour today.

3.2.2 Incongruity Theory

As its name suggests, incongruity theorists propose that ‘the formal object of amusement is “the incongruous” (Morreall, 1986, p.6). Yet some variation in terms of definitions and approaches can be identified. Kant, often cited as one of the earlier proponents within this school, explains laughter as an ‘affection arising from a strained expectation being suddenly reduced to nothing’ (Kant, 2007 [1790]). The expectation (the set-up of a joke, for example) takes our mind down a particular path, but with the punchline, we realise that path was a dead end – our expectations are suddenly reduced to nothing. Yet, despite describing the cause of laughter as a mental process, Kant emphasises the physical (rather than mental) pleasure of laughter, describing it as a bodily reflex – much like Aristotle did (Morreall, 2009, p.11).

By contrast, Schopenhauer (2010 [1818]), who provides a more robust philosophical examination of incongruous humour, defines laughter as an expression of the ‘sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation’ (Schopenhauer, 2010 [1818]). Here, Schopenhauer focuses on the cognitive process of laughter, emphasising the contradiction between our senses and reality; humour, in his view, forces us to readjust our assumptions by subsuming different objects under the same concept. Kierkegaard (2009 [1846]) too offers an explanation of humour based on contradiction (p. 432-433). For him, both the tragic and the comic are a disruption of one’s expectations; the vital difference between the two is that the latter is experienced as pleasant. Kierkegaard thus presents humour as highly subjective: ‘the same event can be tragic to one person and comic to another’ (Evans, 2006, p.84).

The incongruous is also found in Bergson's (1911 [1900]) theory of humour. Despite being commonly categorised as a superiority theory, Bergson's approach hinges on the incongruity of life appearing rigid. In other words, laughter ensues from our perception of 'something mechanical encrusted on the living' (Bergson, 1911, p.18). As such, laughter can work as a social 'corrective' against rigid, inflexible behaviour, which runs counter to the creativity and adaptability of human life (Bergson, 1911, p.43). Bergson thus puts forward an explanation for both the *cause* of laugher and its *function:* rigidity is comic, and laughter is its corrective (Bergson, 1911, p.10).

Despite their differences, Kant, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, and Bergson all explain humour as something that violates our expectations. For others (Beattie, 1776, Koestler, 1964, Luria, Baer and Kaufman, 2018, Roberts, 2019), the emphasis lies not on the comic stimulus, but on our ability to view something from two contrasting perspectives. Koestler (1964), who coined the term 'bisociation', describes it as the mental process of perceiving a situation or idea in two habitually incompatible frames of reference simultaneously (p. 35). Bisociation, as Koestler (1964) explains, is an integral part of creativity and innovation, including the 'creative act of the humourist' (p. 94). Much like other artforms, this process can disrupt ways of thinking to construct new ideas (Luria, Baer and Kaufman, 2018), as explored in section 3.3.3.

Another approach to humour can be found in Attardo and Raskin's linguistic theories (Raskin, 1985, Attardo and Raskin, 1991, Attardo, 2017, 2020, Raskin and Ruch, 2017). One of the essential properties of humour for them is 'script opposition'. Scripts are defined by Attardo as a 'cognitive structure internalised by the native speaker which provides the speaker with information on how a given entity is structured… or how an activity is done, a relationship organised, and so on' (Attardo, 2001, p.2). This definition draws on Goffman's (1956) notion of social scripts, although here, the focus is more specifically on the semantic links that form a script. Script opposition occurs when there is 'compatibility or overlap between the different scripts' (Oring, 2016, pp.22–23).

Though Attardo and Raskin (1991, p.331) are careful to differentiate themselves from psychology-based incongruity theories, the idea of script oppositeness is certainly analogous to incongruity (Oring, 2016, p.17). Unlike other incongruity theories , however, a clear separation between humour and laughter is made here (Raskin, 1985, Attardo, 1994, 2017, Nash, 2013, Raskin and Ruch, 2017). As Attardo (1994, 2017) explains, laughter denotes the effect but does not specify the cause; and humour denotes intention without specifying the

effect, since laughter does not always follow humour. Consequently, it is important to focus on humour intent or 'competence' (Raskin, 1985, Attardo and Raskin, 1991, Attardo, 2020), i.e., how is intention to joke signalled by the joke-maker and how is it recognised by the listener/reader?

Raskin proposes that, just as we internalise knowledge of our native language, we also develop an 'intuition' with regard to humour (Raskin, 1985, p.58). Following Chomsky's (2006) distinction between language as an abstract system (langue) and as a concrete performance (parole), we can also contrast humour in the abstract (competence) with concrete usage of humour (performance). As Attardo (2020, p.49) describes it, 'humor is a property of the stimulus… Humor appreciation is a property of the situation (which includes a specific speaker and hearer, the context in which the humor is produced…)'. Borrowing from Goffman (1974, pp. 43–44), Attardo concludes that humour appreciation requires situations to be 'framed' as humour (Attardo, 2020, p.51). The competence/performance distinction is useful for a study of humour. After all we can recognise a joke as a joke, even if we do not find it funny. Moreover, the specific affordances of the comic 'frame' have social significance, as discussed in section 3.4.

However, the essentialist ontology and positivist epistemology of Attardo and Raskin's theory run counter to the interpretivist approach used here. Critics of universalist theories of humour more generally, claim that such theories cannot account for all forms of humour. Script-opposition may describe some joke constructions, but not others (Gimbel, 2018, pp.38–41); conversely, some script oppositions may not actually be humorous (Ritchie, 2004, p.74). Moreover, as Gimbel (2018, pp.39–40) points out, humour can also derive from script acknowledgment (repeating the script), script corroboration (reaffirming rather than opposing the script), or script amplification (overstating the script). Ritchie's (2004) critique goes even further as he decries the parameters of humour competence as too ill-defined to have any substance (p. 80), and the concept of 'scripts' particularly problematic since 'what counts as evidence for the abstract notion of script' is never clarified (p. 72). The following section outlines some of the developments in incongruity theory that address these issues.

3.2.3 After incongruity

For Attardo and Raskin, as well as other earlier incongruity theorists (Schopenhauer and Kant in particular), incongruity is both a necessary and sufficient defining element of humour. This

assumption has been challenged in recent years by various scholars (See for example: Suls, 1983, Latta, 1999, Critchley, 2002, Gimbel, 2018). The subjective aspect of humour was emphasised by Kierkegaard (2009) in the 1800s, as he observed that incongruity can elicit negative or positive reactions. What makes a contradiction comic for Kierkegaard is distance, i.e., being able to see things from a 'superior vantage point' (Evans, 2006, p.84). In Koestler's (1964) theory, bisociation must be combined with 'emotional tension' for incongruity to be humorous (p. 51). Nerhardt (1976) adds the necessary element of a safe/nonthreatening environment. Others (Jones, 1970, Shultz, 1972, Suls, 1983) have argued that humour necessitates both incongruity *and* resolution, either through information that is already present in the joke, or external knowledge (Suls, 1983, p.42).

Despite these adjustments, incongruity (or incongruity-resolution) theories still lack clarity regarding the object of analysis (Latta, 1999, Gimbel, 2018). More specifically, does the essence of humour lie in the incongruity of the stimulus (stimulus-side theory), or in the cognitive shift experienced by the respondent (response-side theory)? (Latta, 1999). Morreall, for example, seems to conflate the two, at times talking of incongruity as the 'object of amusement', and at others of incongruity as our *perception* of something that violates 'normal expectations' (Morreall, 2009, p.11). Even where incongruity theories specify their object of analysis, their definitions of incongruity can be ambiguous or imprecise. Latta (1999, pp.105–108) presents an extensive list of terms used by humour theorists to mean 'incongruous', including (but not limited to): unexpected, out of context, inappropriate, unreasonable, illogical, exaggerated, ridiculous, absurd. Naturally, the list presents inconsistencies – something can be absurd, exaggerated or inappropriate and at the same time entirely expected, just as the unexpected can be logical. This is particularly true in stand-up comedy, where the comic frame already brings with it the expectation of surprise (Lockyer and Myers, 2011).

This liberal approach to definitions poses a problem: the theory hinges on incongruity as the most basic and necessary ingredient of the humorous phenomenon; contradictorily, however, the very definition of incongruity seems adjustable on an ad hoc basis (Gimbel, 2018, pp.27–28). This makes the theory 'unfalsifiable' in a Popperian sense (Popper, 1940). This epistemological critique of incongruity is also voiced by Latta, who advances his own hypothesis, theory 'L'. Rather than asking what makes an item or event humorous, Latta suggests asking 'what is the basic humour process?' (Latta, 1999, p.11). For Latta, the only commonality in humour is that it tends, albeit in very different ways, 'to elicit a certain single

pattern of response' (Latta, 1999, p.11). Thus, it is the response process that characterises humour. Of course, this claim is weakened by the fact that laughter can occur without humour and vice versa. Latta resolves this by seeing laughter as the culminating step in a humour response process. The first step involves a state of unrelaxation (p. 37); the second is a cognitive shift (p. 38-39); the third is 'rapid relaxation through laughter' (p. 41-42). L theory therefore combines both the notion of a cognitive shift and that of relief. Yet, unlike many incongruity theorists, Latta focuses purely on response-side rather than stimulus-side, and unlike relief theorists, he asks not what laughter does, but what the essence of humour is.

While Latta makes a good case for thinking about humour as a response process rather than an attribute, there are some flaws in his argument. Not only is there a lack of empirical evidence to show that all three phases take place, but we can also identify instances of humour that might not follow this process, and of non-humour that might indeed involve these three steps (Gimbel, 2018, pp.28–30). Moreover, any empirical analysis of humour response is likely to face certain challenges. It is unclear, for example, if responses demonstrate humour appreciation, or simply comprehension. After all, as Levinson (1998) points out, 'humour may engender amusement without any behavioural manifestations' (p. 564). If one looks for comprehension, however, the question remains whether humour comprehension is 'sufficient to produce…a humorous experience' (Suls, 1983, p.52).

Perhaps, as Billig (2005) proposes, 'no single theory can hope to explain the complexity of humour' (p. 184). One way to navigate this complexity is to view humour as anti-essentialist. Latta (1998), for example, suggests that the varied and contradictory definitions of 'incongruous' could present the basis for an anti-essentialist theory:

> at bottom the phenomenon of humor is not any one thing, but in some cases, it is a matter, fundamentally, of encountering something one did not expect, in others a matter of perceiving that something is out of context, in yet others a matter of perceiving that something has been exaggerated, and so on. (p. 113)

While he goes on to dismiss the anti-essentialist approach for its overly broad scope, there is good reason to adopt it. Taking Wittgenstein's language games concept (Harris, 1988, Wittgenstein, 2007), we could think of humour not as a unitary concept, but as a 'family'. Consequently, particular humorous phenomena do not have a common element; rather, they possess 'family likenesses' that might overlap (p. 17). Wittgenstein critiques our tendency to

'look for something in common to all entities which we commonly subsume under a general term' (Wittgenstein, 2007, p.17). This 'craving for generality' as he calls it, tends to dismiss concrete cases that could help us to better understand the usage of a term (Wittgenstein, 2007, pp.19–20). One is of course, free to draw boundaries around terms, but these 'will never entirely coincide with the actual usage, as this usage has no sharp boundary' (Wittgenstein, 2007, p.19). Rather than asking what humour is, perhaps we ought to ask what humour does; the following section will discuss some of the scholarly responses to this question.

3.3 The functions of humour

The psychoanalytical explanation of laughter presented by Freud and others (Spencer, 1863, Gherovici and Steinkoler, 2016) tends to focus on the individual psychological process of humour and laughter. Similarly, incongruity focuses on individual cognitive perception (response-side) or the object of humour itself, i.e., the stimulus. In doing so, both relief and incongruity theories overly emphasise the 'intrinsic details of the humour analysed and ignor[e] such factors as the attitude and feelings of laughter' (Lippitt, 1995b). Yet, as Bergson states, 'to understand laughter, we must put it back into its natural environment, which is society, and above all we must determine the utility of its function, which is a social one' (Bergson, 1980 [1900], p. 65). This section thus seeks to explore the social significance of humour, focusing specifically on its disciplinary and transgressive functions, as well as its aesthetic dimension.

3.3.1 Superiority and ridicule

One of the most popular social explanations for laughter is the superiority theory (Bain, 1865, Figueroa-Dorrego and Larkin-Galinanes, 2009, Hobbes, 2018 [1651]), which sees laughter as a kind of *schadenfreude*. Hobbes(2018), one of the earliest proponents of the theory, believed that even the most well intentioned or seemingly innocent forms of laughter are founded on a deep-seated sense of superiority. As he puts it, laughter is 'caused either by some sudden act of their own, that pleaseth them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves' (Hobbes, 2018 [1651], p. 58). Laughter is thus a form of ridicule, something that operates through the (constructed) perception of difference. When directed at the self, as is the case with self-deprecating humour, laughter express superiority over our former self. Even the kind of infectious communal laughter, which is often viewed as a positive bonding experience (Critchley, 2002), is seen negatively by Hobbes: 'laughing to one's self putteth all the rest to a jealousy and examination of themselves' (Hobbes, 2017, p.50).

Hobbes' pessimistic perspective on humour, though unpopular today (Billig, 2005), is an important foundation for those who see in humour a disciplinary function. Bergson's is perhaps the most famous theory in this regard. His view on laughter bears a striking resemblance to Hobbes: 'in laughter we always find an unavowed intention to humiliate, and consequently to correct our neighbour, if not in his will, at least in his deed' (Bergson, 1911, p.67). Bergson departs from Hobbes, however, in his description of the object of humour. For him, it is comical to find rigidity and inadaptability where we ought to find the elasticity of life: 'what is essentially laughable is what is done automatically' (p. 72). Consequently, laughter is our attempt to correct such misplaced inflexibility. The 'threat of correction' through ridicule is held over us at all times, thus functioning as a 'method of discipline' (Bergson, 1911, pp.134–135). This disciplinary role that Bergson attaches to laughter is quite different from the derisive mockery described by Hobbes. Where Hobbes sees humour as an expression of contemptible human qualities like selfishness and jealousy, Bergson sees it as a necessary mechanism that identifies anti-social flaws, namely absentminded and mechanical behaviour.

More recent proponents of the superiority theory have built on theories of embarrassment and social interaction (Miller, 1996, Scheff, 2000, Goffman, 2017) to explain the effect of disciplinary laughter. Billig advances a critical theory of humour that sees ridicule as having a key function in maintaining the 'moral order of everyday life' (Billig, 2005, p.219). Though Billig also acknowledges other, more rebellious functions of humour, he stresses that laughter often functions to conserve the status quo: 'built into the fabric of social life is the mechanism for social embarrassment, threatening social actors with a form of social death each time they forget the codes of appropriateness' (Billig, 2005, p.220). Even observers develop a fear of being laughed at, as they become 'aware of their own vulnerability to ridicule' (Janes and Olson, 2000, p.484); the 'threat of correction' is always looming (Bergson, 1911, pp.134–135). The result is a self-policing towards conformity, a process that Janes and Olson call 'jeer pressure' (Janes and Olson, 2000, p.475). Both ridicule, and the fear of ridicule, are arguably prevalent in stand-up comedy. Those on the left can point to the racist or misogynist comedy that 'punches down', in the style of Bernard Manning or Jim Davidson, while right-wing comedians (Doyle, 2020, Maxwell, 2020) claim that the comedy industry is enforcing a cultural hegemony of 'woke' identity politics (Doyle, 2021).

One of the problems with the superiority theory of laughter, however, is that ridicule is at best just one example of how humour can function. Hutcheson (1750), an early critic of the theory,

points out that humour does not always rely on comparisons, and is therefore not always a reflection of superiority; and if superiority were the key ingredient to humour, we would always laugh at those inferior to us, and never at those who are our 'equals' - which is not the case (Hutcheson, 1750, p.7). A more contemporary critique is posed by Solomon (2002), who claims that even when we laugh at weaker actors, we can do so out of a sense of empathy: seeing others in unfortunate situations 'makes us aware of our own best and least pretentious emotions' (p. 182). In this sense, it is possible to laugh with someone while also laughing at them (Gimbel, 2018, p.11). Even with this generous reading of ridicule, however, it is hard to ignore the potential damage it can cause.

The 'othering' process that is so central to superiority theory has ethical implications that require some closer evaluation. As various scholars have noted (Gantar, 2005, Lockyer and Pickering, 2005, Smuts, 2010), ridicule can punch down and make fun of the voiceless or marginalised just as easily as it can punch up, attacking those in power. The question posed by Gantar (2005, p.73) then, is whether the blow of ridicule is 'a priori a low one and as such inappropriate for use by ethical speakers'. Shaftesbury (1820) and Collins (1729), for example, viewed laughter as a valid form of discourse, proposing that it is not possible for the true and good to be laughed at: 'decency and propriety will stand the test of ridicule, and triumph over all the false pretences to wit' (Collins, 1729, p.21). Bergson too seems to emphasise laughter's virtuous effect, claiming it has 'a utilitarian aim of general improvement' (Bergson, 1980 [1900], p. 73). Some commentators, on the other hand, claim that ridicule is a primitive form of humour, something tantamount to physical violence (Bowman, 1937, Rapp, 1947, Feinberg, 1978).

The distinction between civilised/primitive culture was popularised in the 19th Century, playing a central part in colonial discourse. Humour through ridicule is viewed in this paradigm as befitting 'the adult in a primitive culture', for whom aggression alone is enough to elicit laughter (Feinberg, 1978, p.10). More 'sophisticated' societies on the other hand, require as a minimum a 'superficial politeness' (Feinberg, 1978, p.10). This raises an important question: can 'polite' humour also have a disciplinary function, or are they radically different from ridicule? To answer this, one must take into account the power relations in interaction. The kind of jokes that are appropriate or 'polite' in institutional settings will depend not only on content, but on social roles (Holmes and Marra, 2002, Schnurr, 2008, Huber and Brown, 2017). As Holmes (2000) observes, the use of humour in unequal relationships can be 'a powerful

way to maintain authority and control while continuing to appear collegial' (p. 179). In the workplace, humour can be a 'tool' used by managers to achieve their instrumental goals (Holmes, 2000, Lyttle, 2007, Tarvin, 2012).

Implicit rather than overt expressions of power are perhaps even more pervasive today because of our liberal values. While hierarchies were rigid and clearly delimited in the past (as illustrated in 3.1.1), contemporary society goes to great lengths to 'appear as if it is egalitarian' (Billig, 2005, pp.45–46). Consequently, we tend to overlook the ways in which humour and laughter express and maintain social order. In this seemingly egalitarian society, 'the gift of humour…belongs to everyone' (Billig, 2005, p.45). Humour is embedded in the complex system of politeness and informality that underpins modern social interaction; it has a heightened significance precisely because social stratification is more opaque (Friedman and Kuipers, 2013, Friedman, 2014a). At closer analysis, then, we can see that 'superiority' does not have to mean ridicule.

Another superiority approach to laughter is found in existentialist philosophy, which describes the god-like perspective that we, as observers, have when experiencing humour. As Evans (2006) elaborates, 'it is the possession of a superior position that enables an individual to experience an incongruity as pleasant rather than painful' (p. 84). Moreover, our ability to obtain such distance and to view incongruity as humorous can be understood as a distinctly human trait that differentiates us from other animals. As Hazlitt (1819) observes, 'man is the only animal that laughs and weeps: for he is the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are, and what they ought to be' (p. 1). The link between laughter and humanness is not new of course; Aristotle too recognised that 'no animal but man ever laughs' (Aristotle, *Parts of Animals*, 3.10, 673a28). Nietzsche too viewed laughter as uniquely human, though unlike Aristotle, he emphasised the humour of existence rather than the physiological dimension of laughter: 'perhaps I know best why man is the only animal that laughs: he alone suffers so excruciatingly that he was compelled to invent laughter' (Nietzsche, 2019, p.44).

While their claim is not entirely accurate – animals do in fact laugh (Provine, 2000) – there is something to be said about the connection between humour and humanness. For Kierkegaard, 'what is comic lies always in a contradiction' (Kierkegaard, 2009, p.387) – much like life itself. It follows that 'the more proficiently a person exists, the more he will discover the comic' (Kierkegaard, 2009, p.388). This notion is elaborated further in Nietzsche's writings. He understands life to be an eternal recurrence, filled with absurd contradiction. As Lippitt

explains, ‘creating our own values to live by is essential if we are to give any meaning to our lives. Yet there is no ultimate reason or justification for our particular set of values, other than that which we ourselves provide’ (Lippitt, 1992, p.47). In essence, there is no absolute truth, and there is no final goal in life, only arbitrary choices and a state of *becoming*. Nonetheless, we are compelled to take things seriously as if they were true, and as if life was about *being*.

Rather than despairing at the absurdity of life, Nietzsche invites us to laugh. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* he distinguishes between ‘laughter of the herd’ and ‘laughter of the height’; the former refers to the laughter of mockery and ridicule, while the latter expresses a certain liberation and transcendence from the constraints of existence (Nietzsche, 1969). The laughter of the height comes from the attainment of a superior vantage point, from which we see the full absurdity of life. Much like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche proposes that seeing life from a higher perspective allows one to have a humorous attitude towards the absurdity of existence; however, Kierkegaard adds a religious aspect to this claim. For him, we can only enjoy the contradictions of life as humorous if we can see a ‘way out’ of our predicament, namely if we have faith in the benevolence of God (Lippitt, 1996). While this transcendental superiority theory of laughter does not provide an exhaustive explanation of humour (nor does it seek to do so), it does open up questions about the self and identity, which will be discussed in further detail in chapter 4.

3.3.2 Rebellion

In direct contrast to the notion of humour as social corrective, laughter can also be viewed as a disruption to the status quo. For many comedians and commentators, the ethics of humour seems to hinge on the target of the joke: comedy should ‘punch up, not down’ (Quirk, 2018, p.113). From this perspective, humour is thought to have an important utilitarian function: that of rebellion. Bhaktin’s (1984) notion of ‘carnivalesque’ laughter is highly relevant in this regard, as it can point to the transgressive opportunities and limits of stand-up comedy more generally, and the Edinburgh Fringe in particular (Jamieson, 2004, Igrek, 2017, Donian, 2018, Harvie, 2020). This ‘rebellious’ function of humour will be examined here, paving the way for a discussion on the political aesthetics of comedy.

Subversiveness is implicit within the various theories of humour: in incongruity theory, humour generates a cognitive shift that makes us view things from different perspectives (Morreall, 1983); in relief theory, humour can be seen as an inner rebellion, with laughter signifying the

'triumph of the ego' (Freud, 2001, pp.162–163 [1927]); even in Bergson's (1911) superiority theory, laughter is portrayed as a resistance of sorts against a mechanical, absentmindedness disposition that threatens the creative vitality of human life. A generous reading of the three main theories could perhaps lead to the assumption that true laughter is inherently subversive. This is indeed what Bakhtin alludes to in his description of the carnivalesque: 'hypocrisy and lies never laugh but wear a serious mask. Laughter created no dogmas and could not become authoritarian; it did not convey fear but a feeling of strength' (Bakhtin, 1984, p.95). If laughter is antithetical to rigid dogmatism and its incongruities, then it can serve a political function, destabilising 'the kinds of certainties that lead to "political illness"'(Bruner, 2005, p.151). In George Orwell's analysis of political humour, jokes are described as 'tiny revolutions' precisely because they have the power to 'upset the established order'(Orwell, 1998, p.284). But rebellious humour is not just directed at politics, nor is it exclusively a weapon against oppressive powers. It is also a rebellion within ourselves: 'Laughter liberates not only from external censorship but first of all from the great interior censor' (Bakhtin, 1984, p.94).

Bakhtin's notion of laughter, though based on medieval carnivals, finds continued relevance in contemporary scholarship (Bruner, 2005, Braun and Langman, 2012, Parks, 2019). In Bakhtin's description, carnival is a public festivity that parodies and transgresses the dominant social order: 'it belongs to the borderline between art and life. In reality, it is life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play' (Bakhtin, 1984, p.7). Bakhtin is particularly relevant for understanding the 'carnivalesque' nature of the Edinburgh Fringe (Jamieson, 2004, Thomasson, 2015, Igrek, 2017, Jamieson and Todd, 2019). Firstly, the Fringe's origin as a 'playful opposition' to the official Edinburgh International Festival (EIF) (Thomasson, 2015, p.107) resembles the contrast made by Bakhtin (1984) between 'official feasts' and 'carnivals' (pp. 9-10). Whereas the former is serious and reveres tradition, the latter is playful and celebrates change and renewal. The EIF, like many arts festivals, is 'rigorously planned by a group of directors and producers who… act as gatekeepers' (Waterman, 1998, p.59). It may be a celebration of art, but it is, as Waterman (1998, p.59) puts it, 'serious' and 'controlled' fun. Contrastingly, the Edinburgh Fringe has no such gatekeepers: 'no individual or committee determines who can or cannot perform at the Fringe' (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, 2017, p.5). Like Bakhtin's carnival, where 'all are considered equal' (p. 10), the Fringe too does away with hierarchical rank.

Moreover, the carnivalesque not only inverts the norms of 'high' culture, but it is also an expression of the 'grotesque' concept of the body, which is contained 'not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people' (Bakhtin, 1984, p.19). The grotesque body is unfinished, always in the process of becoming; it is 'grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable', and concerned with the 'lower stratum' (Bakhtin, 1984, p.19). A comparison can be made with the Fringe again here, as 'expressions of excess and the celebration of grotesque bodies' is found in every corner of central Edinburgh in August (Thomasson, 2015, p.107). The Edinburgh Fringe is an embodied experience that is as much about the people as about the performances. Drawing on psychoanalytical literature, Jamieson and Todd (2019) claim that embodied forms of play open up a third space between 'the individual's own fantasy world and exterior world'. Within this liminal space, we can push back against reality and imagine new possibilities (Jamieson and Todd, 2019, p.5).

Of course, the transgressive potential of play is not exclusive to the realm of the 'festival imagination' (Jamieson and Todd, 2019). In Morreall's (2009, p.36) work, for example, humour more generally is also defined as a kind of 'play mode' with transgressive potential: 'humor and play are modelled on serious activities... only they suspend the usual purposes, assumptions, and consequences of those activities' (Morreall, 2009, p.34). Echoing Aristotle, Morreall (2009, p.23) claims that 'humans need to rest occasionally from serious activity, and humor and other forms of play provide that rest'. Humour as a form of play can offer respite from the serious, and carnival as embodied playfulness can offer relief 'from the prevailing truth and from the established order' (Bakhtin, 1984, p.10).

Yet, despite its transgressive potential, we can debate the extent to which the carnival (in this case, the Edinburgh Fringe) really is subversive. For all its appearance of spontaneity and abundance, there are limits set upon the festival and months of organisation that precede it. Perhaps the carnivalesque misrule of the festival helps to maintain, rather than disrupt, the status quo. As Bakhtin critics have observed, carnival can function more like a 'safety valve for passions the common people might otherwise direct to revolution' (Bakhtin 1984, xviii). In other words, carnival sustains the very structures that it seemingly transgresses. On a social level, the dialectical tension between official culture and its disavowed double (carnival) is what keeps the dominant 'ideological fantasy' alive (Žižek, 2005, 2009). Žižek goes further in his analysis, claiming that the internal contradictions of neo-liberalism are absurd (and funny), just like the workings of comedy: 'both comedy and capitalist ideology are impervious to

'rational' argumentative criticism' (Donian, 2018, pp.61–62). Moreover, as the findings in this thesis suggest, the Edinburgh Fringe can be seen as extension of neo-liberal ideology (Jamieson, 2004, Harvie, 2020): its 'claims to openness - like neo-liberalism's putatively free markets - mask the fact that it operates in striated structural conditions that inevitably make it easier for some to participate' (Harvie, 2020, p.109).

At the personal level, Freud's relief theory of humour presents a similarly conservative picture: jokes act as temporary relief from our own inhibitions, and laughter offers a cathartic release of built-up energy (Freud, 2001, 2003). Rather than subverting the order of things, this catharsis 'relieves subjects… of their potentially rebellious drive toward authority' (Donian, 2018, p.64). From this perspective, humour that 'speaks truth to power', like the alternative comedy of the 80s, is a failed project. Rather than inciting political change, 'radical comedians ultimately supported the status quo by establishing borders of inclusion and exclusion and safely venting social tensions' (Schaffer, 2016, p.384). Contrary to the idea of jokes as 'tiny revolutions' that upset the established order (Orwell, 1998), Schaffer and others refute humour's capacity to affect social change. For Oring (2016), much like in Freud's thesis, jokes act as a temporary relief; as such, they are not an expression of political revolution, but of political resignation (p. 122). Anthropologist Mary Douglas posits an even harsher critique, claiming jokes are an 'expressive, symbolic formation devoid of impact on real-world affairs. It is not a technology. It does not do anything. It is merely an exercise in cognition' (Oring, 2016, p.122).

However, we might question the 'essentialising' tendency in comedy studies literature, which continuously defines humour/carnival as either serving a conservative disciplinary function or a subversive revolutionary one. As Stallybrass and White (1986) eloquently explain,

> It actually makes little sense to fight out the issue of whether or not carnivals are intrinsically radical or conservative, for to do so automatically involves the false essentializing of carnivalesque transgression. The most that can be said in the abstract is that for long periods carnival may be a stable and cyclical ritual with no noticeable politically transformative effects but that, given the presence of sharpened political antagonism, it may act as catalyst and site of actual and symbolic struggle. (p. 14)

In short, the transgressive potential of comedy, and of carnivalesque festivals, cannot be pre-determined. At the very least, however, we can conclude that the carnival's ephemeral, liminal

and participatory features suspend the 'principles of utilitarian organisation' (Igrek, 2017, p.248) and offer transformative – even if short-lived – potentials.

3.3.3 The (Political) Aesthetics of Comedy

Though comedy studies scholarship has tended to seek universal features and functions of humour, some refute this utilitarian view. Morreall (2009) and Gimbel (2018), for example, see humour as an aesthetic experience, much like other forms of art or play. Aesthetic appreciation has traditionally been defined as 'disinterested' pleasure (Kant, 2007, p.41), which has 'no concern for any ulterior purpose' (Stolnitz cited in Asavei, 2018, p.73). As Gadamer (2004) puts it, the 'truth' that is experienced through art 'asserts itself against all attempts to rationalize it away' (p. xxi). Morreall's (2009) account of humour is explicitly linked to the notion of aesthetic pleasure: 'While joking with friends, for example, nothing is urgent, no action is called for. We are not attending to anyone's needs, but are like art lovers strolling through a gallery or music lovers listening to a concert' (p. 101). If we view comedy as an artform – as Morreall and many others do (Stebbins, 1990, Double, 2013, Brodie, 2014, Gimbel, 2018) – it too can be understood as something 'beyond the reach of rational analysis and debate' (Lockyer and Pickering, 2008, p.808). This section takes a closer look at the aesthetic functions of art more generally, and stand-up comedy in particular, and discusses the political affordances therein.

In a representational paradigm, political art is commonly defined as work that creates 'an awareness of political situations' and consequently, helps to foster 'political mobilization' (Rancière, 2009, p.74). The 'aesthetic' dimension, however, is about form and beauty: 'you may draw a religious subject and all that. But in the end how good is it as a picture? That's what the aesthetic is… It's not politics' (Greenberg cited in Duve, 2010, p.130). Greenberg's comments illustrate the critical stance that many scholars have towards the interlocking of the 'political' and the 'aesthetic'. As Asavei (2018) points out, this critique is either based on a belief that 'political' art is conflictual and thus undermines the aesthetic ('pleasurable'), experience of it (p. xv); or that a concern with aesthetics is rooted in elitist ideas: 'ideology imposes what is good art', and consequently, the 'aesthetic requirements of unity and pleasant form damage the political message' (Asavei, 2018, p.xvi).

There are certainly echos of this debate in the field of comedy, as laughter affect is often pitted against political(ly correct) effects:

> I'm not trying to change anyone's mind…It's just jokes… People do get a bit over-analytical.
>
> (Jimmy Carr cited in Quirk, 2018, p.38)

> if you're doing anything just for entertainment, and just to make people feel happy and fine … [you are] effectively supporting the status quo.
>
> (John-Luke Roberts cited in Quirk, 2018, p.23).

These two opposing viewpoints are also found in this study, though not as an either/or (affect/politics) distinction but as a continuum that can incorporate both, much like in Schechner's (2000, 2003) efficacy-entertainment dyad.

With regard to the political effects of art, we can distinguish between different 'temperaments' (Martin, 2015) in artistic practice: interventionist art, seeks to make the familiar strange (defamiliarisation), 'so that prevailing rules and norms can be considered contingent and fungible'; and utopian art makes the strange familiar (refamiliarisation), 'so that the seemingly impossible ambition of social transformation appears plausible and actionable' (p. 5). These two elements are related, since challenging the taken for granted is a necessary step in any progressive politics (For a sociological analysis of these concepts, see: Gunderson, 2020). However, defamiliarisation can also have uncomfortable, alienating effects (Felski, 2000, Gunderson, 2020). Indeed, we should not presume that defamiliarisation will 'translate automatically into effective and progressive political action, rather than, say, postmodern irony or cynicism' (Felski cited in Gardiner, 2004a, p.249).

Since political effects cannot be determined a priori, some (Barthes, 1977, Rancière, 2009) have suggested that the artist's intentions are an interesting but inconsequential factor. Rancière (2009, 2019) claims the emancipatory power of a performance lies with the audience. He discredits the elemental idea that art can *be* political; rather, it is in the aesthetic experience of the spectator that we can find the real political dimension: 'politics is about the transformation of the sensory fabric of 'being together'' (Rancière, 2009, p.56). Aesthetics then, is not about beauty or form, it is an *affective* process. Though Rancière does not employ the term 'affect', his understanding of the 'distribution of the sensible' bears some similarities to affect theory

(Tomkins, 1978, Thrift, 2008, Leys, 2011; for the connection between Ranciere and affect theory, see: Bargetz, 2015).

Affect can be understood as a process of feeling, emotion, drive or passion – but without the cultural, social and historical baggage that such terms imply (Thrift, 2008, p.221). In Thrift's (2008) definition, affect is 'the richly expressive/aesthetic feeling-cum-behaviour of continual becoming that is provided chiefly by bodily states and processes' (p. 60). As such, Rancière's aesthetics, defined as 'a way of experiencing a sensory state which has abandoned the hierarchies that normally organize sensory experience' (Rancière, 2019, pp.33–34), can be considered an affective process – much like the Bakhtinian carnival, where the sensory experience of festival laughter liberates from the rigidity of the everyday (For more on the affective dimension of the carnivalesque, see: Klumbytė, 2014, Kan, 2020). The connection between aesthetics and affect has been discussed more explicitly by O'Sullivan (2001) who, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, defines art as 'a bundle of affects ... a bloc of sensations, waiting to be reactivated by a spectator or participant' (p. 126).

In comedy studies, the aesthetics of humour can also be understood in relation to affect. Freud, for example, claimed that 'the essence of humour is that one spares oneself the affects to which the situation would naturally give rise and overrides with a jest the possibility of such an emotional display' (Freud cited in Bruns, 2000, p.17). In more recent scholarship, laughter is described as an 'affect-laden' process (Waisanen, 2011, p.74). As Bachorowski and Owren (2008) explain, laughter has 'obvious links with positive states such as happiness… and with the enjoyment associated with humor' but it has also been noted to 'accompany negative emotions such as guilt, shame and nervousness' (p. 205). It is important to remember, however, that we are cognisant of emotions and feelings; affect on the other hand, is 'a moment of unformed and unstructured potential... [it] is always prior to and/or outside consciousness' (Shouse cited in Leys, 2011, p.442).

This affective process could easily describe experiences of humour, particularly where laughter is involuntary and/or inexplicable. An interesting illustration of this is Fried et al.'s, (1998) neurological study, where laughter was stimulated through electric currents. Despite the internal origin of the stimulus, the subject in the study offered various explanations for their laughter, 'attributing it to whatever external stimulus was present' in the room (p. 650). As Connolly (2002) points out, this suggests that laughter is an affective experience that 'precedes feeling and consciousness' (Connolly, 2002, p.9). In other words, we laugh first, and only after

the fact tell ourselves a story about why laughed. This is not a revolutionary idea – narrative approaches to identity construction show that we are constantly telling ourselves stories that explain our behaviour (see: 4.2). The difference for affect advocates like Connolly is that the story is deemed irrelevant precisely because it is illusionary. Massumi (2015), for example, claims that affect is 'not something that can be reduced to one thing. Mainly because it's not a thing' (p. 47). By that, he means that affect is an ineffable experience: '[it] is lived or it is nothing' (Massumi, 2015, p.viii).

Here lies the issue with the approaches presented so far: they do not leave space for intentionality. For Morreall (2009) and Gordon (2012), a focus on the aesthetics of humour should give primacy to 'the impact of the humor on the people who are viewing it rather than on the motivations and intentions of the performer' (Gordon, 2012). Likewise, Rancière's emancipatory aesthetics is about the spectator, not the artist. There is no way of anticipating affect, and no clear path from aesthetics to political thought and action. Emancipatory aesthetic experiences 'can happen anywhere, at any time, but they cannot be calculated' (Rancière, 2009, p.75). In the affective theories of Massumi (2015) Thrift (2008) or Connolly (2002), 'affective responses involve a kind of … subpersonal bodily thinking that is said to precede cognition and intentionality' (Leys, 2011, p.452).

The anti-intentionalism of affect theory radically separates affect and reason, and consequently, make 'disagreement about meaning, or ideological dispute, irrelevant to cultural analysis' (Leys, 2011, p.472). Where then is the space for politics? Though the 'affect-oriented' notion of aesthetics is seen by some as too narrow to encompass the political (Asavei, 2018, p.48), others have viewed 'affect' as 'political from the get go' because 'it is not concerned with things – certainly not with things "in themselves" – so much as with things-in-the-making' (Massumi, 2015, p.viii). As such, Massumi seems to offer a kind of politics of becoming, much like the performative approaches to identity (Butler, 2002, Loxley, 2007, Asenbaum, 2020). The problem, as Hemmings (2005) points out, is that the tendency to place affect outside the scope of social signification altogether makes it an 'attitude of faith', not of social science: 'we are left with a riddle-like description of affect as something scientists can detect the loss of (in the anomaly), social scientists and cultural critics cannot interpret, but philosophers can imagine' (p. 563).

This does not mean one ought to dismiss affect and aesthetic experience altogether. Rather, we should situate these within the context of 'social narratives and power relations' (Hemmings,

2005, p.562). A more intentional view of aesthetics is taken here, whereby artistic contemplation (and by extension, humour appreciation) is understood as a conversation. Carroll (2001) exemplifies this well:

> just as an ordinary conversation gives us a stake in understanding our interlocutor, so does interaction with an artwork… An important part of why we are interested in art is that it affords not only an opportunity to reap aesthetic satisfaction but is an opportunity to exercise our interpretive abilities in the context of a genuine conversation. (p. 174)

This insight is even more relevant in the context of stand-up comedy, which is fundamentally an active and interactive experience (Rutter, 1997, Brodie, 2014). Just like in 'bona fide' communication (Raskin and Ruch, 2017, Attardo, 2020), there are rules and structures that shape the humorous interaction: 'Joking is a game that players only play successfully when they both understand and follow the rules' (Critchley, 2002, p.4).

This brings us to the question of form, which also belongs to the realm of aesthetics. Asavei (2018) notes that the political in art is often understood in terms of content, while form is considered apolitical, or 'pure aesthetics' (p. 43). However, he sees this dichotomy as misguided: 'the political can find expression through formal, aesthetic means too' (Asavei, 2018, p.33). A similar perspective is held by Holm (2017), who demonstrates how the aesthetic aspects of humour can 'do political work' (p. 12):

> By political aesthetics, I refer to the idea that the aesthetic aspect of a text—its form, style, palette, rhythm, narrative, structure and form—can do political work, by which I mean it can intercede in the negotiation, contestation and distribution of power.
>
> (Holm, 2017, p.12).

For Holm then, it is the formal features of the comic performance that influence how we engage with it. Unlike the universalist theories of humour discussed earlier in this thesis, Holm asserts that the function of humour as a site of dominance or resistance cannot be determined in advance; humour is a 'cultural terrain whose aesthetic contours determine its multiple possible political trajectories' (Holm, 2017, p.13).

To understand the political effects of humour then, it is important to look beyond its content. If we take the term 'political' to mean a site of resistance, a 'hegemonic struggle' (Mouffe, 2005), or a conflict between 'antagonistic principles' (Rancière, 2019, p.73), then much of what we call political comedy or satire does not qualify as such (See: Holm, 2017). Drawing on Rancière's (2009) notion of 'distribution of the sensible', Holm (2017) considers the aesthetics of humour to be political if they 'disrupt stable forms of sensory community experience' (p. 188). A joke that takes aim at political actors is not necessarily political if it uses a superiority form of humour to re-enforce existing social and political norms. As discussed in the analysis chapters, British panel shows like Mock the Week are a perfect illustration of such non-political "political comedy". This leads us to a reflection on the different categories of comedy, and their social implications. The significance of genre for our cultural understanding of comedy will be discussed in the following section.

3.4 Comedy Genre(s)

The overt 'mixing, blurring and shifting of cultural forms' in modern times makes the concept of 'genre' difficult to pin down (Freedman and Medway, 1994, p.vii). Traditionally, genre has referred to the categorisation of discourses into similar 'types' based on their content or form (p. 2). In order to understand the meaning of a text, we must understand what kind of text it is. Yet, the categorisation process involved in genre is embedded in cultural and social structures and relations. It is thus important to acknowledge from the outset that genres are not naturally occurring categories, nor are they stable (Freedman and Medway, 1994, Bateman, 2008, Frow, 2014). Yet, despite their fluid and nebulous existence, genre classifications are very much 'real' in the sense that they 'have an organising force in everyday life' (Frow, 2014, p. 13). Within this research project, it became clear in the analysis of the Edinburgh Fringe catalogue that 'stand-up' is a category deemed relevant in this particular context. What is less clear if one simply browses the catalogue, is what this classification actually means: what does it include or exclude? What are its defining features? How is this genre defined?

There are structural dimensions that help code the text as belonging to a certain genre. Frow (2014) describes these as: formal features (how the text is put together), thematic structure (what kind of conventional topics or schemes does it draw on?), situational address (the speaking position), structure of implication (the background knowledge invoked), rhetorical function (the pragmatic effects – what is the text doing?), and the physical setting, i.e. the regulative frame(Frow, 2014, p.9). The cues provided by these different dimensions, and the

way in which the dimensions interact with each other, facilitate the decoding of meaning by placing a text, whether consciously or not, within a certain category.

These structural elements can help us to identify stand-up as a genre. It contains formal features in its structure of a 'typical' stand-up performance (Quirk, 2011, Double, 2014); it has the rhetorical function of 'entertainment' through humour and play (Brodie, 2014); moreover, this form of play is a collaboration that requires the 'performed demonstration of a shared worldview' (Brodie, 2014, p.132); and lastly, the physical setting of the stage and microphone (combined with the aforementioned dimensions and the social context) helps to frame the performance as 'stand-up comedy'. Brodie (2014) sees the microphone as indicative of the power-relation within this social interaction: it amplifies the performers voice providing the illusion of intimacy, while at the same time allowing the performer to retain control (as the audience's voices are typically not amplified).

Stand-up comedy's 'illusion of intimacy' also expands further than the microphone. One of the features of stand-up is the interweaving of jokes with a narrative routine – each 'bit' of a routine is linked with others in the same routine, and connected to other factors such as venue, perceived audience, and so on. In this sense, the live stand-up performance exists only in that fleeting moment between performer and audience members sharing the same physical space. Moreover, the contents of the routine in stand-up often take the form of personal stories. While these may simply be fabrications for entertainment, they are told by the performer as if they were real. The physical proximity, the 'uniqueness' of an experience that will never truly be replicated, the seemingly authentic personality of the performer, and the relationship that is cultivated during the show between performer and audience all help to create the illusion of intimacy that ultimately defines the stand-up genre (Brodie, 2009a, 2014).

Having established stand-up comedy as a genre, it is now important to explore the boundaries of the subgenre of political comedy. For Tsakona and Popa (2011) political humour is understood as a 'communicative resource spotting, highlighting, and attacking incongruities originating in political discourse and action' (p. 6). Some stand-up easily fits this definition, unapologetically claiming the 'political' label (see for example, John Oliver, Mark Thomas, Frankie Boyle, to name but a few). Comedy panel shows also tend to count as political comedy (Weber, 2017, Davies and Ilott, 2018). Intrinsic to this genre is not only the theme of politics, but also the 'rhetorical function' (Frow, 2014) of critique, which often takes the form of disciplinary ridicule (Weber, 2017, Davies and Ilott, 2018). As some have noted, the

confrontational style associated with political comedy tends to render it a male-dominated space (Gilbert, 2004, Robinson, 2010, Davies and Ilott, 2018, Webber, 2018) – a topic that will be explored further in the analysis chapters.

It is argued here that the genre of political comedy as defined above is too restrictive, and constructs a problematic distinction between the political (that pertaining to politics) and apolitical (that which just seeks to entertain). This distinction falls short; 'not talking about politics is effectively political', as it supports the status quo (Roberts cited in Quirk, 2018, p.23). The 'depoliticisation' of comedy, to use Barthes terminology, is in itself a 'myth'; it serves a 'purifying' function, making comedy seem innocent and natural (Barthes, 1972, p.143). Despite attempts to downplay its significance, however, comedy has a social function beyond immediate enjoyment; 'there is no such thing as "just" being funny' (Quirk, 2015, p.9).

Even when political comedy is taken seriously, the term political is usually narrowly defined. In other words, it is common to think of political comedy as comedy *about* politics, rather than comedy that *does* political work. Holm (2017) challenges this categorisation and promotes a broader definition of political comedy. Comedy for him is only *political* if it challenges the way we understand the world. Comedy that simply addresses the 'practice of government' (Holm, 2017, p.62) is described as *politicised* comedy. If we expand politics to its wider definition, then stand-up comedy becomes a key medium through which hegemonic struggles (Mouffe, 2005) can be expressed.

Identity is central to this political process. Not only is the personal political, as Hanisch (2000 [1969]) claimed, but all political activity is 'animated by efforts to define and defend who I am, or we are, or you are, or hope to be, or hope to be seen to be' (Parker, 2005, p.53). While these questions will be explored in more depth in chapter 4, it is important to note here the intrinsic relationship between identity politics and comedy. Comedy involves both inclusion and exclusion: it generates a bond between the joke-maker and the recipient(s) who accept the content and target of the joke, and excludes those who do not (Tsakona and Popa, 2011, Davies and Ilott, 2018). As Davies and Ilott (2018) explain, stand-up comedy 'might reflect existing norms and values with regards to social identity, yet it also has the potential actively to (re)construct such identities' (p. 16).

3.4.1 British Comedy

If comedy says something about who "we" are, functioning as a 'testing ground' for ideas about national belonging (Medhurst, 2007, p.39), what does it say about British identities? A brief overview of the traditions of British comedy are needed in order to answer this question. As Double (1991, 2020) explains, British stand-up comedy can largely be divided into three eras, each with a particular style: Musical Hall and variety, working men's clubs (WMC), and Alternative Comedy (altcom). These three traditions reflect the changing culture and politics in Britain over the past century, and continue to influence British comedy today, as this thesis demonstrates.

A point of departure, if we want to identify the origins of stand-up, is to look at the comic songs of Music Halls in the 19th Century and the comedic variety acts of early 20th Century. This type of performance relied on stereotypes, though arguably less hostile ones than those later found in men's comedy club gigs: 'some jokes were undoubtedly racist, but in many cases the racism was not the main point of the joke' (Double, 1991, p.110). Double (1991) points to the importance of familiarity in the music hall and variety genres. Performers developed recognisable catchphrases and comic characters and the jokes followed a formulaic and predictable pattern. In short, the audience knew what to expect from the shows, and that was part of the charm (Double, 1991, p.70). The music hall era is particularly relevant for this thesis because it gives rise to the 'Scotch comic', a well-known type of comic character in the variety circuit, influenced by the Tartanry tradition (Maloney, 2010).

Music hall and variety tended to reflect the specific characteristics of locality, and in Scotland, this meant 'Scottish performers speaking in Scottish accents and performing Scottish songs, sketches and patter'(Maloney, 2010, p.133). The Scotch comic was also a central feature of shows in other parts of the UK, with the kilt-wearing Harry Lauder being one of the most famous examples. Lauder, much like other comics at the time, exaggerated his Scottishness and played up to national stereotypes. His kitsch Scottish aesthetic made him hugely popular in the UK and abroad, where he appealed to an expat community (Brown, 2005, Maloney, 2010, Schweitzer, 2011). Despite his success, the style of comedy that Lauder represents has been critiqued by many for its 'cultural fraudulence' (Maloney, 2010, p.134). In contrast, some contemporaneous comics of Lauder, like Tommy Lorne for example, seemed to express a more 'authentic' urban working-class Glaswegian culture (Maloney, 2010, p.139); this contrast

foreshadows the recurring debate over Scottish authenticity in the scholarly literature (explored further in section 4.3).

As music hall and variety came to end in the 1950s, stand-up comedy (the genre we recognise today) began to take its place, primarily within the confines of working men's clubs (WMC). British stand-up at this time has been described as white, male, and working-class, and exclusionary of minorities (Double, 1991, Medhurst, 2007). Though WMCs are talked about as the origins of British stand-up, some have argued this is a distinctly *English* style of comedy, which was particularly prominent in the North (Medhurst, 2007, Fox, 2018). Before moving on to the British Alternative Comedy of the 80s, a short detour through the 'Englishness' of stand-up is needed.

For Medhurst (2007), one of the few scholars to have written explicitly about English national identity and comedy, talks about belonging as the central appeal of stand-up. He explains that:

> we imagine ourselves to be close or closer to something produced in 'our nation'. Any such imagined proximity is never merely spatial, it supposes a proximity of sensibility, a proximity of disposition, a proximity of cultural vocabulary.
>
> (Medhurst, 2007, p.207)

The particularities of being English, or to be more accurate, the imagined proximity to Englishness, creates boundaries around English identity that are articulated and constructed through comedy. As Medhurst (2007, p.1) explains, comedy has contributed significantly to 'how English culture has imagined its Englishness'. British traditions of comedy are heavily influenced by class and in English popular comedy, this influenced is clearly expressed through the working men's club (WMC) comedy of the 50s, 60s and 70s. Performers like Bernard Manning, Jim Davidson, or Roy 'Chubby' Brown focus on the lives and the values of the 'ordinary' Englishman, where ordinary is equated with white, working-class, heterosexual identity (Medhurst, 2007, p.192).

WMC comedy was also distinct in terms of style. It did not provide the kind of free-flowing narrative monologue that we tend to find in today's stand-up (Quirk, 2015). Rather, the humour is much more disconnected from the performer (who often does not actually write their own material); as Double observes, 'there is no attempt to express a personal opinion or offer a

social or political critique' (2020, p.24). WMC comedy is therefore conservative both in its *style*, preferring a tried and tested formula to a risk-taking one, and its *politics*, as it works to defend and maintain the status quo (Double, 1991).

While the discriminatory aspects of WMC English comedy can be judged as reactionary, Medhurst (2007) also highlights its importance as a site of resistance against the negative effects of globalisation. In a postmodern and fragmented world, 'Chubby' Brown's comedy 'waves a battered, often shabby, but always defiant flag for wholeness and locality' (Medhurst, 2007, p.194). Though Medhurst is careful to note that it also hinges on 'intolerance', and is 'not a carefully thought-out political programme' (p. 196), he nonetheless defends its value. He sees Brown and Manning as personifications of the 'stigmatised' white working-class, who do not identify with, or benefit from, the cosmopolitan postmodern imperative (Medhurst, 2007, p.197).

There is some truth to this. The stigmatisation of the working-class has come from all sides since Thatcher: the political establishment, who turned away from class-conflict in favour of neo-liberalism and a 'third way' (Giddens, 2013) consensus; the media, who vilified the white working-class through sensationalist news and negative stereotyping (*Little Britain*, *Shameless*, and *The Scheme* are just some examples); and the middle-class public, whose hatred of the white working-class united both liberals and conservatives (Lockyer, 2010, Kamm and Neumann, 2016, Jones, 2020). Meanwhile, the comedy of Manning and 'Chubby' Brown, with its racist undertones and working-class appeal became less popular with the mainstream (though it never really went away).

Such stigmatisation of the working-class should be, and has been, condemned by many (Lockyer, 2010, McGarvey, 2018, Jones, 2020). Yet the racism expressed by WMC comics also deserves condemnation, even if they express a 'beer-gut reaction' (Medhurst, 2007, p.196) against the very real damage done by global capitalism. As comedian, Bridget Christie, remarks: it is 'not about socio-economic class: if you are a racist, you're a racist and you need to be called out on it' (Quirk, 2018, p.112).

The Alternative Comedy (altcom) scene that emerged in London in the late 70s and 80s offered a critique of the 'old-fashioned' WMC stand-up. Despite originating in London, with The Comedy Store as its birthplace, altcom eventually spread much wider (Craig, 2001, Quirk, 2018, Double, 2020). The Edinburgh Fringe, for example, was an important 'training ground'

for alternative comedians (Batchelder, 2006, Venables, 2017). One of the best-known comedians of this era, Billy Connolly, influenced and inspired many of the alternative comedians who followed. In his early days, Connolly performed in folk clubs, incorporating comic patter about his Glaswegian working-class experience in between his musical numbers (Double, 2020, p.26). He broke the mould, and confused some commentators since he was 'neither a stand-up comic', at least not in the style of WMCs, nor was he a 'stage-Scot with kilt and sporran (Heilpern cited in Double, 2020, p.27), at least not in the style of music halls. Connolly was doing in the 70s what the altcom of the 80s would later do – shifting stand-up comedy towards introspective monologues and anecdotes.

Altcom can be described as a counterculture; not only was it more politically minded (mostly left-wing and Anti-Thatcherite), but it also disrupted the traditional orthodoxies of the comedy world. As Double (2020) points out, altcom was about expressing 'individual perspectives on the world' rather than recycled jokes and 'lumpen shared assumptions' (p. 112). Despite being the 'alternative' to mainstream comedy, altcom rose in popularity extremely quickly, and soon became a much more professionalised genre; full-length solo stand-up shows started to emerge at the Fringe in the mid-80s, as did large-scale comedy tours. In 1987, Scottish performer Arnold Brown became the first alternative comedian to win the Perrier Award (aka the Edinburgh Comedy Award) (Double, 2020).

Despite its wide appeal, altcom has also attracted critics. Medhurst's (2007) analysis of 'English national comedy' in fact leaves out this genre altogether in order to avoid the 'masochistic chore of grappling with comedy that makes no substantial inroads into my own laughter' (p. 7). Alternative comedy from his perspective is 'flecked with bile and designed to divide' (Medhurst, 2007, p.180). Other scholars have instead critiqued the political inefficacy of altcom and even its originality (Peters, 2013, Schaffer, 2016). For these critics, altcom was 'unfunny, elitist, and its radical ambitions remained unfulfilled' (Double, 2020, p.10). However, as Double (2020) points out, there is whole range of possibilities 'between zero and toppling the government' (p. 141); to measure comedy's success on the basis of '180-degree Damascene conversions in its audiences' is perhaps a little unrealistic (Double, 2020, p.141).

Contemporary British stand-up is complex and multifaceted, but the dividing lines within it seem eerily familiar. In Quirk's (2018) analysis of the field, she observes that:

> left- and right-wing remain the major categorisations which comedians use to describe their own political affiliations… left-wing comedy punches up. The desire to punch downwards through comedy in itself describes a form of right-wing politics. (p. 123)

Much like in the WMC era, the comedians claiming to represent the 'ordinary' man (Brown, 2018, Koshy, 2019) still defend their right to offend (or punch down). Alternative comedians, on the other hand, are more politically correct (Brassett, 2016, Quirk, 2018), and aim their jokes at those in positions of power (punching up). Some have argued that the punch of 80s altcom was impotent as an agent of social change, and perhaps even inadvertently strengthened Thatcherism (Schaffer, 2016). Despite their progressive intentions, altcom served to legitimise 'global market rationalities' as the comedy scene became increasingly driven by neoliberalism (Brassett, 2021, p.59).

Contemporary alternative comedy has been equally discredited by some as unfunny, and ineffective. The political correctness of the 'snowflake' generation is 'killing the British sense of humour' according to *Only Fools and Horses* star David Jason (Eden, 2012). Moreover, the exponential growth of stand-up has pushed other artistic forms out (Ferguson, 2017), and the field has become more homogenised and professionalised; the white male comedian is everywhere, and though he looks the part, he lacks the radical political content associated with the earlier era (Double, 2020, p.166). Moreover, if we take 'alternative' to mean a counterculture that pushes against hegemonic values, then today's right-wing comedians might readily adopt the label as they fight the woke political correctness of 'liberal hegemony' (Webber, 2018, p.190, Koshy, 2019).

Contemporary right-wing comedians are like 'free-speech warriors' (Leaker, 2020, p.7), who use the ambiguity of irony to put forth their political message. Like the 'old school' comedy of the past, alt-right stand-up prioritises 'freedom to joke over more politically correct sensibilities' (Quirk, 2018, p.28). Comic discourse is not designed to be taken seriously, they claim, so the charge of offense cannot be placed on the performer. As 'Chubby' Brown puts it, 'there are no laws in comedy, no rules' (Brown cited in Quirk, 2018, p.28). At the same time, right-wing stand-up draws on the alternative comedy of the 80s, maintaining the same style, if not its content. The Comedy Unleashed club in London, for example, markets itself as a place for 'free thinking comedy' (Koshy, 2019). Andrew Doyle, the founder of the project, insists that a 'truly alternative scene' needs to involve risk-taking (Koshy, 2019).

To put this in context, it is important to note the political changes that have taken place since altcom. The conditions that Medhurst refers to in 2007 (postmodern fragmentation, alienation, and a defensive reassertion of nationalist belonging) have only been exacerbated in the decade since. The Brexit referendum is explained through the narrative of the 'left-behind' white working-class (Norris and Inglehart, 2019), and exclusionary and offensive comedy is presented by some as a vital form of resistance (Quirk, 2018, Koshy, 2019). White men are 'under attack' (Leaker, 2020, p.51), claim (some) white men. This attack is perfectly illustrated by the marginalisation of right-wing comedians within the lefty, liberal, 'virtue signalling' world of the arts (Fox, 2020, Heffer, 2020). Yet, as Quirk (2018) rightly points out, British mainstream comedy has plenty of right-wing representatives[1]. Jimmy Carr, Ricky Gervais, Frankie Boyle, Geoff Norcott, Andrew Lawrence, among others, have all forged successful on- and off-screen careers as politically incorrect comedians.

Moreover, resurgence of comedy that resorts to racism and sexism, even if ironically, raises the question (again) of whether left-leaning comedy can meet its politically progressive goals. As Webber (2018) notes:

> In the post-Brexit/Trump era, it is not just that satire is "failing," but that it has become a constituent element in "the problem." The very role and function of "political satire" has been called into question for its failure to communicate beyond the "echo chamber" of liberal opinion. (p. 179).

However, Quirk (2018) has a more positive outlook. She sees millennial alternative comedians as a new generation capable of presenting solutions to the complex problems of our political climate. Though they draw inspiration from 80s altcom, new alternative comedians have different priorities. Perhaps the biggest difference is the growth and commercialisation of stand-up comedy, which leads to a 'complicity with neoliberalism' (Wagg, 2005, Quirk, 2018, p.166), but also resistance exemplified by 'DIY', autonomous comedians who prioritise their message over commercial success (Josie Long is cited by Quirk (2018) as a key example). The neoliberal rationality of the stand-up scene, and of the Edinburgh Fringe more generally,

[1] The right is defined in Quirk's analysis as those who deride the politically correct sensibilities of the left

presents a particular challenge, but one that alternative comedians are actively grappling with (see: 7.3.1 for further discussion on this issue).

It is important to note too that comedy does not have to carry the 'alternative' label in order to be political. Kate Fox's (2017, 2018) analysis of English comedy provides some interesting insights into forms of resistance. She notes that the familiar archetype of the Northern comic (most famously exemplified by Bernard Manning) still 'haunts' Northern stand-up, but is challenged and sometimes re-appropriated, creating an in-between space where resistance against the hegemonic 'Northern Imaginary' can take place (Fox, 2018, p.32). Northernness, she notes, is 'a signifier for a working-class, low-brow and grotesque culture' (Fox, 2018, p.31). The embodied features of Northernness, such as accent and body size, contribute to the common 'misrecognition' (Fox, 2017, p.66), whereby Northern accents are often read as working-class, even if they are socioeconomically middle-class.

These connotations consequently impact the way in which Northern comedians are received – reviews are more likely to comment on their regional identity, accent and body, and categorise them as working class (Fox, 2017, 2018). This, of course, contrasts with the way in which comedians from the South of England are talked about. Regardless of what accent they hold, Southern comedians are more likely to be described based on their national (British) rather than regional identity; little reference is made to their body; and fewer references to their working-class identity, even where the comedian is self-proclaimed working-class. This is identified as a form of 'cultural imperialism', a way through which Northern identities are othered, while elements that differentiate the 'dominant' culture are made invisible (Fox, 2018, p.20).

3.4.2 Scottish Comedy

Having established the main features of British comedy, this section now turns to the specific elements of *Scottish* comedy. It starts by asking the question: is there something distinctive about Scottish humour? For some, the answer is a resounding 'Aye!' (Charteris, 1932, McArthur, 1998, Davies, 2002, Colgan, 2007, Hibberd, 2010, Wilkie, 2014, State of the Nations, 2018). Davies (2002) identifies the Scots as having a 'remarkable efflorescence of self-directed humor and of humor directed towards a collective self' (p. 44), the trope of the 'canny Scotsman' being perhaps the most widely recognised example of this self-mockery. In Double's analysis of music hall, he remarks that 'Scots were shown as being mean and addicted

to whisky', and Scottish performers themselves played up to such stereotypes (Double, 1991, p.107)

The 'golden age' of Scottish jokes (1850-1950) saw a host of intellectuals publishing Scottish joke books that expressed seemingly derogatory Scottish stereotypes of the 'canny, thrifty, shrewd, grasping, dram-drinking, fanatically Calvinist and Sabbatarian Scot' (Davies, 2002, p.20). The self-derogatory element of Scottish humour, according to Davies (2002), is not a sign of self-hate, nor of outsider hostility; rather, it is a self-reflective device that '*celebrates* Scottishness' (p. 21, original emphasis) through mocking – a way of expressing pride whilst remaining modest. This sentiment is also expressed by Goldie (2000), who views the use of Jimmy hats by the Tartan Army as an act of triumph: 'by reclaiming it in a spirit of irony, and in laughing at themselves [Scots] are also laughing at the simplicity of those who would mock them' (P. 12-13). Similarly, Francesconi's (2011) analysis of Scottish postcards shows that humour is effectively used as a form of self-promotion and (imagined) bond between host and guest as both are the butt of the joke.

The national specificity of Scottish broadcast comedy is observed by Hibberd (2010) in her analysis of the Comedy Unit – the independent television production company that brought *Chewin' the Fat*, *Rab C Nesbitt* and other successful comedies to fruition. These shows, as Hibberd (2010) highlights, are 'definitively, identifiably and sometimes even problematically representative of the [Scottish] nation' (p. 75). The distinctly Scottish dialect not only serves to position the characters' geographical location and working-class status, but also operates as a form of 'banal nationalism' (Billig, 1995), constructing a boundary between those who understand the regional dialect (and therefore belong) and those who do not (McArthur, 1998) – 'here's tae us, wha's like us'. While both *Chewin' the Fat* and *Rab C. Nesbitt* were aired on the BBC to the rest of the UK, they were produced primarily for a Scottish audience, which according to Hibberd (2010), contributed to their success (in Scotland at least).

For Scottish viewers, the use of Scots is a welcome change from the standardised English devoid of regional difference often found on the BBC: 'The use of the dialect provides an extra dimension to the humour — we laugh at once with the joke […] and the subversive nature of the appearance of Scottish characters on the BBC' (Hibberd, 2010, p.79). Combined with the urban settings of the shows, Comedy Unit productions provide a 'glimpse of "normal" life in Glasgow' (Hibberd, 2010, p.81). This regional specificity might appeal to a Scottish audience, but it arguably presents a barrier for non-Scottish viewers. For Wilkie (2014), this is partly

explained by the fact that Scots 'play with subtle forms of self-deprecation in ways that are not always immediately accessible to an English reading' (p. 179). The use of Scots can make the humour even harder to understand. Indeed, when Scottish comedies reach mainstream UK audiences, they become more Anglicised; one clear example of this is the switch from Scots to English in *Still Game*'s episode titles from season 4 onwards.

In Scottish stand-up comedy, a distinctive element is the focus on, and mocking of, regional particularities. Frankie Boyle illustrates this as he states his preference for a Scottish audience, 'not for nationalistic reasons, but because a largely English audience means that I won't be able to spend about a third of the show throwing lazy, clumsy blows at the city of Dundee' (Boyle cited in Wilkie, 2014, p.180). It is also important to note the overwhelmingly Glaswegian tone of Scottish stand-up comedy: 'there is no Scottish comedy that is not Glaswegian . . . when people speak of the Scottish sense of humour, what they mean is the Glaswegian sense of humour' (Brown, 2013, p.12). This Glaswegian slant to stand-up also results in the overrepresentation of certain topics, such as football-related sectarianism, and the rough working-class Glaswegian identity – these issues are often presented as Scottish, but the extent to which they feature in the everyday of 'middle-class' Edinburgh or rural Highlands, for example is debatable.

Sectarianism and class issues are in fact some of the topics that make Scottish comedy problematic according to some scholars (McArthur, 1998, Mowatt, 2008, Reid, 2015). In an analysis of sketches from the Scottish radio comedy show *Watson's Wind Up*, Reid (2015) points to how bigotry against the Irish-descended and Catholic communities in Scotland is reinforced through the humour of the sketches. For Mowatt (2008) the lack of engagement with class struggles poses a problem. He observes that protagonists in Scottish broadcast comedy are almost always working-class (Mowatt, 2008, p.148). When 'posh' or RP-based Scottish accents are heard, this is usually to 'heighten the "vernacularity" of the central characters' (McArthur, 1998, p.110). This helps to perpetuate the myth of working-class identity being an essential condition of Scottish nationalism (Anderson, 1985, Morton, 2011).

At the same time, Scottish TV comedy could be viewed as an example of the working-class stigma prevalent in Britain, most notably through the portrayal of the 'chav'. As scholars (Lockyer, 2010, Lindner, 2016, Jones, 2020) have noted, the term 'chav' has been used frequently since the late 90s to pejoratively describe white, working-class youth:

> in the sphere of consumption, chavs wear the "wrong" type of clothing…wear too much jewellery…wear too much gaudy cheap make-up…binge-drink on cheap lager, and listen to the wrong kinds of music.
>
> (Lockyer, 2010, p.125)

The 'chav' therefore represents a rejection of 'middle-class modesty' and discipline through their conspicuous consumption, promiscuity, aggression, ignorance and 'grotesque body' (Lockyer, 2010, p.128). This is perfectly illustrated in the character of Vicky Pollard in *Little Britain*, who is depicted as an inarticulate single mother and teenage delinquent. The show has come under much criticism in recent years for its negative representations of class, race, and gender and sexuality (Tyler, 2008, Lockyer, 2010, Goracci, 2013, Lindner, 2016, Jones, 2020). Little Britain illustrates the contempt for the white working-class, which Medhurst (2007) sees as a central aspect shaping English stand-up comedy.

Though the word 'chav' is used widely in Britain, Scotland has its own specific equivalent, the 'ned'. As Law and Mooney explain, 'descriptions of the Chavs as a cultural underclass in England cannot be readily translated into accounts of the Ned phenomenon in Scotland' (Law and Mooney, 2012, p.112). One key difference is that neds are more strongly associated with anti-social behaviour than with bad taste – though consumption choices are relevant here too. Moreover, the working-class is less likely to be explicitly racialised as 'white' in public discourse due to Scotland's emphasis on civic rather than ethnic nationalism (Law and Mooney, 2012, p.113) – though whiteness is still implicit. Law (2006, p.28) also suggests that in contrast to *Little Britain*, Scottish comedy shows portray the urban poor in more sympathetic ways, demonstrating an 'insider's understanding'.

However, 'shaming representations' of ned culture and of the urban poor can readily be found in Scotland too (Law, 2006, Law and Mooney, 2012); the documentary series *The Scheme* is one such example of deprivation exploited for entertainment (McGarvey, 2018). Moreover, books like *Nedworld*, and websites like *Dumpdee* are 'ripping the piss out of the neds' (Law, 2006, p.30) through humour. Though class is an important element of Scottish identity, and a common theme in Scottish comedy, the meaning of class and its relationship to national identity remains contested; this topic is discussed in more depth in section 4.3.

Working-class representations in Scottish comedy tend to be urban and 'assertively male' (Irwin and Smith, 2018, p.5), drawing on the tradition of 'Clydesidism' (Neely, 2008, p.152). The Clydesider encompasses a rough masculinity defined by socio-economic effects of de-industrialisation in the West of Scotland in the latter half of the 20th Century. Irwin and Smith (2018) see Clydesidism as an influential narrative in Scottish comedy, which is embodied in the comic archetype of 'The Glaswegian Man', as they call it. The Glaswegian Man is not only prevalent in much of the broadcast comedy produced by the Comedy Unit, but is also found in Scottish stand-up too. Billy Connolly, Kevin Bridges, Frankie Boyle, all present a decisively Glaswegian, traditionally masculine, and working-class identity.

There are exceptions to this hegemonic masculinity, however. Both Brown (2010, 2020) and Irwin and Smith (2018) talk about the subversiveness of 'Scottish Camp' comedy. Brown (2020) describes Scottish camp as a device that undermines 'assumptions about authoritative representational modes and hegemonic power' (p. 189). Craig Hill is cited as an example of this since his kilted yet camp stand-up performance challenges traditional Tartanry Scottish masculinity (Brown, 2010, p.190); Hill's stand-up is discussed in more detail in section 5.2.1. Other examples of Scottish camp can be found in the pantomime tradition, explored in more depth by Maloney (2010), broadcast comedy (e.g., *The High Life* and *Gary: Tank Commander*) (Irwin and Smith, 2018, Brown, 2020) as well the some of the stand-up performances analysed in this thesis.

In Scottish broadcast comedy, two recent series have transgressed heteronormative norms. In the sitcom *Two Doors Down,* we have a prominent gay character, who is unambiguously out. The show also deviates from the Clydesider hegemony as it is set in middle-class suburbia (albeit in the outskirts of Glasgow). *Gary: Tank Commander* is a particularly interesting example as it not only subverts masculine stereotypes, but also deviates from the Glasgow-centric frame. In this mockumentary series, the main character, Gary McLintoch, is a soldier from Dalgety Bay with a distinct east-coast accent and ambiguous sexuality. As Irwin and Smith (2018) observe, Gary 'is a naïve, good natured "small town boy" whose optimistic outlook is distinct from the world-weary cynicism of the Glaswegian funny man' (p. 13).

To return to our earlier question on the distinctiveness of Scottish humour, we can identify contrasting positions in the literature. The comedy of the Tartanry tradition, from Harry Lauder to Craig Hill, is recognisably Scottish, but is seen by some as a manufactured 'burlesque Scottishness' (Goldie, 2000, p.10); in their desire to succeed in a British or international

cultural space, they dilute nuances of Scottish identity, and amplify stereotypes. On the other hand, The Glaswegian Man archetype, which draws on the Clydesider tradition, is thought to represent a more realistic vision of Scottish life (Hibberd, 2010, Irwin, 2015). Yet, here too we can find limitations. *Rab C. Nesbitt* and many other Comedy Unit sitcoms operate 'non-naturalistically': 'class is rarely engaged with explicitly since the protagonists are almost invariably working class' (Mowatt, 2008, pp.146-148)). This 'almost charmingly romantic' (Law, 2006, p.29) portrayal of Scottish working-class culture expresses a 'restorative nostalgia [that] does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition' (Boym, 2008, p.xviii).

Scottish comedy then can be accused of not being Scottish enough, with its inauthentic 'kitsch' Tartanry designed for an English and American audience; or it can be too Scottish, with its 'internalist' outlook that 'ignores major cultural and social changes in the world generally' (McCrone 1998 cited in Goldie, 2000, p.13). As explored in the following chapter, however, the search for an 'authentic' identity may be a misguided enterprise due to the plurality of meanings that that nation can embody. The same can be said for the concept of Scottish humour: 'any attempt to define what an entire nation may, or may not, find funny is, of course, fraught with problems' (Wilkie, 2014, p.178). There are numerous comedians who are proudly Scottish, but as Goldie (2000) points out, 'it would be difficult to distil much that is essentially Scottish from their diverse comedic efforts' (p. 16). Scottish comedy, much like Scottish identity, operates in terms of hybridity (Bhabha, 1984, 2013) – a theme that is explored in more depth in in the analysis chapters.

3.5 Summary

This chapter has presented a conceptual review of humour and comedy. It started by analysing the philosophical writings of Plato and Aristotle, were we find beginnings of a superiority theory of humour that sees laughter as a form of ridicule. While the function of laughter was dependent on context and social roles, it was generally seen as a bodily pleasure and as such, subordinate to the pursuit of reason and morality. This hierarchy of serious over comic discourse is based on the mind-body dualism emphasised in Plato's philosophy. Though laughter is now viewed in overwhelmingly positive terms, it was shown that the conflict between serious and comic discourse still remains, now reframed as a conflict over comedy taste.

After presenting the contrast between laughter in antiquity and modernity, the chapter discussed some of the most influential theories of humour. It divided the theoretical field in two: those who look for the defining features of humour (what humour is), and those who look for functions (what humour does). In the first camp we find Freud's relief theory which, though flawed, does point to the cathartic nature of laughter. With incongruity theory, the mechanics of jokes can be explained as a cognitive shift resulting from script opposition. Both relief and incongruity theories are limited in their explanatory power since they do not apply to all instances of humour. However, both offer valuable contributions if we view humour as contextual. Rather than leading to a universal definition, these theories help us to understand the characteristics of the 'family likeness' across humorous phenomena (Wittgenstein, 2007, p.17).

On the functions of comedy, the chapter talks about superiority theory and the disciplinary power of ridicule. Laughter from this perspective can serve as a social corrective. By othering and punching down, some forms of humour help to maintain social hierarchies. Contrastingly, humour can transgress social rules and serve a rebellious, carnivalesque function (Bakhtin, 1984). Bakhtin's carnival is particularly relevant here because it helps us understand the subversive potential of stand-up comedy and of the Fringe festival, as well as their limitations. By restricting transgressive misrule to specific pre-defined and state sanctioned occasions, festivals generally help to maintain rather than disrupt the social order (Jamieson, 2004, Žižek, 2005, 2009, Harvie, 2020), but their liminality nonetheless opens up possibilities for politically transformative effects.

Defining the political effects of humour is not an easy task, however. This chapter looked at the concept of political aesthetics in art, and how this can be applied to comedy. It reviewed the representational paradigm, which separates aesthetics (comedy for its own sake) from the political (comedy about political issues). This description places disproportionate focus on the intention of the comic rather than the effects of humour. Affect theorists provide a contrasting perspective, defining laughter as an unconscious affect-laden experience that can be emancipatory, but they leave little room for intent. Yet, as this chapter has argued, intent does matter, even if it only tells us half the story: stand-up comedy is co-constructed with the audience, it is a conversation with its own set of rules.

When discussing genre, it is acknowledged that the label 'political comedy' tends to refer to comedy about politics in the narrow sense. However, drawing on Holm (2017) it is argued that

the separation between political content and aesthetic form is an unhelpful one; humour's political potential is determined as much by its aesthetic contours as by its content. Stand-up is characterised by an individualistic and intimate narrative form of comedy, which opens up a political space precisely because it involves inclusion and exclusion, and the (re)negotiation of identities. This makes it a particularly interesting genre through which to analyse national identity.

An overview of British stand-up comedy traditions was presented, starting with music hall and variety, where we find the precursor to stand-up comedy. Though this was far from the free-flowing narrative that defines stand-up today, music hall gave us the archetype of the Scotch comic (e.g., Harry Lauder). Music hall was replaced by working men's clubs (WMC) in the mid-20th Century. WMC comedy expressed a particularly English and working-class identity, and is associated most prominently with Bernard Manning. This style of comedy relied on prejudiced stereotypes, and formulaic joke structures. Alternative comedy emerged in the 80s as a critique of WMC comedy, advocating for a more progressive politics and politically correct discourse. However, critics of alternative comedy viewed it as an elitist and politically ineffective movement.

The conflict between WMC comedy and alternative comedy finds some continuity today in the divide between right-leaning comedy that advocates 'free speech', and new alternative comedy that defends political correctness. Moreover, WMC comedy of the past still has an impact today, particularly on Northern comedians, who are perceived as working-class and low-brow regardless of their status. This 'Northernness effect' (Fox, 2017, 2018) means that markers of Northern identity (Northern accent, larger body) lead to class misrecognition. These stereotypes are challenged and sometimes re-appropriated by Northern comedians.

Parallels can be found between Northernness and Scottishness in comedy as both have archetypes that 'haunt' them. Scottish comedy has been, and continues to be, defined by the kilt-wearing 'Scotch comic', and the heavy-drinking, canny Scotsman stereotype. In contemporary comedy, we also find the Scottish archetype of 'The Glaswegian Man', a representation of tough, working-class masculinity in post-industrial West of Scotland (Irwin and Smith, 2018). Much like the 'Northernness effect' described by Fox (2018) there may be a 'Glasgow effect' in Scottish comedy, a classed and gendered cultural bias that impacts how Scottish performers are perceived. At the same time, this literature review has pointed to the

ways in which this dominant discourse has been challenged or subverted through comedy, opening up the space for the ‘multi-layered hybridity in Scottishness’ (Brown, 2020, p.202).

4 IDENTITY AND SCOTTISHNESS

Identity holds a significant meaning-making function in society; it is an 'inescapable dimension of being' (Campbell, 1992, p.8, Taylor, 1992, p.31). Yet, the politics of identity remains contested both in the public discourse (Citrin et al., 2016, Reeves, 2016, Press, 2017) and in academia (See: Calhoun, 1994, Parker, 2005, Walker, 2016). In Scotland, political and social changes over the last decade have made national identity a particularly contentious issue, leaving the crucial question of what it means to be Scottish (or what it should mean) unanswered. This chapter provides an in-depth investigation of the concept of identity, and what this means in the context of Scotland. It starts by exploring the origins of identity and the different theoretical approaches to it in the scholarly literature, culminating in a discussion about narrative and performative identity construction. The chapter then provides an overview of the literature on Scottishness, from the boundaries of Scottish identity, to the politicisation of nationalism, to the cultural representations of Scottishness.

4.1 Situating Identity

Despite its ubiquity, the origins of identity as a social concept are hard to pin down. Moran (2015, p.23) points out that few scholars view identity as a new phenomenon (exceptions include: Mackenzie, 1978, Gleason, 1983, Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). Yet, the common assertion that we are living in the 'age of identity' (Ingram, 2004, Brown, 2009, Elliott, 2020a) suggests an opposition to a past when identity operated differently. This raises the question of what came before it, and what its potential future might be. In Gleason's (1983) historical analysis of 'identity', he shows that the word has undergone various semantic variations over the years. Its origin can be traced to the late 16th Century, when it was used to mean the 'quality of being identical' (etymology: *identitas*). Early mentions of identity were used in Christianity to reference the 'soul', or to refer to personal identification.

The contemporary, broader definition of identity only came into existence in the 20th Century, with Erikson's (1994 [1959]) work being highly influential in this regard. Identity, he claims, 'connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself (selfsameness) and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others' (Erikson, 1994 [1959], p. 109). The term's usage

has grown exponentially since. Various scholars have documented the boom in academic publications (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000, Côté, 2006, Moran, 2015, Elliott, 2020a), which now constitute the field of "identity studies" (Elliott, 2020a). Many thinkers in this field have linked the transformations of modernity to the rise in identity discourse (Giddens, 1991, Beck, 1992, Taylor, 1992, Calhoun, 1994). As Calhoun (1994) puts it, the 'discourse of self is distinctively modern and modernity distinctively linked to the discourse of self' (p. 10). With this, he does not mean that identity matters more now than it did before, but that it is harder to establish one's identity (now that we have a choice in the matter) and have this identity recognised by others (now that traditional forms of legitimation are questioned). We have, as Bauman (2000, 2017) would put it, become 'liquid'.

In nationalism literature, many see elites as driving this concern with identity (Gellner, 1983, Anderson, 2006, İnaç, 2013). Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (2006), a seminal work in the field, points to the growth of the printing press, industrialisation, and a burgeoning population as catalysts for national identity. In more recent years, the factors that Anderson cites have only accelerated – population has grown at astonishing rates and there is a proliferation of media through which to "imagine" larger communities. Globalisation in turn has resulted in the growth of both fear and liberation: on the one hand, we are able to break away from tradition, which allows us to redefine ideas about our role in society; on the other hand, this liberation simultaneously leads to fear, as people lose their sense of self and thus search for meaning by regressing to traditional notions of identity.

It is in the context of this 'crisis' that identity becomes political. Fukuyama (2018), decries that 'groups have come to believe that their identities whether – national, religious, ethnic, sexual, gender, or otherwise – are not receiving adequate recognition' (2018, p.92). For those who argue against it, 'identity politics' consists of increasingly fragmented and narrow social identity groups, whose misguided focus on cultural issues not only distracts from material politics, but also creates discord (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000, Riofrancos and Denvir, 2017, Fukuyama, 2018). For Brubaker and Cooper (2000), scholars are guilty of exacerbating this trend by being the '*protagonists* of identity politics' (2000, p.6 original emphasis). Identity is a concept without merit in their view; not only is it an invented concept that constructs 'unitary and exclusive groups', but its ambiguity and lack of clarity renders it meaningless as an analytical category in social science research (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000, p.1).

Though there is some truth to their argument, it is misguided to think that identity will cease to matter anytime soon. In a response to Brubaker, Jenkins (2014) asserts that 'Groups may be imagined, but this does not mean that they are imaginary. They are experientially real in everyday life' (p. 12). Though they may be 'invented' (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983, Özkirimli, 2003, Wodak et al., 2009), nations and – social identities in general – have real consequences; they are the frame through which we make sense of our fragmented, uncertain and disoriented existence. Though contingent, identities can be 'grasped and "seen" without having to make any effort of the imagination' (Jenkins, 2014, p.12).

In more precise terms, identity can be defined as an ongoing process of recognition: it is the 'human capacity – rooted in language – to know 'who's who' (and hence 'what's what')' (Jenkins, 2014, p.6). From this broad definition, we can further distinguish between 'self' and 'identity' – while both terms are linked to the same question ('who am I?'), they allude to a dichotomy between the personal and the social. The 'self' is commonly understood as an intrapersonal process of identification (Zahavi, 2008a, Elliott, 2020b). 'Identity' on the other hand, tends to have a social meaning: it is based on interpersonal and intergroup relations of self and other. Although we can question whether there is indeed a 'self' separate from social forms of 'identity', the distinction has nonetheless been integral to academic debates (Simon, 2004, Leary and Tangney, 2012, Jenkins, 2014). Consequently, the following section will discuss each element separately at first, before expanding on the theoretical framework of the performative self.

4.1.1 I think therefore I am

What does it mean to exist as a person? Can we answer this question without the baggage of cultural or sociological context? René Descartes laments, with words that still resonate today, that 'so long as I gave thought only to the manners and customs of men, I met with nothing to reassure me' (Descartes, 1958, p.99). It is this kind of uncertainty that leads Descartes to look inwards, establishing cognition as key element of the self: "I think, therefore I am" (*Cogito ergo sum).* The historical journey towards the category of 'self', according to Mauss (1985) and Hall and Gay (1996), begins with Descartes' anchoring of reality to the thinking 'I', and the claim that this "I" exists 'independently of any material conditions or bodily forms' (Seigel, 2005, p.57).

Cartesian thinking does have its limitations – being certain of one's existence does not necessarily reveal much about the nature of that existence, as Žižek (1998) points out. Nonetheless, Descartes presents an Enlightenment view of the self that still shapes our discourse. The 'Enlightenment subject', as Hall (1996) describes it, is:

> the human person as a fully centred, unified individual, endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness, and action, whose "centre" consisted of an inner core. (p. 597).

For those in the phenomenological tradition, conceptualising the self as 'self-reflecting consciousness' (Hall and Gay, 1996, p.100) means placing subjectivity and lived experience at the centre of social inquiry:

> If we wish to understand the world that we experience and live in, we also have to investigate subjectivity. Truth, meaning, reality are always a truth, meaning, and reality for somebody.
>
> (Zahavi, 2008b, p.674)

Epistemologically, this means separating "things-in-themselves" (noumena) from things as they appear to us (phenomena), as Kant proposed (1996 [1781]). In other words, we cannot truly know the nature of the self outside of our subjective experience of it: '[I] know myself, like other phenomena, only as I appear to myself, not as I am…' (Kant, 1996 [1781], p. 194).

We generally experience our self as stable, fixed, and continuous. Consciousness, as Zahavi (2008b) explains, 'is an ensemble of experiences that is unified both at a given moment and over time' (p. 63). The relationship between consciousness and the self is undoubtedly important for the negotiation of personal and social identities. Yet, the focus on interior subjectivity is epistemologically challenging. As Jenkins (2014) points out in response to Cohen (2012, 2013), the idea that we have a 'private self' – whether that be a soul, spirit or mind – that has 'causal "primacy" as a core of individual being' cannot be proved with the tools of sociological research (Jenkins, 2014, p.55). We cannot read people's minds, nor should we presume to know what they think. As discussed in section 2.4.2, we should be wary of privileging the research interview as a window into the authentic self.

However, psychology does provide interesting avenues for understanding the self, which deserve further consideration. Continuity, or at the very least the perception thereof, is commonly understood to be a defining element of the self (Baumeister, 1986, Klein, 2016). This idea of continuity dates back to Locke (1959 [1689]), who proposed that personal identity is contingent on our consciousness of former actions. In more recent times, the idea of the self as a 'product of memories' (Klein, 2016, p.25) gained in popularity. Memory, of course, is particularly important in the construction of national identity (See section 4.2.1). Memories are always interpreted – they are not simply recalled with objective clarity. It is through our interpretations of the past that we find ourselves.

Another aspect of unity that is invoked by some psychologists (Allport, 1955, Erikson, 1994 [1959], Stern, 2018 [1930]) is that of a unity of personality, self, or ego. This refers to 'all aspects of personality that make for inward unity' – all the things that are 'peculiarly ours' (Allport, 1955, p.40). Personal identity, both in terms of one's individual characteristics, and how one positions themselves in relation to socially defined categories, is thought to be rooted in a feeling of sameness and of specificity: 'the individual perceives himself as identical to himself; in other words he is the same in time and in space, but that is also what specifies him and marks him out from others' (Worchel, 1998, p.3). At the individual level, the self is constructed through comparison to others: it is a relational process that is fundamentally about differences and similarities.

Though a sense of continuity is critical for our understanding of who we are, various scholars have argued that the self, and our consciousness, is far more fragmented than we perceive (James, 1890, Flanagan, 1995, Simon, 2004). This position was posited by Hume (2009 [1738]) centuries earlier with the claim that we are 'nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux' (p. 396). Hume (2009 [1738]) proposed that the 'identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one' (p. 405). Nietzsche's philosophy similarly embraces this idea of the fictitious self (see: Davey, 1987 for similarities between Hume and Nietzsche). Nietzsche defines the subject explicitly as 'our belief in a unity underlying all the different impulses of the highest *feeling* of reality' (Nietzsche, 2019, p.485, own emphasis). This feeling of reality is what makes us (erroneously) believe in a transcendental self (Nietzsche, 2019, p.485).

What is important for Nietzsche, or rather, what constitutes the self in his view is the reality of our drives (Nietzsche, 2010, p.47). This is also how we intuitively understand the idea of the

self, according to Katsafanas (2016): 'one thing that we mean when we ask for descriptions of a "true self" is a description of what the person really values, really wants, really cares about' (p. 199). With drive as the main element of human existence, reality can be understood as changing rather than static: 'the world is not about being but becoming' (Pearson, 2009, p.208). This raises some ontological questions; for example, it is also possible to see the idea of permanent becoming as simply a condition of being rather than its antithesis, as Heidegger does (1996). However, the point here is not to ponder in metaphysics, but to highlight the shift in focus that characterises the modern concept of personal identity: from what the self *is* to what the self *values* (and consequently what the self *does*) (Hitlin, 2003).

4.1.2 I do therefore I am

This paradigm shift, which emerges in the early 20th Century in particular, comes with the proliferation of functional and social approaches to understanding the subject. Schools of thought such as pragmatism (Peirce, 1982, Dewey, 2007), behaviourism (Skinner, 1974, Watson, 2017), and structuralism (Levi-strauss, 2008, Saussure, 2011) seem to break with previous philosophical concerns over the nature of the conscious self. In pragmatist and behaviourist thought, there is a concern with epistemology – the nature of the self is seen as something we cannot scientifically observe. In structuralism, there is an ontological shift – there can be no thinking "I" preceding meaning. Despite their differences, they all focus on the link between the individual and the social world through: the actions of humans (behaviourism); the functions of interaction (pragmatism); or the societal structures in which we exist (structuralism).

In contrast to earlier theories, which saw personality as the driver of our actions, behaviourists believe variables and stimuli can 'establish personalities' (Skinner, 2012, p.285). The self is an empirical 'me' rather than a thinking 'I'. This is evident in Skinner's behaviourism, where subjectivity and agency are limited: 'all behavior is determined, directly or indirectly, by consequences' (Skinner, 1974, p.127). Mead (2015), another key thinker in the behaviourist school, adds to this a focus on social interaction:

> The individual enters as such into his own experience only as an object, not as a subject; and he can enter as an object only on the basis of social relations and interactions, only by means of his experiential transactions with other individuals in an organised social environment (Mead, 2015, p.225).

In this sense, even our seemingly individual experience of the world cannot be understood in isolation. We can only conceptualise our 'self' through the social process of language, i.e., common symbols that have meaning in conventions within a given community. This process of meaning construction is inherently intersubjective, allowing the individual some agency: 'humans are not passive reactors to "objectively given" stimuli but are instead, active interpreters of the symbolic nature of stimuli' (Denzin, 2008a, p.311). The theory of identity put forward by Mead (2015) is based on a critique of the individualistic self. He contends that the 'mind can never find expression, and could never have come into existence at all, except in terms of a social environment' (Mead, 2015, p.223). This notion of the subject embedded in a web of interaction forms the basis for Symbolic Interactionism (Stryker, 2002, Reynolds and Herman-Kinney, 2003, Mead, 2015), Identity Theory (Stryker, Owens and White, 2000, Burke and Stets, 2009) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, Abrams and Hogg, 1987, Tajfel, 2010).

Interactionist perspectives claim that individuals can only understand themselves in relation to social categories, a process that Identity Theory (IT) calls 'identification', and social Identity Theory (SIT) refers to as 'self-categorisation'. The self, in turn, is composed of multiple role-identities, i.e., 'the set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society' (Burke and Stets, 2009, p.3). They contend that we always occupy multiple roles at any given time, through membership to particular groups, or through characteristics that define us (e.g., daughter, student, football player, etc.); a key question for analysis then, is how individuals make sense of these multiple identities, and how identities affect individual behaviour.

There are some differences between interactionist approaches. Social Identity Theory (SIT) acknowledges the multiple elements that comprise the individual's conception of self, but their focus is specifically on the identities derived from membership to a social group. SIT is thus concerned with intergroup relations, i.e., 'how people come to see themselves as members of one group/category (the in-group) in comparison with another (the out-group), and the consequences of this categorization' (Stets and Burke, 2000, p.226). IT on the other hand, is concerned with how people internalise social roles. However, both acknowledge that the meaning of social identities and roles are relational; for example, the role of mother only acquires meaning in its relation to the role of father (Hogg, Terry and White, 1995, pp.256–

257), much like in-group identities like Scottish nationalism only acquire meaning in relation to an out-group, in this example, British Unionism (Fieldhouse and Prosser, 2018).

Another important school in the study of identity is structuralism. Unlike the interactionist approaches that see the individual as embodying the capacity to actively interpret/reinterpret meanings (Denzin, 2008a, p.135), structuralists see limited scope for agency. For Saussure (2011) language structures play a particularly important role; though we engage in individual acts of speaking [*parole*], these can only exist within the shared system of language in a society [*langue*]. Language exists perfectly 'only within a collectivity'; it is not a 'function of the speaker', but a 'product that is passively assimilated by the individual' (Saussure, 2011, p.14). He aptly exemplifies the structural nature of language through the analogy of a chess game: In a similar fashion to language, understanding a game of chess requires one to not only know the position of an individual chess piece, but the relation to the other pieces on the board, and the rules that govern the possible moves. (Saussure, 2011).

With regard to agency, however; the chess analogy falls short: 'the chessplayer *intends* to bring about a shift and thereby to exert an action on the system, whereas language premeditates nothing' (Saussure, 2011). It is at this point that structuralism, according to its critics, begins to unravel. As Piaget (2015) points out, the problem of the 'genesis of structures' continues to divide opinions: 'Have these composite wholes always been composed? How can this be? Did not someone compound them? Or were they initially (and are they still) in *process* of composition?' (p. 9). As highlighted in the Epistemological considerations, Structuralism does not address the power relations that are implicit in the linguistic structure (though *poststructural*ism does).

Moreover, structuralism contains essentialist elements, which are linked to a 'broader intellectual history in which the idea of essence has been associated with a privileging of structure over play, of "reason" over play' (Marshall, 2005, p.103). Section 3.1.1 has shown that the hierarchy of reason over play dates back to antiquity, and has implications for how we understand comedy, as well as the self. Critics like Derrida have rejected such essentialism, and advocated instead for 'the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming' (Derrida, 2021, p.292). Stand-up comedy, as this thesis demonstrates, allows people to play with identity. This form of play is not subordinate to serious discourses on identity, because these too are constructed. We are *always* 'already playing and could, at least in principle, play differently' (Howe, 2008, p.576).

4.2 The Performative Self

The notion of performativity is useful as a way of highlighting the socially constructed nature of identity. Identity is viewed here as *performative* because it is something that we do. In the context of national identity, Edensor (2002a) explains how this performativity can occur in a variety of ways, ranging from:

> the old disciplinary (usually invented) 'traditional' rituals which marked the birth of modern nations, to looser, more popular events such as sport and carnival; and from carefully constructed enactions and staging of the nation in the tourist industry, to the innumerable habits and unreflexive rituals of everyday life which secure us in place and provide a temporal structure for (imagined) collectivities and individuals. (p. 102)

Under this ontological framework, there is no essential 'self' that can be expressed or represented in our actions. Rather it is only through these actions that the subject comes to exist in any meaningful way.

The everyday performative ways of reproducing the nation are also stressed by Billig (1995) in his highly influential book, *Banal Nationalism*. While Billig does not use the term performative, he does focus on the way we engender the nation through banal (though not benign) practices; 'if the world of nations is to be reproduced', he claims, 'then nationhood has to be imagined, communicated, believed in, remembered and so on' (p. 17). This is often done unreflexively through routine practices that serve as reminders of nationhood: a flag hanging outside a public building, or a weather report accompanied by a national map are given as examples. Billig (1995) arguably shifts the debate in nationalism studies from the question of 'when did the nation emerge' (Gellner, 1983, Smith, 1986) to 'how is the nation reproduced' (Billig, 1995, Edensor, 2002a, Özkirimli, 2005, Skey and Antonsich, 2017). In this school of thought, nationhood is never a completed project, even in seemingly well-established nations, precisely because it comprises an 'imagined community', as Anderson (2006) asserts.

4.2.1 The Performative Nation

The nation is 'imagined' in Anderson's (2006) account 'because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members'(Anderson, 2006, p.6). The sense of community amongst people who have never met is made possible in part because of

the development of the printing press, and consequently, the imagining of a shared culture, language, and past. The extent to which this imagining of shared culture and past is anchored in a pre-existing reality has been the subject of intense debate (Gellner, 1996, Ozkirimli, 2003, Guibernau, 2004). Regardless of the *when*, *why* or *what* of nations, however, there remains the question *of how*. As well as the banal practices of the everyday, which Billig rightly emphasises, it is also important to note the more conscious ways of 'flagging' the nation (Billig, 1995), particularly the narratives of a shared history.

While the concept collective memory is not the central part of their work, both Anderson and Billig touch on it by referencing Renan's (2018 [1882]) claim that nationhood depends as much on 'remembering' as it does 'forgetting':

> Every nation must have its history, its own collective memory. This remembering is simultaneously a collective forgetting: the nation, which celebrates its antiquity, forgets its historical recency. Moreover, nations forget the violence which brought them into existence.
>
> (Billig, 1995, p.38)

The dialectic of remembering/forgetting does not give us an objective account of history, however. Rather, 'the production of memory is a performative practice and inevitably social' (Edkins and Jenny, 2003, p.54).

Collective memory occurs through conscious, ritualised ceremonies, and mundane practices: we remember the soldiers who lost their lives in battle, we erect statues of *national* heroes, we commemorate significant dates in *our* history, we tell the story of *our* past in history classes. Yet, these acts of remembering are not neutral, they are intensely political: 'part of the fight for political change is the struggle for memory' (Edkins and Jenny, 2003, p.54). The production of collective memory helps to constitute the nation, and national identity. It is both *performative* – i.e., it brings into existence the very thing that it seems to describe, and is often also *performed* in the theatrical sense (Tilmans, Vree and Winter, 2010, Samuel, 2012, Plate and Smelik, 2013). We continuously engage in 'a public "theatre" of history', with 'a public stage and a public audience for the enacting of dramas concerning "our" history, or heritage, the story, traditions and legacy' (Popular Memory Group, 2011, p.254).

4.2.2 Nation in Narrative

The remembering/forgetting of the nation's past serves to construct a seemingly coherent, and continuous story; 'nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye (Bhabha, 2013, p.1). To take Puckett's (2016) definition, narrative 'is what results from the effort to make real or imagined events and objects meaningful in relation to one another' (p. 2). As Anderson (2006) explains, remembering and forgetting are central to a modern narrative of identity; it is precisely because we forget, that we create records of the past (photographs, documents, diaries, etc) that can provide a sense of continuity: 'out of this estrangement comes a conception of personhood… which, because it cannot be 'remembered' must be narrated' (p. 204). In much the same way as our personal memories help to construct a narrative of self, so it is with nations: An 'awareness of being embedded in secular, serial time, with all its implications of continuity, yet of "forgetting" the experience of this continuity' (Anderson, 2006, p.205).

For Bhabha (2013) there is a 'double temporality' at work in this: the 'process of identity constituted by historical sedimentation (the pedagogical); and the loss of identity in the signifying process of cultural identification (the performative)' (p. 304). Bhabha's (2013) concept of performativity allows for agency as he separates meta-discourse from contingent actions. The pedagogy of the nation is understood as the normative narrative that 'tells us who and what we are' whereas performativity is about how we 'enact who and what we are' (Belas, 2010). Much like Bhabha (2013), Freeman (2001) proposes that national group narratives 'could be described as "prescriptive". They can tell us not just who we are, and were, but who we should be' and as such, they are 'taken up as stories of the self' (p. 141).

For the present study, it is the personal narratives of national identity that are considered, although these are inevitably interweaved with a collective narrative of nationhood. As this chapter has shown, scholarly work on personal identity has often treated the self as a cohesive essence (Locke, 1959 [1689], Taylor, 1992, Erikson, 1994) or a bundle of fragmented experiences (James, 1890, McAdams, 1993, Hume, 2009 [1738]). What scholars using a narrative approach emphasise, however, is the significance of 'autobiographical' narration in the construction of the self: 'we are all storytellers, and we are the stories we tell' (McAdams, Josselson and Lieblich, 2006, p.3). The narrative view of identity is described by McAdams et al (2006) as 'internalized and evolving life stories… [that] function to organise and make more or less coherent a whole life, a life that otherwise might feel fragmented and diffuse' (p. 5).

These life stories are shaped by social context. Just as Goffman (1956) emphasises the 'impression management' at work in everyday performances (p. 132), McAdams et al (2006) maintain that 'Stories are performed in the presence of certain audiences. Different situations call for different kinds of stories' (p. 6).

Langellier and Peterson (2004) provide a useful framework for understanding narrative as performance. In their definition, narrative is:

> embodied by participants in a system of relations among audiences, storytellers, narrators, and characters… situated in particular material conditions, [i.e.] constraints of language, history, and culture among storytellers and audiences… discursive regularities that constitute rules of exclusion and inclusion for stories and storytelling, and rules for who listens to and who tells stories (p. 8)

Personal stories then are never a complete replica of the past, they are always an altered and edited re-telling. They are shaped by material and discursive constraints, and the relationships between participants.

Narrative in everyday life is not merely representational, but rather, 'the story or stories of myself that I tell, that I hear others tell of me, that I am unable or unwilling to tell, are not independent of the self that I am: they are constitutive of me' (Benson, 2001, p.45). As Peterson and Langellier (1997, 2006, 2004) elaborate, narrative is both a 'making and a doing' (Peterson and Langellier, 2006, p.173). In Walter Benjamin's (2019 [1936]) much cited essay we are led to think of the storyteller as a 'craftsman', whose role consists in 'reworking the raw material of experience' (p. 105) – a phrase that resembles Schechner's (2000) concept of 'restored behaviour' in performance. Storytelling then, as Benjamin goes on to explain, 'does not aim to transmit the pure, intrinsic nature of the thing like information or a report. It plunges the thing into the life of the teller and draws it out again' (p. 85).

The dual function of stories can raise questions regarding authenticity, as expressed by Benson (2001):

> How much of me is in the telling? Is there a 'me' apart from a telling? Is the story I tell of myself or hear told of myself a record of what I am and have been or is it a fabrication or construction which can never really hit the mark? (p. 46)

In stand-up comedy, this apparent tension between performance and authenticity is brought to the fore as we wonder how much of the staged narrative is real. Yet, we can argue that although storytelling generally needs to seem plausible and authentic, it does not necessarily have to be true – fiction writing would be impossible if this were the case. Bruner (1991) sums this up with the claim that 'narrative "truth" is judged by its verisimilitude rather than its verifiability' (p. 13). For Bruner, this is the case for personal stories as much as fictional ones. Narratives are simply a 'version of reality whose acceptability is governed by convention and "narrative necessity" rather than by empirical verification and logical requiredness' (Bruner, 1991, p.4)

4.2.3 Narrative and Stand-up

While the above descriptions of storytelling pertain to personal narratives, it is also possible to see stand-up comedy through the same lens, and this is indeed the approach taken by some comedy scholars (Brodie, 2009b, Colleary, 2015). Just as Bruner (1991) emphasises the necessary verisimilitude of narrative, Colleary (2015) thinks 'telling 'genuine' versions of the self is a vital and central component of stand-up' (p. 52-53). However, the stand-up material is 'restored behaviour', to use Schechner's (2000) terminology; the 'strips of living behaviour' that constitute the stand-up performance acquire a life of their own: 'the original "truth" or "source" may be lost, ignored or contradicted – even while this truth or source is apparently being honoured and observed' (Schechner, 2000, p.36).

For Colleary (2015), this puts the question of authenticity back into focus:

> 'the idea of a comic routine being detached from their causal origins (which may not even be the comic's own), reconstructed and rearranged for laughter, would seem to undermine a comic's expression of his or her own experience, of his or her own version of truth' (p. 51)

Colleary (2015) resolves this dilemma by emphasising the overlap between the on-stage and offstage identity of the comedian:

> the story which constitutes the ongoing and edited version of 'me,' as fragments or aspects of the self, selected and projected outward from within by means of a comic persona, and bound by ideas inherent to the comic frame, can be understood as the comic 'I'. (p. 57)

As Schechner (2000) proposes, we should see the performance of self in everyday life and the staged performance as differences of degree, not kind. Taking that as a point of departure, the comic 'I' that Colleary (2015) refers to can be seen as 'one means among many of perceiving and examining ideas of the self, identity and performance in the form' (p. 57).

This conception of the comic persona sees identity as situated, contextual and fragmented – a view that is shared in much of the scholarship on identity. Psychologists have long argued that we are composed of multiple selves (James, 1890, Lester, 2017), while sociologists have pointed to the multiple 'role' identities (Stets and Burke, 2000, Stryker, 2002), and cultural theorists to multiple 'subject positions' (Hall and Gay, 1996, Strozier, 2002). In the same vein, Colleary (2015) sees stand-up comedy as a continuation of the self, which is situated in, and therefore constrained by, the comic frame: 'the self as channelled through the comic persona can be understood as a part but not the whole, a kernel through which to grow and project partial illustrations of the self from within' (p. 98). Moreover, she sees the (comic) self as constructed through narrative. The comic persona 'acts as a mode of communication and connection with an audience' (Colleary, 2015, p.98)

The comic persona also 'acts as the portal through which aspects or fragments of the self flow' (Colleary, 2015, p.98). This conception of the comic 'I' presented by Colleary applies to observational as well as autobiographical comedy, or as is most often the case in stand-up, performances that mix these two styles. In short, the comic is always 'sharing something of him- or herself with an audience', regardless of the 'particular quirks of a performance style' (Colleary, 2015, pp.55–56). The diverging comic styles in stand-up can again be seen through the lens of Schechner's (2000) performance theory, in that they are on a continuum: a 'difference of degree not kind' in terms of how the self can be performed (Colleary, 2015, p.56). Whichever style is used, the stand-up performance is underpinned by the comic 'I', who must be, to some extent an 'authentic' self. Yet, just as storied self is shaped and constrained by 'discourse regularities' and 'material conditions' (Langellier and Peterson, 2004, p.8), the comic 'I' constructed in the stand-up performance is shaped by its own set of constraints. The particular constraints that shape the comic identities of Scottish performers will be presented in the Analysis chapters.

With the above noted, it is possible to highlight two significant mediating factors that apply to stand-up comedy more generally: the comic space and comic license. The first of those factors describes the discursive regularities of stand-up: it is a form of play (Morreall, 2009) that tries

to invoke laughter from its audience (Colleary, 2015, Quirk, 2015). As Colleary (2015) observes, 'stand-up comedy fundamentally resists the serious mode' and this comic frame 'radically contextualises all telling on a stand-up stage' (p. 57). Moreover, although comedians do not always stay within the 'boundaries of permission', stand-up comedy operates under the assumption that the comic space gives the comic a license to experiment with ideas in a playful way (Colleary, 2015, p.57).

4.3 Understanding Scottishness

This research takes the view that multiple versions of Scottish identities exist and are dependent on subjective interpretation and context. Identity is thus seen here as a negotiated process, 'not a "thing" which can be treated as real or unreal, but a social space in which matters of structure and culture come together' (McCrone, 2001a, p.4). Academics are a part of this social space, even if they masquerade as outsiders looking in. The scholarly literature therefore holds a mirror up to society allowing us to see ourselves, but it also has a role in constructing that image. With that in mind, this section reviews the academic literature on 'Scottishness' by focusing on the various lenses through which this concept has been analysed. The first part will focus on how academic disciplines have tackled the question of Scottish identity, while the second part will highlight the various themes found in the Scottishness literature. Particularly relevant for this study are the dominant forms of Scottish representation (Tartanry, Kailyard, and Clydesider), discussed in section 0, and the hybridity of Scottish identity presented in section 4.3.6.

4.3.1 Boundaries of Scottish identity

As Barrow (1965, p.7) explains, 'to make a nation conscious of its identity you must first give it a history' (p.7). Historical perspectives can reveal how ideas have been constructed, and how their meanings have changed over the years. In Scotland, several historians (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983, Finlay, 1990, Pittock, 1991, Donaldson, 1993, Brown, 2010, Broun, 2012) have focused on the 'myths' about Scotland that have become sedimented in the public imagination. Trevor-Roper (1983), for example, makes the claim that 'the whole concept of a distinct Highland culture and tradition is a retrospective invention' (p. 15). The origin of cultural markers like the kilt and clan tartan, as well as the blood heritage of Highlanders, lies in the Celtic Irish tradition. Not until the 18th century did these markers get 'reinvented' as a Highlander – and later Scottish – culture (Trevor-Roper, 1983, p.16).

For some scholars then, an important issue is how such historical narratives are framed in the school curriculum (Dargie, 1998, Hillis, 1999, Wood and Payne, 1999). Wood and Payne (1999) assert that the school history curriculum is highly significant in developing 'a sense of national identity'. Yet, their research found 'a mixture of ignorance and confusion' marking pupils' understanding of Scottish history, as well as evidence that pupils' perception of their own Scottish identity was based on an opposition to England (p. 120). Moreover, others have noted that symbolic historical narratives in popular culture, the film *Braveheart* being a prime example, are highly influential in shaping pupil's perceptions of their country's past, and consequently, of their own identity (Cowan, 1997, Edensor, 2002b, Spracklen, 2017).

Sociological research on Scottish identity has focused more specifically on this question of how people understand national identity. How do they negotiate claims to national belonging? and how do 'mass' perceptions of Scottish identity interact with 'elite' constructions of Scottish nationalism? A widely used measure of national identification is the 'Moreno' survey question (Moreno, 1988, ScotCen Social Research, 2018). It asks participants to select the statement that best described them on a 5-point scale ranging from exclusively Scottish to exclusively British (ScotCen, 2020a; see Figure 1). The vast majority of respondents in recent years have claimed both a Scottish and British identity, albeit with varying degrees of importance assigned to one or the other.

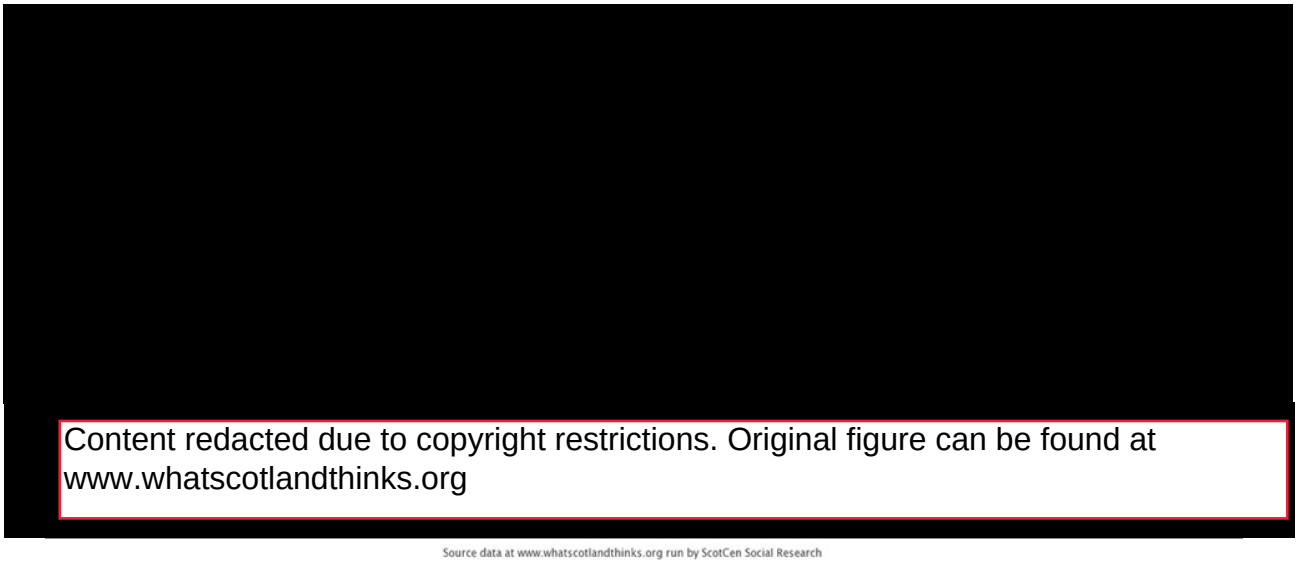

Figure 1: 'Moreno' National Identity

On the other hand, if forced to choose only one national identity, the majority choose 'Scottish' (ScotCen, 2020b; see Figure 2). An important question following from these findings is the extent to which such self-assigned identities align with attitudes towards constitutional questions (Leith and Steven, 2010, Bond, 2015, Henderson, Jeffery and Liñeira, 2015, Botterill et al., 2016); towards European politics (Sindic, 2005, Thorpe, 2008, Hepburn and McLoughlin, 2011); or support for a political party (McCrone, 1981, Henderson, 2005, Bechhofer and McCrone, 2007, Scully, 2013). Certain trends can be observed, such as those exclusively or more strongly identifying as Scottish being more likely to support independence and the Scottish National Party (Bond, 2015); yet others have found that the link between national identity, party support and views on constitutional change remain fairly weak (Bechhofer and McCrone, 2007, Hearn, 2014).

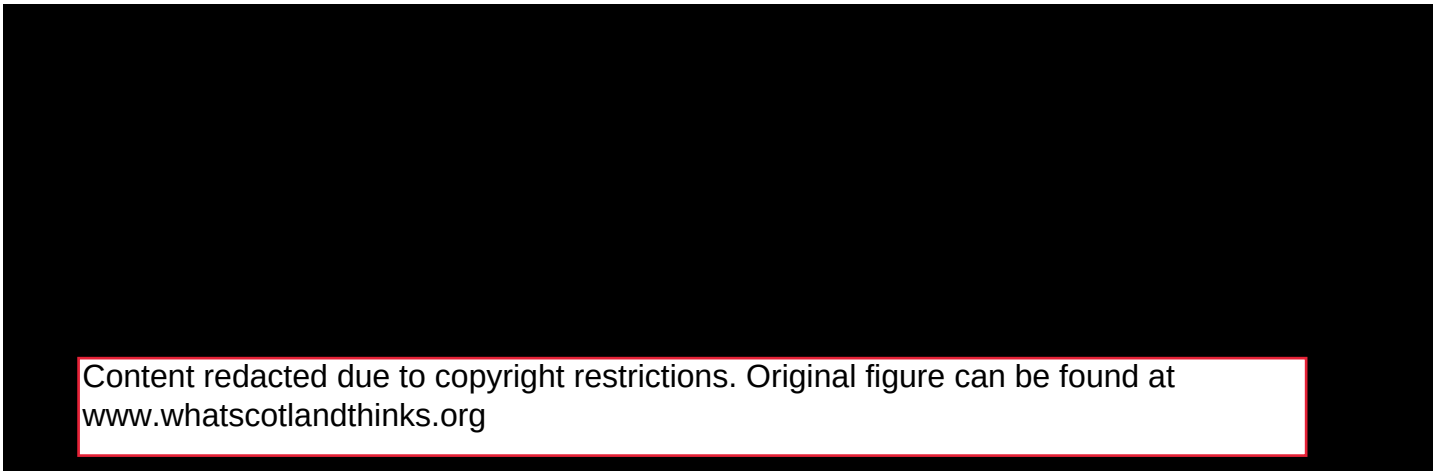

Figure 2: 'Forced Choice' National Identity

Another area of sociological research is that of belonging, inclusion, and exclusion. What identity 'markers' are employed when Scots make a claim to a national identity, and which are most salient for the acceptance or rejection of claims to Scottish identity? For Kiely et al (2001), claims to national identity are made and assessed based on a combination of fixed and fluid markers (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Markers of Scottish Identity

Research on claims to Scottish identity have revealed the complex way in which people employ or reference such markers. For example, while Kiely et al (2005) found that birthplace was the most salient marker for respondents in their study, McCrone and Bechhofer (2010) established that those with an exclusively Scottish sense of identity are more likely to reject claims based on birthplace alone. The assumption of whiteness also correlates with Scottishness, though often in less explicit ways than in expressions of English nationalism (McCrone, 2017, pp.338–342) As Virdee et al (2006) explain, 'whiteness is an unstable identifier of Scottishness; and Scottishness is an unstable identifier of whiteness' (p. 1).

Accent and dialect also seem to have a strong link to Scottish identity. Abrams and Hogg (1987) found (unsurprisingly perhaps) that 'in-group' accents are likely to be evaluated positively compared to 'out-group' accents. Yet, the boundaries of in-group and out-group are context dependant; when comparing between variations of Scottish accents, regional kinship is more salient, but when comparing a regionally different Scottish accent to an English accent, national identity overrides regional differences. In a newer study, McCrone and Bechhofer (2015) found that 70% of respondents would accept a claim of Scottish identity by someone who is non-white if they have a Scottish accent (p. 105). As Virdee et al (2006, p.6) explain, 'a Scottish accent disrupts the suggested relationship between skin colour and behaviour' and as such, provide an authoritative legitimacy to claims of belonging.

Despite its salience, the status that such accents (or dialects) should have remains up for debate. Aitken (2015a) has written extensively on the confusion surrounding the definition of 'Scots', which he claims tends to be used either as a descriptor for 'low-prestige' Scottish dialects, or the 'archaic' language of Scots literature (p. 7), or sometimes both. Are we to consider Scots a language? A dialect? Scottish cultural heritage? Or merely 'bad' English? It is not the answers to these questions that are relevant here, but the social context of such debates. As Aitken (2015b) observes, accent in Scotland is a strong marker of social class and level of education. Middle-class Scottish nationals are likely to speak English with few Scotticisms, i.e., 'words of Scottish origin assimilated into English' (Aitken, 2015b), and stigmatise certain Scotticisms commonly found in working-class speech. At the same time, many perceive what Aitken calls the middle-class 'Morningside' and 'Kelvinside' accents as 'pretentious' (p. 13). These differences are played out in Scottish broadcast comedy which relies heavily on Scotticisms (see: 3.4.2). Attitudes towards broad Scottish accents and dialects appear to have shifted over the last few years (Unger, 2013), yet the status of Scots remains contested.

More markers are generally likely to strengthen one's claim to Scottish identity (McCrone and Bechhofer, 2010, p.937), but 'markers in themselves do not explain how people will use them' (Kiely et al., 2001, p.52). Large-scale sociological research presents a useful overview of potential attitudes. Methodologically, however, such findings must be treated with caution: surveys assume presented identities as having 'fixed or singular meanings' (Mann and Fenton, 2017a). They therefore lack insight into the respondent's subjective understanding of Britishness or Scottishness. As McCrone and Bechhofer (2010) point out, people tend to (erroneously) conflate citizenship and national identity. While the former relates to the 'right to vote, pay taxes […] and participate fully in the 'civic' life of the country', the latter involves 'cultural markers, of birth, ancestry, language as well as residence, and operates through complex processes of social interaction' (p. 940-941). In the case of Scotland, however, the distinction is often blurred. This can be observed in political discourse itself, which tends to combine civic forms of belonging with notions of heritage and culture (Mycock, 2012).

4.3.2 Politicising national belonging

The question of national belonging was brought into public debate with vigour in the lead up to the 2014 Independence referendum as the event prompted voters to reflect on Scotland's position as part of the United Kingdom. For some scholars, this raises the question of whether the recent increased politicisation of nationalism (Bond, 2015) reflects, or constitutes, a stronger sense of Scottish identity among Scots (Mann and Fenton, 2017a). Implicit in this question is the idea that the top-down, political framing of Scottish nationalism may differ from the ways in which 'ordinary people' experience national identity (Mann and Fenton, 2017a, p.1). A common claim, particularly by those who focus on political discourse, is that Scotland's version of nationalism is civic in nature, leaning towards openness and inclusivity (Keating, 2001, McCrone, 2001a, McLeish and Brown, 2012). Yet, others have emphasised that such civic constructions of national identity, albeit commonly leveraged in politics, are not as salient among the general public (Henderson, 2007, McCrone and Bechhofer, 2010, Leith and Soule, 2011). The extent to which the liberal and tolerant Scottish nationalism pushed forward by the 'elites' actually resonates with the masses remains a point of contention.

In the modernist school of thought, the power of the elites in shaping national identity is emphasised. They maintain that industrialisation, which brought with it state-sponsored mass education, print press, and other advancements, facilitated 'the spread of a standard culture among the subjects' (Gellner, 2006, p.xxiv). This cultural homogeneity imposed by the polity

is what modernists call nationalism. The nation in turn is the community 'imagined' by nationalism (Anderson, 2006). Thus, to understand nationalism, it is important to understand the way in which the political elite define national belonging. In the case of Scotland, Leith (2012) observes a tendency for the political elite to portray Scottish identity as an 'inclusive and civic-based form of belonging' (p. 50). While Scottishness is defined by elite respondents as something quite distinct, there is a clear message: 'anyone who wishes can be Scottish' (ibid). However, as Leith rightly observes, what makes Scottishness distinct if not ancestry, birthplace, or cultural markers is less clear. For Henderson (1999), the distinctive element of Scottishness put forward by (some) elite members is a political one: democracy and egalitarianism are aligned with the left, and the left with Scottish values (p. 135).

Thus, the boundaries formed around identity can be described as political rather than cultural; For the SNP in particular, unionism and conservativism are the markers against which Scottish identity is defined. While the modernist perspective makes an important contribution regarding the constructed nature of national identity through political discourse, it is important to clarify that in Scotland, the SNP represent but one of the 'elite' perspectives, and support for independence is certainly not a pre-requisite for claiming a Scottish identity (despite attempts by the SNP to make it seem otherwise). Moreover, a referendum, which necessarily reduces complex issues into a black and white dichotomy, is unlikely to solve the underlying issues that give rise to the constitutional question in the first place (Keating, Loughlin and Deschouwer, 2003, McLeish and Brown, 2012). Finally, it would be a mistake to equate support for independence with an expression of Scottish national identity, or conversely, lack of support with British rather than Scottish identity (Bond, 2015, Mann and Fenton, 2017a).

Critics of modernism have argued against the overemphasis on elite-constructed notions of national identity. The ethno-symbolist school (Armstrong, 1982, Guibernau and Hutchinson, 2004, Smith, 2009) distinguishes itself by focusing on the 'symbolic' resources that motivate nationalism as an ideology and on mass expressions of nationalist practices rather than elite representations of it (Smith, 2009, p.18). Thus, nationalism is congruent to a sense of common identity, constructed through 'traditions, memories, values, myths and symbols that compose the accumulated heritage of cultural units of population' (Smith, 2009, p.16). Crucially, ethno-symbolists propose that elite actors cannot impose meanings of national identity in a top-down fashion; If their message is to resonate with the masses, it must take into account pre-existing symbols of national belonging.

In the case of Scotland, Leith (2012) has shown that the 'civic' national identity advocated by elites is at odds with mass understandings of Scottishness that prioritise 'birth and ancestry' (p. 41). This points to the limited influence of newly constructed elite narratives of national belonging. It should also be noted that despite their emphasis on civic nationalism, the SNP have also retained some ethno-cultural themes within their discourse. Examples of this can be seen with the Government backed 'Homecoming' 2009 and 2014 celebrations of Scottish heritage (Sim and Leith, 2013), and changes to the School history curriculum to teach young Scots about their own 'culture and heritage' (Mycock, 2012). This may reinforce the theory that national identity necessitates some reference to historical symbols and values.

A third perspective is that of scholars who agree with the focus on mass rather than elite understandings of nationalism, but claim that material concerns, rather than symbolic resources, are the foundations for such (Nairn, 2003, McLeish and Brown, 2012, Mann and Fenton, 2017a). The narrative of a discontented national identity, based on the feeling of being worse off or 'left behind' is common in nationalist movements (Ford and Goodwin, 2014). For Mann and Fenton (2017a), a neo-liberal system that weakens the ties between states and citizens through privatisation and cuts to welfare is seen as the cause of such discontent. In Scotland, signs of discontent could be observed during the Independence referendum: areas with high levels of deprivation had higher proportions of Yes voters (Scottish Government, 2012), and a commitment to social justice was explicitly leverage during the campaign as an articulation of national difference (Mooney and Scott, 2015). In accordance with this materialist perspective, Scottish national identity is seen as inextricably linked to, and perhaps functioning as a 'substitute' to, social class (McLeish and Brown, 2012, p.156, Mann and Fenton, 2017a). For Henderson (1999), Scottish identity in the political arena is arguably less about culture and heritage, and more about perceptions of injustice (p. 136-137).

4.3.3 Scottish nationalism

It is important to remember that national identity is not a stable concept, and the way in which political elites attempt to align national identity with political interests also changes. While the SNP is now commonly associated with the construction of Scottish identity in the political arena, the party remained very much on the periphery until the 1960s, and espoused a different politics in its earlier years than it does today. It was initially seen by some as a party focused on preserving Scottish ethno-cultural values and customs than providing efficient policy. Their political objectives were 'nebulous' at best (Begg and Stewart, 1971, p.139); internal divisions

plagued the party, particularly with regard to the constitutional question (independence vs. devolution) and ideology: 'should it be ideologically 'lite' and appeal across the classes and sectional interests within the nation' or does it require the formulation of a more explicit ideological position? (Hassan, 2009, p.37).

The Labour party in particular viewed the SNP as a Scottish manifestation of Conservative politics, dubbing them 'Tartan Tories' due to their appeal to middle-class and rural voters (Hassan, 2009, Keating, 2014). Moreover, devolution was delivered not by a (Scottish) nationalist party, but by Labour, whose focus was strongly on Britishness. If devolution was a political tool for nationalism, it was one designed to encourage multi-national identity (British and Scottish) by accommodating the distinctive interests of Scotland within the wider framework of the UK as a union state (Mitchell, 1998). By contrast, it would seem like the SNP today tend to leverage the same claim of distinct Scottish interests to foster a singular identity – that of being Scottish rather than British, or at the very least, Scottish before British.

Despite the recent success of the SNP and its separatist position, the extent to which the SNP are espousing 'nationalist' politics has also been questioned by some (Keating, 2014, Mann and Fenton, 2017a). Mann and Fenton (2017a) see the SNP not as a nationalist party but as social democrats attempting to promote the idea that Scotland is a '*naturally* social democratic' country (p. 23, original emphasis). A further criticism is the apparent contradictions between SNP rhetoric and action. While the party continues to appeal to labour supporters and promotes the goal of 'a fairer Scotland where everyone feels valued' (SNP, 2018), this social justice discourse is at odds with their simultaneous support of business interests (Asher and French, 2014, Keating, 2014, Paterson, 2015). More specifically, the SNP are seemingly committed to the maintenance of the neoliberalist structures that have been responsible for the erosion of the same social justice values which the party appears to advocate (Asher and French, 2014).

Some have also criticised the very concept of nationalism as reductionist, for it necessarily 'flattens' and homogenises into one what are in fact multiple and complex identities (Özkirimli, 2010, Asher and French, 2014). This constructed homogeneity is particularly good at masking certain forms of power and oppression. The interests of Scotland and Westminster are framed as competing, and a strong emphasis is placed on how Westminster infringes on Scotland's ability to pursue its own interests. This seems to perpetuate the myth of a 'colonially-tainted otherwise-bastion-of-virtue' Scotland, whose egalitarian aspirations are supressed by its oppressors - Westminster elites (Asher and French, 2014, p.5). This myth of a 'colonised'

Scotland is especially harmful when one takes into account the fact that Scotland's elites and emerging middle class benefitted from the British Empire and the Union, participating in, and reproducing, 'modes of oppression many nationalists would like to externalise as 'alien'' (Asher and French, 2014). The merging of working-class identity and Scottishness is crucial if one is to sidestep this inconvenient reality.

The relational spatiality of British/Scottish politics is another important element in nationalist discourse. Asher and French (2014) point to how geography is used within the political discourse in Scotland to place power as physically distant. Calls for 'home' rule, or for decisions about Scotland to be made in Scotland, make it seems as if 'spatial proximity' would in itself eradicate the possibility of elitist power, oppression, or any unfavourable policy (p. 4). This naturally allows for the evasion of accountability of political elites within Scotland. The idea that Scottish independence, under the guise of nationalist rhetoric, could generate the left-wing radical change it seemingly promises is challenged in their critique: 'having the political class closer to home doesn't necessarily make replacing them any easier, never mind challenging the idea of a political class per se' (p. 5).

4.3.4 Gender and postcolonialiality

Representing Scottish political nationalism, as outlined above, relies on a post- or neo-colonial rhetoric. Postcolonialism, however, is a contested concept (Bhabha, 1984, McClintock, 1992, Chatterjee, 1993, Radhakrishnan, 1993). It denotes, on the one hand, a temporal state, situated beyond the historical colonial era; and on the other, an epistemological and cultural conjuncture (Radhakrishnan, 1993, p.751). As Young (2016) explains, postcolonialism

> names the activities by which new subaltern histories, new identities, new geographies, new conceptualizations of the world -. transnational rather than western - are fashioned and performed, and seeks through them to redress current imbalances of power and resources in the pursuit of more just and equitable societies
>
> (Young, 2016, p.66)

To do this, postcolonial theory engages in critical deconstruction of nationalism, colonialism and neo-imperial powers.

Particularly relevant for the Scottish context is the postcolonial critique of the gendered nation. As scholars observe (Nagel, 1998, Stirling, 2008, Schoene, 2018) the nation is often affirmed through feminine metaphors (e.g., motherland) and representations (e.g., Britannia). The rhetoric of nationalism is thus similar to that of patriarchal ideology in that 'embodiment and femininity are equated' (Thomas 1996, cited in Schoene, 2018). The commonly used family analogy of men as 'sons and fathers (of the nation) and as lovers (of the home/motherland)' (Miller and Wilford, 2004, p.197) further illustrates this. Like women, the nation is feminised, embodied, objectified, idealised, controlled. In this conception, men have agency over the nation; indeed, the nation is an object that is both an extension of the (male) self, and external to him. The existence of the nation 'is a function of possession' (Handler, 1988, p.153) – possession of a bounded territory, a unique history, a culture, which must be defended. For Nagel (1998) the entire apparatus of the state is best understood as 'masculinist projects, involving masculine institutions, masculine processes and masculine activities' (Nagel, 1998, p.243).

Colonised nations, by virtue of their oppression, are said to be 'feminised' (Puri, 2008, p.135). Through sexualised metaphors, we can describe the 'rape and plunder' of a territory, the 'penetration' by colonial forces, and the resulting 'impotence' of the colonised nation (Nairn, 2003, Puri, 2008, p.142). Colonised subjects have commonly been characterised as savage, uncivilised, 'childlike, emotional, and impulsive' (Puri, 2008, p.135). By feminising them in this way, their subordination is made to seem natural. The men, who are ordinarily the protectors of the nation (and have, presumably failed in this regard) encounter a crisis of masculinity, and overcompensate with a hyper-masculine identity (Jones, 2009, Lehner, 2011, p.226). As cultural theorists observe (Schoene, 2004, Gardiner, 2011, Lehner, 2011), the story of Scottish masculinity tends to follow this pattern. Much like the modern man torn between an uncertain modern ideal and a regression to a 'prefeminist past' (Ross, 2013, p.38), Scotland sits between utopia and nostalgia; its crisis of nationhood 'mirrors the predicament of the contemporary masculine self, keen to become part of new communal configurations, yet held back by pomophobic anxieties over its exact status and position' (Schoene, 2004, p.124).

This is most notably outlined in Tom Nairn's (2003) The Break Up of Britain as he describes the 'neurosis' of Scotland as a stateless nation. The Union has 'always posed grave cultural psychological problems for Scotland' (Nairn, 2003, p.118), something which in his argument has led to the romantic 'infantilism' (Nairn, 2003, p.146) of Scottish cultural expressions, i.e.,

the kitsch of Kailyard or the 'Tartan monster' (Nairn, 2003, p.104). Nairn's lament is a political one, for Scotland has always in his view, been a willing member of the Union, binding itself to servitude and 'self-colonisation' (Nairn, 1997, p.217), and has compensated for this political 'decapitation' by turning to romanticism. Hechter (1975) makes a similar case through the concept of 'internal colonialism', which he describes as the dominance of the core over the periphery, both politically materially (p. 9). This results in a malintegration that is regarded as 'unjust and illegitimate' (Hechter, 1975, p.34).

The social and economic dependence of the colonised nation can also result in a colonisation of the mind, as Fanon (2008) proposes in Black Skins, White Masks. Colonised nations are defined by Fanon as 'every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality' (Fanon, 2008, p.9). Fanon's work has been hugely influential for the understanding of the postcolonial psyche. He explains how the oppressed internalise colonial norms, develop an inferiority complex, and end up adopting the behaviours and values of the coloniser (Fanon, 2008, p.x). The colonial subject must either accept their dependency and inferior status, or experience a crisis.

Beveridge and Turnbull's (1989) analysis of Scotland's postcoloniality draws heavily on Fanon. They celebrate Scottish culture and lament its devalued status, which they see as the result of an 'inferiority complex' driven by cultural subordination to England. Scottishness, they argue, is shaped and supressed by a wider British cultural framework that overvalues 'English versions of Britishness' (Connell, 2003, p.43). Unlike Nairn (2003), who sees cultural representations of Scotland as a hindrance to political emancipation, Beveridge and Turnbull (1989) advocate for a stronger national culture in order for Scotland to overcome its political weakness. This sentiment is shared by Cairns Craig, who claims that Scotland's lack of political resistance is tied to the fact Scots 'have such a low opinion of their own culture' (Craig cited in Bell, 2004, p.35). Academic attempts have been made to rectify this supposed 'eclipse of Scottish culture' (Beveridge and Turnbull, 1989), most notably through the strengthening of a distinct Scottish literary tradition.

The strengthening of Scottish cultural nationalism is not without its problems. For one, the postcolonial vision of Scotland employed by Scottish critics tends to homogenise Scottish culture, promoting essentialist representations of the nation which can serve to 'justify and verify their own political positions' (Bell, 2004, p.34). Moreover, it is questionable whether postcolonialism is even an appropriate framework in context of Scotland, particularly

considering the, at best, ambivalent role it played in the British empire (Connell, 2004, MacKenzie, 2010, Giles, 2018). A historical narrative of a 'colonised Scotland' inevitably masks the fact that Scotland retained autonomy over its institutions, and produced a thriving professional class and Scottish elites who willingly participated in, and had considerable power over, political affairs in Britain. If we do employ a postcolonial lens, we are also faced with the problematic gendered dimensions of nationalism. As Lehner (2011) explains, 'the whole notion of colonisation as emasculation posits a male viewpoint of that process' and as such, 'female experiences and perspectives are necessarily excluded and erased from this model' (Lehner, 2011, p.226). Despite the contested role of postcolonial theory in scholarly work, however, it is clear that postcolonial narratives remain an influential part of Scottish identity construction for some. The analysis and discussion chapters examine this postcolonial narrative and its criticisms in more detail.

4.3.5 Representing Scottishness

If one takes a social constructivist approach, it is vital to acknowledge that identity is not simply 'found' in the self, but is produced and given meaning through social interactions and 'cultural codes' (Hall, 1997, p.4). *Representation* is thus a key part of this exchange – we do not simply reflect the world as is, but constitute new meanings through representation. It is therefore important to analyse how Scottish identity has been (re-)presented, i.e., what shared 'concepts, images and ideas' (Hall, 1997, p.4) make up cultural understandings of Scottishness. For example, how is Scotland portrayed in literature (March, 2002, Weissenberger, 2008, McCulloch, 2009, Shields, 2010), music (Symon, 1997, Wood, 2012, Tranmer, 2016, Spracklen, 2017), art (Morrison, 2003, Newton, 2005, Riach, 2005), popular culture (Edensor, 2002b, Giulianotti, 2005, Zumkhawala-Cook, 2009), and on screen (Neely, 2008, Martin-Jones, 2009, Murray, 2015)?

Representations of Scottishness are typically categorised into distinct types of discourses: Tartanry, Kailyard, and Clydesidism. The first refers to the historical image of the Scottish tartan-clad highlander, the brave, yet defeated hero (Brown, 2010). The romanticised vision of the Highland hero remains perhaps one of the most extensively used images in contemporary literature (Hague, 2014) as well as film and television, Braveheart (Edensor, 2002b) and Outlander (Frankel, 2015) being prime examples. Kailyard on the other hand, presents a mythic picture of Scotland's lowland rural communities (Newton, 2005), most famously associated

with the work of James Barrie (Nash, 2007). For Knowles (1983), the Kailyard is characterised by:

> the sentimental and nostalgic treatment of parochial Scottish scenes, often centred on the church community, often on individual careers which move from childhood innocence to urban awakening (and contamination), and back again to the comfort and security of the native hearth. (p. 13)

Such representations have been criticised by some (Craig, 1982, Nairn, 2003) for constraining Scottish identity to an idealistic nostalgia. Indeed, as Nash (2007) observes, the term Kailyard now often stands as a 'synonym for kitsch' and is associated with tartanry (p. 169). Countering the historic romanticism of Tartanry and the Kailyard, a third element of Scottishness emerged during the latter 20th century – the image of the Clydesider, portraying a bleak, urban, male, and working-class image of Scottish life (Martin-Jones, 2009). The deindustrialisation processes in the post-war era led to economic decline and greater social inequality in areas like Glasgow that relied on manufacturing jobs (Lever, 1991, Clayton, 2002, Phillips, Wright and Tomlinson, 2020). Clydesider representations thus grappled with the hardships of (post-)industrial masculinity, often with a tinge of 'socialist politics' (Leith, 2014, p.167).

Though Clydesidism is associated with the West of Scotland, some have expanded this tradition beyond the banks of the River Clyde, for example: *The Brave Don't Cry* (1952), set in Ayrshire, and *Trainspotting* (1996), set in Edinburgh. The latter is particularly relevant here as it is referenced by a number of comedians (see discussion chapter). *Trainspotting* is often categorised as a 'modern' version of Clydesidism because it focuses on masculinity and deprivation in post-industrial Scotland, and deals with themes of violence and drug/alcohol abuse (Douglas, 2009, p.25). At the same time, *Trainspotting* critiques the Clydesider's 'stoic pride in suffering' (Shen, 2019, p.170): 'weedjie experience ay hardship is the only relevant experience ay it' says Renton, tongue in cheek (Welsh, 2011, p.191).

As scholars observe (McCrone, 2001a, Murray, Farley and Stoneman, 2009, Zumkhawala-Cook, 2009), Clydesidism may have offered 'realism' and a break from the nostalgic rural traditions of Tartanry and Kailyard, but it has become a myth in itself. In *Trainspotting*, the myth is critiqued for its romanticisation of the working-class 'weedjie'; but as Zumkhawala-Cook (2009) points out, Clydesider representations (including *Trainspotting*) simply reproduce many of the previous sentiments about Scottishness: white men 'who struggle heroically to

transcend their strictures through acts of brute violence and aggression' (p. 148). Boym's (2008) concept of restorative nostalgia is a fitting description of the Clydesider tradition: it presents itself as realism and tradition, thus masking its own mythical status. Moreover, the nostalgic longing of Clydesidism seeks to reconstruct the 'lost home' of Scottish working-class values. The historicism found in all three stereotypical representations of Scotland is seen by some as conflicting with current political nationalism which, as aforementioned, tends to present a modernist, inclusive, civic Scottish identity (Pittock, 2008).

The traditional representations of Scottishness have also been an object of analysis for scholars of Scottish tourism and heritage (Paterson, 2001, Peach, 2007, Yeoman, Greenwood and McMahon-Beattie, 2009, Bhandari, 2014). Their focus is on how the tourism industry draws on common perceptions of Scottish culture in order to sell a particular image of Scotland. Sim and Leith's (2013) analysis of diaspora tourism finds that nostalgia in this context is 'reflective' rather than 'restorative' (Boym, 2008). The authenticity of 'homecoming' events is evidently staged, but diaspora tourists recognise this and even embrace the 'pandering to their nostalgic recollections' (Sim and Leith, 2013, p.271). Brown (2010, 2020) sees Scottish heritage, and the Tartanry tradition more generally, as a form of escapism: 'Highland and rural areas as places of escape from capitalist exploitation and of self-reshaping' (Brown, 2020, p.223).

The 'commodification' of Scottishness in the tourist industry has nonetheless been critiqued (McDonald, 2002, Peach, 2007) for its detrimental effects: 'the production and maintenance of the picturesque very often has a naturalising effect on social relations and may overwrite concerns about social justice' (McDonald, 2002). Prieto Arranz's (2004) analysis of Scottish tourist brochures points to the way in which Scottishness is 'marketed' to visitors. He finds that tourism discourses over-represent the (white and male) Celtic Highlander image, thus reinforcing a rural, racial and gendered boundary to Scottish identity. It is clear that tourism discourses are not the 'innocuous texts they are frequently mistaken for' (Prieto Arranz, 2004); the image of Scottish nationhood presented to visitors represents an assertion of the 'desired narrative of the country' (Bhandari, 2014). These narratives are shaped by an interwoven mix of interests, from top-down political nationalism to local assertions of cultural identities. As Bhandari (2014, p.9) argues, the 'revival' of cultural nationalism in Scotland is expressed through heritage, and 'inextricably linked to tourism' (p. 9).

This 'revival' of cultural nationalism has also brought with it a renewed interest in the connection between language identity, particularly the role of Gaelic as cultural heritage

(McCoy and Scott, 2000, Oliver, 2005, Paterson et al., 2014). Yet, as Paterson et al (2014) observes, the relationship between political autonomy and language in Scotland is weaker than in other similar cases such as Wales, Ireland or Catalonia. The distinct 'national' language (Gaelic) is not a central element to national membership, culture, or politics. That is not to say that Gaelic is unimportant; the language has certainly experienced a 'renaissance' over the last few decades (McDonald, 1997, Oliver, 2005). With the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act of 2005 and subsequent government agency Bo`rd na Ga`idhlig set up to promote Gaelic in Scotland, it could be argued that the language has been increasingly politicised (Paterson et al., 2014). However, considering the low percentage of Gaelic speakers, the role of Gaelic remains symbolic – it may add to a 'sense of belonging to the Scottish nation' but it is not an essential element of Scottish identity (Paterson et al., 2014).

4.3.6 Diverse Scottish Identities?

While Scottishness can be (and has been) analysed in a variety of ways, it is possible to draw some commonalities among the different fields of study presented here. The role of symbolism and iconography is emphasised across disciplines, particularly the use of the tartan or kilt to represent Scottish identity (Craig, 1982, Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983, Brown, 2010). The literature also points to an overrepresentation of male, heteronormative, working-class expression of Scottishness (Prieto Arranz, 2004, Zumkhawala-Cook, 2009). Moreover, while civic interpretations of nationalism are advocated by the Scottish Government, studies suggest that this is at odds with how some Scots view their own identity, and how they evaluate others' claim to Scottish identity (Leith and Soule, 2011, Leith, 2012). Notwithstanding, social research has also served to emphasise the complex ways in which such claims to identity are expressed and received. The extent to which one or more markers of identity become salient very much depends on context, and what these markers are being compared to. For example, regional differences may be more significant when identities within Scotland are being compared, whereas a Scottish national identity may be invoked when contrasting between British identities.

The interaction between language (including accents and dialects) and Scottish national identity is also relevant here, particularly as it links to assumptions about class and status, i.e., broader Scottish accents being associated with the working-class, and Received Pronunciation (RP) or anglicised Scottish accents being linked to wealth. What complicates matters further is the implicit assumption that Scotland is rooted in working-class, egalitarianism (as opposed to

English middle-class elitism). This creates the myth of Scottish identity being inextricably linked to a working-class identity, essentially excluding middle- and upper-class Scottish nationals from the 'in-group' of Scottish identity. Coincidently, the 'no true Scotsman' rhetorical fallacy (Flew, 1975, p.47) seems to aptly fit this phenomenon. An implicit, hierarchy appears to relegate those with a posher accent to the category of being less Scottish – or not a 'true' Scotsman.

The interdisciplinary underpinnings highlighted in this section help to contextualise this research within a wider academic body of work on Scottish identity. The question here is how Scottish stand-up comedy builds on, or breaks with, these traditional representations of Scottishness. Much in the same way that Scotland sells an image of itself to visitors, stand-up comedians could also be thought of as 'marketing' their Scottishness to their audience who, in the case of the Edinburgh Fringe, are likely to actually be tourists. What role does language, accent, class and iconography play in their performance? How are markers of identity mobilised? And how is national identity politicised? The analysis in the following chapters examines contemporary understandings of Scottishness, while emphasising that Scottish identity remains in flux and open to new significations

5 ANALYSIS OF FRINGE SHOWS

5.1 Introduction

With the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of identity construction in Scottish stand-up comedy, the researcher attended 38 shows performed by Scottish comedians at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2017 (see Appendix). As outlined in the Methodolo chapter, Scottish stand-up shows were chosen by using the filtering options on the Fringe online catalogue. Extensive field notes were taken, and the data was coded with the assistance of the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti. This chapter discusses the findings from the participant observation phase of the research. It starts by highlighting the demographic data related to the performances before delving into the thematic analysis, which is presented in two parts: identity in section 5.2 and politics in section 5.3.

5.1.1 Attribute Coding

Prior to the thematic analysis, the attributes of each performer were coded, i.e., demographic information that is external. As Saldana (2009, p.57) highlights, attribute coding is an important way of 'documenting descriptive "cover" information about participants'. The performers were fist categorised according to the following attributes: ethnicity, gender, and their local region. These categories were considered to be particularly relevant as the usual, stereotypical representations of Scottish identity are of white, Glaswegian males. In the present research, the demographics of the performers reinforce this trend. The vast majority of the comedians are white (88%), (see: Figure 4) and male (72%) as illustrated in Figure 6). Almost half of them (49%) are Glaswegian, and a significant number (26%) are from Edinburgh (see Figure 5). These attribute codes help to illuminate potential differences in the way that Scottish identity is constructed and represented by different localities, genders and ethnic groups. The thematic codes are cross-analysed with the attributes coded during the analysis to provide further insights.

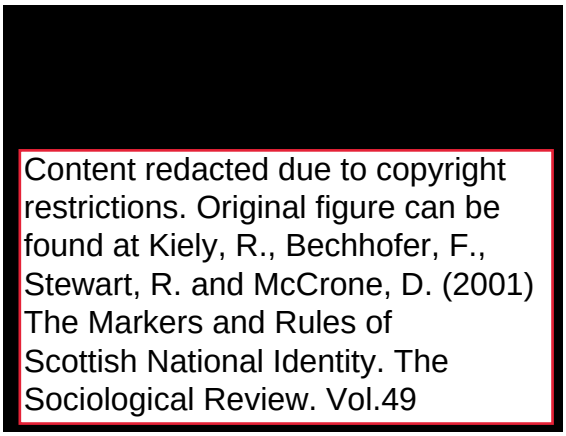

Figure 4: Attribute - Ethnicity

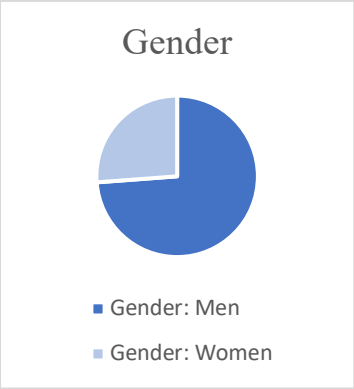

Figure 6: Attribute - Gender

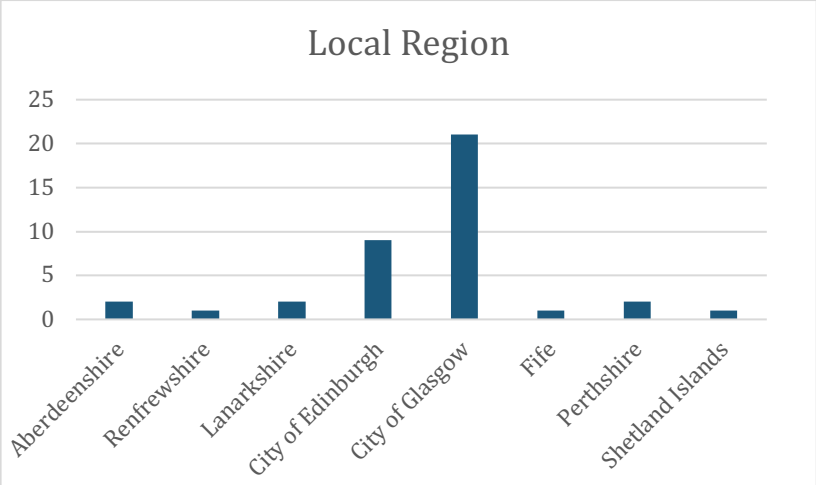

Figure 5: Attribute - Locality

5.1.2 Thematic Analysis

The coding scheme for the analysis started with two broad categories: identity and comedy. During the analysis process, further sub-codes emerged from the data, which were added to the coding scheme. The first part of this thematic analysis looks at how stand-up comedy reproduces Scottish identities, focusing on five main topics: nation, locality, race, class, and gender. The data shows that local stereotypes are particularly salient in Scottish comedy, and this is especially true for non-white comedians, who draw on their lived experience of locality to assert their (national) belonging. Scottish national identity is expressed through the Caledonian Antisyzygy (Nairn, 2003, Stirling, 2008, Barlow, 2017) of both pride and shame, and is presented as antithetical to Britishness to varying degrees. This leads to a discussion on the gendering of the nation, and the interrelation between the crisis of masculinity and the crisis of national identity in Scotland. Markers of class are also important, with the contrast between an authentically Scottish working-class, and an Anglicised Scottish middle-class emphasised in the data.

The second half of the chapter looks at the politics of comedy. The Edinburgh Fringe Festival can be seen as a site for hegemonic struggle over the meaning of comedy, art, and identity. This is exemplified by the critique of awards and critics that is made by some of the comedians. Notably, national identity is an undercurrent here, as the dominance of English voices and lack of Scottish ones raises questions about who the festival is for. This section will also look at the function of stand-up comedy, as described by the comedians themselves, who express the

desire to incite political change, to communicate serious issues through comedy, or to use comedy as a cathartic release. Finally, the issue of offence offers a further avenue for politics, as well as identity construction. Swearing is pre-empted as potentially offensive, but is simultaneously presented as central to Scottish identity, bringing up interesting questions about language taboos and (national) identity.

5.2 Representing Identities

5.2.1 Scottishness

Though not all comedians make national identity a central part of their performance, most do reference it, particularly when engaging in crowd work at the start of their show. Unsurprisingly, there are plenty of antagonistic jibes at the English: ‘Do we have anyone from England? Oh we do have some English in, that’s unfortunate.’ [Chris Henry]. Some reproduce the stereotype of a violent Scotland: ‘Scots in the room give me a cheer? Yeahhh there's gonna be stabbings in Edinburgh tonight. English people give me a cheer? Enjoy the stabbings’ [Fummey]. Others subvert the token friendship trope (Eligon, 2019): ‘I don’t mean to have a go at the English. Some of my best friends [pause] know English people and they tell me that… [laughter]’ [Singh Kohli]. ‘I have got one English mate, cause that is all you are allowed after you watch Braveheart.’ [Marc Jennings].

Anti-Englishness can create a social bond during the performance by constructing an in-group (“us”) that exists in opposition to an out-group (the English). Singh Kohli illustrates this when interacting with an English audience member: ‘Thank you so much for coming and colonising, erm I mean living amongst us’. Here the antagonism operates within the narrative frame of Scotland as a postcolonial nation – a recurring theme in the data analysis. In some cases, Brexit is invoked as a marker of difference: ‘Only one European in the audience? That's your fault England. Hello European man, Scotland voted to remain, you're very safe.’ [Jay Lafferty]. Brexit voters are portrayed as less progressive: ‘the same people who were upset about a female Doctor Who are the same people who voted Leave; the irony is that after Brexit, the only doctor you will be able to find is a fictional one’ [Keir McAllister]. In another example, the Indyref is presented as a reflection of anti-English sentiment: ‘Any English people give me a cheer? Don’t be ashamed. Only 45% of us hate you’ [Ashley Storrie]. Politics is tied to identity in all three examples: colonised Scots and English colonisers; Scottish Remainers and English Brexiteers; pro-Indy Scots, pro-union English.

The politics of identity is also common in the realm of sport. Harris (2014) notes how Scottish athletes have become 'a contested site for the (re)claiming of national (British/Scottish) glory' (p. 275). This is illustrated in the data as one comedian notes: 'we are in 2017, and we can't even decide if Andy Murray is Scottish or British. Depends if he wins or not' [Rick Carranza]. Football in particular is one arena where Scots expect to lose, and so are, as McTavish puts it, 'permanently fucking disappointed'. In this section of his show, McTavish misdirects the audience, alluding to the divisiveness of politics, but actually talking about the back and forth in an England-Scotland World Cup qualifying game (June 10th 2017). The disappointment of football fans is turned into a positive in McTavish's show (we are very good at it). Indeed, when it comes to football, Scots are often characterised as 'good humoured underdogs' (Abell, 2011, p.254). The Scottish underdog identity is built in opposition to an Englishness, with many Scottish football fans choosing to support 'anyone but England' (Whigham, 2014) – a rivalry that helps to reinforce perceived 'cultural differences' (Giulianotti and Gerrard, 2001, p.34).

Encounters with other (non-British) cultures can also serve to reinforce difference. As Cohen (2013) explains, our sense of self is 'informed by implicit or explicit contrast' (p. 115). For comedians who have spent time abroad, national identity appears more salient as they become aware of their 'Scottish' traits. For example, hair colour: 'they class orange as a lucky colour. So I became a trinket to people in Myanmar' [Struan Logan]; body shape: 'I landed in Australia and I fully understood why Shrek had been given a Scottish accent. None of us are beach ready ever' [Chris Henry] and skin colour: 'I am the whitest, see-through person you will ever meet…I was like a fucking unicorn to those people' [Robin Grainger]. Their difference makes them exotic, and an object of interest abroad.

A notable exception to this discourse of cultural difference is Ireland. When Irish people are in audience, the comedians generally welcome them as 'one of us' [Fummey], and at times use stereotypes to present cultural similarity: 'I am the Scottish one in the show, which ordinarily would make me the miserable alcoholic, however the other three are all Irish' [Andy J Ritchie]. This sense of commonality with the Irish is not surprising considering many Irish emigrants settled in the West of Scotland in the 19th Century (Devine, 2012, Walker, 2016b). They have shaped modern Scottish society in many ways, including the establishment of some of Scotland's most prominent football clubs (Celtic, Hibs, Dundee F.C.) (Walker, 2001, McMenemy and Poulter, 2005). The drinking culture in both Scotland and Ireland has notable

similarities too, though Scotland has its own specific problems when it comes to harmful alcohol consumption (SHAAP, 2016, AFS, 2018).

From Scotch whisky to Buckfast, alcohol consumption in Scotland is symbolically meaningful in the construction of the nation. As Ashley Storrie remarks, the Scots are known for being the 'most alcoholic people in the entire world' [Ashley Storrie]. In Marjolein Roberts' performance, heavy drinking is presented as particularly central to Island identity: 'alcohol is very important to Shetlanders, we have a very special relationship with it. In that we abuse it'. It is perhaps even more interesting that Roberts describes the Nordic history of the Shetlands, and questions whether her own national identity is Nordic or Scottish before pointing to alcohol as the deciding factor: 'I wanted to know who I am truly. So I looked into the two countries, and what I found is alcohol is a quarter of the price in Scotland - so FREEDOM!' [Marjolein Roberts].

Some comedians are more critical of Scotland's pervasive binge drinking culture, however:

> I am trying to give up the alcohol. That is what I am trying to do instead of going to the gym. And see when you say that in Scotland, it's hard man, 'cause we grew up on the stuff. People always look at you like a bit of a leper when you say you are giving up alcohol [Jantarasorn].

It is easy to see why giving up alcohol might be a challenge when drinking is such an integral part of Scottish identity. The pressure to conform is apparent here, a dynamic that is also found in discussions about gender later in this chapter (see section 5.2.6)

Figure 7: Vladimir McTavish

Stereotypically Scottish iconography is also used by the performers, most notably Paul Sneddon (who uses Vladimir McTavish as his stage name) and Craig Hill. McTavish invokes the discourse of tartanry through his stage name and the use of tartan in his show's promotional material (Fringe Society, 2017, p. 185). Craig Hill not only wears a kilt (Figure 8), but also uses it as a play on words in the title of his show (Fringe Society, 2017, p.84; Craig Hill: someone is gonna get kilt!). This is a noteworthy strategy for a Fringe show, as tartanry symbolism is 'an instantly recognisable signifier of identity' (Munro, 2010, p.180) both nationally and internationally. Yet, while tartan conjures up the image of a romanticised history and heritage (Trevor-Roper, 1983; see literature review), it is also frequently employed by Scottish performers in 'knowing, ironic and reflexively self-satirical' ways (Brown, 2010, p.109), as is the case with McTavish and Hill. The former uses an ironically kitsch iconography that seems reminiscent of the tartanry discourse produced by Scottish comedians like Lauder, Stanley Baxter or Andy Stewart (See Figure 9); the latter invokes the image of the Scottish hardman stereotype with a stance that mirrors that of *Trainspotting 2* characters (Bisset, 2017; see Figure 10).

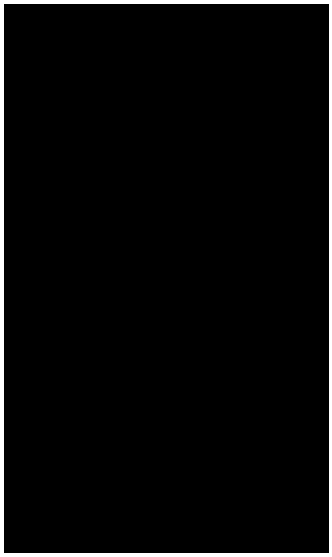

Figure 8: Craig Hill

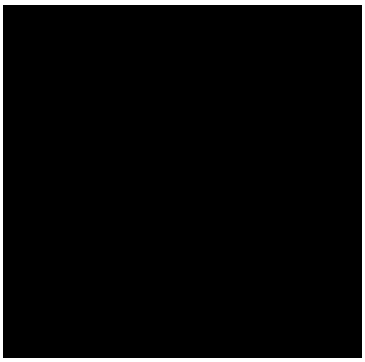

Figure 9: Andy Stewart

Many of the comedians fall back on self-deprecation, attaching a sense of inferiority to their national identity: 'I was trying to work out what my campaign slogan could be [if running for office], I was thinking 'Make Scotland Great Again'. Then I realised you have to have a point of reference for that to work. [Kevin McPadden]. This 'inferiority complex' of the Scottish psyche is well documented in the literature (Beveridge and Turnbull, 1989, Cusick, 1994, Homberg-Schramm, 2018), and reflects the postcolonial mentality of Scotland. To be Scottish means perpetual disappointment [McTavish], and little cause for optimism: 'Give me a cheer if you are Scottish? [a few

Content redacted due to copyright restrictions. Original figures can be found at (Fringe Society, 2017; Spotify 2020) Figure 9: Spotify 2020 https://open.spotify.com/album/1y7nj48Ty7Tm7DYIrQPxkV

unenthusiastic cheers] That's about right for the Fringe. And also the right amount of happiness' [Gareth Waugh].

Alongside this discourse of inferiority, some comedians incorporate a more positive vision of the nation: 'I think Scotland's got a lot going for it. We are rich in renewable energy. We are a very safe country, Scotland. Here we are. Biggest arts festival in the world, city is full of tourists and anytime I ask anybody if they feel safe, they say Yes'. McTavish ends his show on a similarly uplifting note as he encourages the audience to become more socially and politically engaged while *Trainspotting*'s 'Lust for Life' tune plays in the background: 'Choose to live in a world where your children can inherit a better one than the one you were passed down by your parents'. McTavish perfectly encapsulates the Scottish 'schizophrenic tendency' (Farred, 2004, p.216) that combines both pride and shame. The postcolonial identity of Scotland is ambiguous at best considering its complex relationship, and complicity with, its 'colonisers' down South. The result is a 'split positionality' (Homberg-Schramm, 2018, p.20) whereby Scotland is both the coloniser and colonised.

Figure 10: Trainspotting 2

5.2.2 Britishness

Though Scottish identity stands in opposition to Englishness in some contexts, it is also interpellated into Britishness. We can observe this in Andy J Ritchie's performance:

> My daughter is learning the most important thing about being Scottish - or being British rather. Which is of course, the magic word. Because all you need to do is tag the word please at the end of any request, and that will somehow mask your murderous passive aggressive tone. [Ritchie]

Ritchie's correction – 'being British' rather than 'Scottish' – seems to reflect the idea that Britishness and Scottishness are distinct and perhaps oppositional. Politeness is presented as a typically British stereotype here, though this can be interpreted as a superficial performance. As Mills (2017) points out, Brits are often represented as being overly polite, 'but underneath, their real feelings are in stark contrast' (p. 3).

While it is easy to flatten Britishness to such stereotypes, by doing so we mask variations that exist across class, gender, or locality. Ritchie's description of Britishness is based on 'negative politeness language' (distance, reserve, indirectness), which as Mills (2017) points out, more accurately reflects class (upper/middle class) and region (Southern England) rather than Britain as a whole (p. 59). The notion of Britishness thus could be viewed as a stand in for middle-class English codes of politeness. Historically, these cultural traits have served to 'other' Scotland as 'the opposite of civilised, reasonable and sophisticated England' (Homberg-Schramm, 2018, p.26).

Some Scottish comedians interpret politeness differently. Fern Brady talks about her frustration with service workers who do not smile: 'I did my job every day for 2 and a half years with a smile on my face, so surely hipster baristas can serve me my flat white with a fucking grin'. The lack of smiling signals to her that the barista thinks they are better than her: 'they think I am not good enough for the coffee' [Brady]. Susan Morrison and Jojo Sutherland also condemn rude behaviour: 'Manners! People are quite rude now aren't they? Especially now with mobile phones because people are always on the phone and ignoring you and that' [Fanny's Ahoy]. These examples illustrate a desire for 'positive politeness', which stresses the 'closeness of the speaker and the hearer' (Mills, 2017, p.7). This sits in stark contrast to the distant and indirect language of negative politeness:

> Anytime I said anything in my disgusting guttural accent, Daisy would just nod and go 'hmm quite'. I don't know what posh people mean when they say that, but I know it's along the lines of 'hmm cunt [Brady]

As Brady illustrates, indirect politeness comes across as insincere for many working-class people (Mills, 2017, pp.29 and 79).

The notion of 'civility' can be understood as system whereby the boundaries of class, race, and gender, as well as national (British/English) identity are maintained (Mills, 2017, p.76). Commenting on the Conservative Party conference, Brown notes that 'they kept using the phrase 'British values' without ever explaining what that meant. What do you mean by British values?' Brown answers his own question: 'what they mean when they say British values is Imperialism. They mean like racism, homophobia, sexism and tea'. Tea can signify two things here: the colonial tea trade that sustained the British Empire; and the symbolism of the 'quintessentially "English" cup of tea' (Roseneil, 2016, p.226), which is a staple in polite

'rituals of sociability' in Britain (Klein, 2002, p.885). These two elements are interlinked since cultural characteristics like civility helped to legitimise Britain's Imperial role, and have influenced modern party politics (Cooper, 2007, Evening Standard, 2012, Mohdin, 2018).

Britishness may be a cultural construction, but it is also materially linked to citizenship status. Jamie McDonald discusses the UK citizenship test with his audience:

> I didn't realise that if you were a foreign person and you want to settle in the UK, you have to sit what is called a 'life in the UK' test. For those of you who don't know it is a questionnaire that tests your knowledge of UK customs and culture. They are nonsense. [McDonald]

These comments point to the hierarchy of citizenship that is inherent in testing, as well as the power of the state in deciding what it means to belong – an argument that the 'modernist' school of nationalism would agree with (Anderson, 2006, Gellner, 2006). Citizenship tests in this view are both a 'disciplinary tool' and a 'technology used to naturalize the authority' of the state (Löwenheim and Gazit, 2009, p.149). McDonald goes on to make fun of these 'nonsense' questions and points out that many British natives would not be able to answer them. After all, those who are native born citizens do not have to prove their linguistic competence or cultural and historical knowledge.

Though citizenship and national identity are not the same thing (Isin and Wood, 1999, Miller, 2000, Habermas, 2018), the two concepts are interconnected. In the ideal type of modern nation-state, 'cultural nationality and legal citizenship should be coextensive' (Brubaker, 2015, p.132). Citizenship tests serve to objectify and standardise national culture, constructing the myth of a homogenous nation. Despite their shortcomings, citizenship tests are regarded by many as a necessary step in the naturalisation process. Jamie McDonald imagines a hypothetical citizenship test for Scotland during his performance:

> if independence ever does go through, we will have to test our immigrants. Have to get them to sit the life in Scotland test. And we can do a kinda Scottish version of the UK one. If we do have to test them at all, let's REALLY test them. Let's do it better. Let's get my wife to set them a challenge. Then we will see if they have got grit. [McDonald]

In McDonald's example, 'grit' is presented as the necessary attribute of Scottish citizenship – and while he merely uses this for comedic effect, it is interesting to note that Glaswegian children score highest in the so-called 'grit scale'[2] (BBC, 2011, Duckworth, n.d.).

The differentiation between the British citizenship test as 'nonsense' and the Scottish one as real ('let's REALLY test them') again points to the way Scotland defines itself in opposition to England/Britain. Moreover, the implication in McDonald's comments that living in Scotland is challenging and requires grit fits with the image of the bleak, urban 'Clydesider' representation of Scottish identity. Of course, it would be a mistake to conflate citizenship with national identity, even if the two are connected. The defining criteria for Scottish citizenship (if Scotland were to gain independence) remains contested, and moreover, the boundaries of a (hypothetical) Scottish citizenship differ from those of national belonging – the latter being more restrictive (Leith and Soule, 2011).

5.2.3 Locality

> If you think about it, Scotland's actually quite a diverse country. You look at the central belt very different from the highlands, and even within the central belt, you compare Edinburgh to Glasgow very different cities. [McTavish]

As McTavish alludes to here, what we think of as national identity is in fact the amalgamation of distinct local cultures. Scottish stand-up comedians often play with local stereotypes, and as can be expected, Scotland's largest cities feature prominently. Edinburgh is described as a 'beautiful city' [Singh Kohli; McTavish], but with 'nae chat' [Singh Kohli]. Or as John Scott puts it, the moon landing must have been filmed in Edinburgh 'because there was no fucking atmosphere'. As well as the lack of banter, Edinburgh is seen as less authentic: 'where did you get that posh accent from? You buy it? You can buy everything in Edinburgh' [Singh Kohli]. The lack of authenticity extends to national identity too, as Edinburgh is perceived to be less Scottish: 'Can't find Scottish people in Edinburgh. Canny find them. They're like unicorns.'

[2] The grit scale is a self-reported questionnaire created by Professor Angela Duckworth at the University of Pennsylvania in the US (see: Duckworth, n.d.). It aims to measure qualities like determination and perseverance in the face of failure.

[Ashley Storrie]. This is even reiterated by an Edinburgh comedian who asserts: 'I love Glaswegians, they are the real Scots aren't you eh?' [John Scott].

Edinburgh is also portrayed as very posh by many of the (non-Edinburgh) comedians: 'After 20 years I still can't get my head around quite how posh it is' [McTavish]. Marjolein Robertson also shares this sentiment: 'Isn't Edinburgh mad? Because any other city in Britain you walk onto the pavement and there is vomit and chip suppers on the ground. I walked out of my flat and there was genuinely sundried tomatoes and avocado squished onto the pavement'. McTavish compares Edinburgh to other cities by commenting on its crime rate (or lack thereof):

> In Edinburgh, somebody sees somebody dropping litter at a bus stop in Trinity they go "Right that's it, we've had quite enough! Society's gone to hell in a handcart Margery. I am phoning the police. Three letters to the Scotsman haven't made one iota of difference. I blame *Trainspotting*. Once was bad enough, bringing it back was just clearly asking for trouble". [McTavish]

By referencing *Trainspotting,* McTavish juxtaposes the 'real' posh Edinburgh, with the gritty fictional one.

Comedians who are from the capital tell a different story, however: 'We used to live in this area of Edinburgh called Granton. If you don't know Granton, just to let you know what it's like, when I was kid, I couldn't leave my toys outside, I'd come back in the morning and they'd be on fire' [Rick Carranza]. Wiz Jantarasorn, who is also from Edinburgh, describes his local area of Leith as a 'crack den', and jokingly refers to *Trainspotting* as a documentary. Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* is, of course, not a documentary, but it does depict the real contrast between the Edinburgh of tourists and 'rich cunts', and the Edinburgh of the marginalised (MacLeod, 2008).

When it comes to Glasgow, Jamie McDonald explains that 'we are the warmest, friendliest, folk on the planet according to us. Weegies we love ourselves, we rate ourselves very highly'. Gary Little reinforces this view by pointing to how Glaswegians can turn a negative into a positive:

> Glasgow got told they are the world capital for lung cancer; the world capital for heart attacks; highest obesity rate in the UK; most violent city in Europe. And most people in Glasgow are just asking – is there anything we are no good at? [Little]

Similarly, Scott Gibson expresses this kind of Glaswegian positivity in his show: 'if you weighed over 300 pounds, you might think to yourself, I need to calm down right? My first thought when I was told I weighed 300 pounds was - I am a wrestler!' The combination of shame and pride that is expressed by the Glaswegian comedians seems to illustrate the 'Caledonian Antisyzygy' (Smith, cited in Barlow, 2017, p.97) of the Scottish psyche discussed in section 5.2.1.

The local divisions highlighted in this section are significant for understanding Scottish nationalism. As Pittock (2001) points out, 'the Scottish habit of opposing each other rather than the common foe can be seen as compromising the development of a consistent sense of nationality' (p. 5). On the other hand, rather than seeing a substantive divide between the different versions of Scotland presented by the comedians, we can also understand the performative function that local knowledge serves. People's sense of national identity will inevitably be mediated by particularities like locality, but they are what constitute the whole; externalising these differences can serve to reinforce the solidarity of a group (Cohen, 2013, pp.88–89). The following section will continue the discussion of locality, but through the lens of minority racial identities in Scotland.

5.2.4 Race

The concept of race is understood here not as a biological or objective category, but as a 'discursive construct' (Hall, 2017), which nonetheless can create essentialist effects. In Scotland, the over-representation of whiteness, both in terms of population size and in portrayals of Scottishness, helps to construct an ethnic marker of identity in the imaginary of the Scottish nation . As a consequence, non-white Scots, whose bodies are 'racialised', must negotiate their identity as minorities (Ahmed, 2013). A strategy of disidentification (Muñoz, 1999) is used by Bruce Fummey, who starts his show by addressing misrecognition:

> I know when I walk on stage, there's always a bit of confusion in the room. Because my accent says FREEDOM, whereas my hairstyle says legalise it... It's an unusual combination. [Fummey]

Scottish identity is not resisted, but nor is it taken up unquestioningly. He discusses his identity at length in the show, emphasising his lived experience: 'I'm Scottish. Born in Scotland. I've always lived in Scotland. I've lived various places in Scotland'. This assertion echoes the observation of many scholars who claim that 'modern Scottish identity is much more firmly aligned to a sense of place than to a sense of tribe' (Smout, 1994, p.107).

Fummey's sense of belonging is anchored to his conception of home. While home can have many meanings, one way in which it can be defined is as 'the lived experience of locality' (Ahmed, 2013, p.89). The home of locality 'intrudes into the senses: it defines what one smells, hears, touches, feels, remembers' (Ahmed, 2013, p.89); it is the home of locality which is presented by Fummey. Yet this belonging is problematised through misrecognition:

> Every place I've lived I've played in the local rugby team. Every time I run on the rugby pitch people go oooh. Is he Samoan? Is Haitian? Is he a Māori? and then they see me play they go he's definitely Scottish! Cause you can't hide that shit. [Fummey]

Fummey plays on a racial stereotype to reinforce his Scottishness. The lived experience of being Scottish over-rides racial markers of identity in his narrative. More importantly, the use of the term 'hide' points to an inner, authentic self that is not necessarily evident at first glance. The self is nonetheless constituted through the body as 'subjectivity and identity cannot be separated from specific forms of embodiment' (Ahmed, 2013, p.41).

Fummey plays with other people's perceptions of him by putting his identity within the frame of mock comedy reviews:

> The Dundee evening telegraph said that I was the finest comedian on the Afro-Celtic comedy circuit. That's right. The Edinburgh Evening news said I was the only comedian on the Afro-Celtic comedy circuit! Nigel Farage said we are being swamped by comedians from the Afro-Celtic comedy circuit, coming here taking gigs from funnier, whiter comedians and putting them out of a job. [Bruce Fummey].

The discursive practices that shape meaning, particularly within the media we consume, are highlighted here. As the literature shows, newspapers play a key role in shaping Scottish

national identity (Dekavalla, 2015, 2016) as well as our perceptions about race and migration (Silveira, 2016). Fummey uses 'reverse humour' in this example to subvert these common discourses (Weaver, 2010, p.32) and expose their absurdity. As Weaver (2007, 2010) notes, however, reverse humour is ambiguous since it can be interpreted as a subversion or reinforcement of racist signifiers. Fummey's comments, for example, can be taken at face value by those who decry the increasing 'wokeness' of comedy (Healey, 2019, Fox, 2020).

A commentary on language and meaning construction reappears later in Fummey's show: 'I was handing out fliers for my show and this Aussie woman said you can't be Scottish. You're black. I says you can't be Australian. You're white.' This occurrence highlights the interpersonal dimension of identity (Stryker, 2002, Denzin, 2008b). While Fummey strongly identifies with Scotland, this identification is mediated through 'biographical and interactional experiences' that connect the personal to the structural (Denzin, 2008b, p.27). As Ahmed (2013) emphasises, 'when we face others, we seek to recognise who they are, by reading the signs on their body, or by reading their body as a sign' (p. 8). This naturalised relationship between ethnicity and nationality is problematised by Fummey.

The displacement of being away from home brings identity to the forefront in what Ahmed (2013) would call 'strange encounters'. This is exemplified as Fummey talks of his experience as 'an Afro-Celt' abroad: 'there are three questions people always asked me: 1) what's a Scotsman got in his sporran. 2) what's a Scotsman got under this kilt. And 3) if you're half African, how do you hide the fucker'. In the above example, Fummey is exoticized on two fronts: his Scottish identity and his race. He later leans into the stereotypes: 'people say Fummey, it must have been really difficult growing up a mixed-race kid in Scotland in the 60s and 70s. And some things were difficult. Like trying to play reggae music on the bagpipes'. Fummey's position as an 'Afro-Celt' allows him (or perhaps requires him) to lean into racial stereotypes (Pérez, 2013). This strategy is a double-edged sword; as Weaver (2010) highlights, racial comedy has the polysemic potential to highlight the absurdity of stereotypes, and/or re-enforce their original meaning.

For those who belong to the majority, the identification process often happens unconsciously: the white body is rendered 'invisible, unraced, and normative' (Goltz, 2017, p.79). For minorities, however, the process of identity construction is 'often, if not always *work'* (Muñoz, 1999, p.6). Fummey explains this quite explicitly in his show: 'You had to be more Scottish than other Scottish kids just to fit in, to the extent that for the last few years I have been trying

to learn Gaelic'. Furthermore, the labour of identity is inherent in the performance, as Fummey's identity is not self-evident to a transnational audience. He pre-empts their questions ('people ask me…') and their thoughts ('I'm guessing a lot of people have never heard an accent like this coming out of a face like this before…') to explain the complexities of his identity.

The conscious work of making identity is also highlighted in Singh Kohli's performance:

> As a child of an immigrant, you've got a choice, you can either stay on the periphery and do nothing and not engage. Or you can engage and be more Scottish than other Scots, show how much you're engaged with the country of your upbringing.

Though there is some commonality with Fummey here, Singh Kohli differs by emphasising the process of 'becoming Scottish' (Bond, 2006), which entails long-term residence, rather than birthplace or ancestry. Unlike Fummey, whose identity is partly predetermined by being born in Scotland to a Scottish mother, Singh Kohli presents his Scottishness as a more intentional and reflexive choice. This sentiment is not unusual – research shows ethnic minorities are likely to identify strongly with British (MacInnes, 2011) or Scottish national identity (Bond, 2017).

One way in which Singh Kohli reasserts his identity is by incorporating local references into his material. While this is a technique that is common to Scottish stand-up more generally, Singh Kohli uses it far more extensively than other comedians in the sample. Furthermore, he goes beyond simple stereotypes such as violent Glasgow/ posh Edinburgh. Rather, Singh Kohli showed that he knew the different parts of the cities well when interacting with the audience: at the mention of Uddingston, he talks about Tunnock's wafers (Tunnock's is based in Uddingston); at the mention of Portobello, he asks if they drink at the Espy (local Portobello pub); when he hears a posh Edinburgh accent, he asks if they went to Watson's (one of the Edinburgh's private schools). This local knowledge at the start of the show serves to reinforce the notion of belonging, which similarly to Fummey, is also based on 'the lived experience of locality' (Ahmed, 2013, p.89).

Singh Kohli uses various modes to engage with the audience, most notably the use of photographs as part of a biographical narrative. In one example, Singh Kohli shows a picture of his younger self in an Indian folk dancing outfit; in another, he wears his Glasgow school

uniform and turban. While stand-up comedy already 'implies a level of performed autobiography' (Brodie, 2014, p.141) and an 'underlying truth'(Brodie, 2014, p.156), this is intensified through the use of photographs since, as Barthes (1981) notes, 'in Photography I can never deny that the thing has been there. There is a superimposition here of reality and of the past' (Barthes, 1981, p.76). Some of the images used by Singh Kohli depict the area of Glasgow where he grew up, Bishopbriggs. Interestingly, he shows a historical Bishopbriggs, which he describes as 'like a perfect picture postcard… horse drawn carriage and the beautiful Victorian architecture and only white people. Those were the days' [Singh Kohli].

Singh Kohli's affection for Bishopbriggs and its history is juxtaposed with the place's historical rejection of people like him. As he shows the audience a photo of his childhood home, he comments that when his family first moved to the house, 'that wall wasnae there and the porch wasnae there. Fucking immigrants coming here improving properties'. Similar to Fummey, Singh Kohli uses reverse discourse to explicitly subvert the traditionally held notion that immigrants make neighbourhoods less desirable (Bressey and Dwyer, 2008). This is reinforced in another anecdote: 'Sunday morning, my dad used to drive us out from Bishopbriggs to one of the posh neighbourhoods and we would pretend to buy a house and just watch the white people panic' [Singh Kohli]. The experience of being seen through a white gaze is recounted here, but in a way which reverses the power dynamics.

The uncomfortable tension between Scotland's historical racism and its progressive ambitions comes through in the performances:

> Glasgow is known as the second city of empire, right? And that gives us a very mixed history. We built the ships that sailed all over the world to allow two thirds of the globe to be pink. We are absolutely complicit in the slave trade. We don't deal with our history. We will eventually start to. [Singh Kohli]

The willing involvement of Scotland in the Empire is well documented (MacKenzie, 1998), but as Asher and French (2014) observe, this is often masked in Scottish nationalist rhetoric. Singh Kohli addresses this head on, but also claims that Scotland has improved in terms of racism: 'you don't have it on a daily basis so much these days. I mean, it's really changed. And that's a two-way process'.

For Singh Kohli, progress in racial equality has occurred not only because white people changed their behaviour, but because ethnic minorities gained their trust:

> So many white British people's primary point of contact with brown people was in positions of great trust. So, whether it is was your doctor, your bus driver, your train driver, the nurse or the restaurant or the corner shop. You know, and I think there was, that trust was there at the very beginning.

Although this seems to oversimplify and romanticise intercultural relations, there is some truth to this argument. Virdee et al's (2006) study, for example, notes that in multi-ethnic neighbourhoods in Scotland, 'residents come to a more nuanced understanding of the racialised other such that racialised nationalism no longer has the purchase to cohere communities in the way it did in the past' (Virdee, Kyriakides and Modood, 2006, Section 5.4). Shopkeepers in particular are an important point of contact, as one white respondent in the study illustrates: 'I love Indian shopkeepers… they work hard, they provide a service to the local community' (Virdee, Kyriakides and Modood, 2006, Section 4.12).

The image of the Asian shopkeeper is famously represented on Scottish TV through Navid, a character played by Hardeep Singh Kohli's brother, Sanjeev, on *Still Game*. Navid is lauded as having a noticeable impact on racial attitudes: Navid 'has done more for race relations than any legislation will' [Singh Kohli]. This statement is backed up by an anecdote of a time when Singh Kohli was seemingly mistaken for his brother:

> He shouts 'awright Navid man'. I love my brother, but I refuse to take his credit. So, I turn around and I'm like jakey that's not me. That's my brother. He turns around, quick as a flash, and he goes, 'I know, but it doesn't half piss you off. [Singh Kohli].

This harmless interaction is a stark contrast to Singh Kohli's school years, when he would regularly get chased home from school by 'jakeys'. The contrast serves to show 'how much the world has changed'. Or more precisely, how much Scotland has changed. After years of living in London, the change in Scottish attitudes made Singh Kohli feel 'it was time to come home'.

The significance of locality is also emphasised by Wiz Jantarasorn, a non-white Scottish comedian of Thai heritage. Leith (Jantarasorn's local area in Edinburgh) is metaphorically presented as a separate country:

> Leith is like our own country nowadays. You can a get a train right up to the border get your passport stamped at the brass monkey. We have our own currency, we only do things in ounces and grams. We have our own anthem, Sunshine on Leith. [Jantarasorn].

A comparison to *Trainspotting* could be made here, as the film also distinguishes between Edinburgh and Leith (MacLeod, 2008). *Trainspotting* is used by Jantarasorn as a point of reference to explain Leith to his audience. Yet, regardless of how he self-identifies, Jantarasorn must contend with the way that others see him: 'With a name like Wiz, everywhere I go people ask me. Wiz, where is it you 'hail from' and I have to get a map out and point to this country outside of Scotland called Leith'. The area of Leith is again presented as a separate country, and much like the experiences of Fummey and Singh Kohli, Jantarasorn is miscategorised as an outsider at first glance.

Even those who know he is from Scotland might still pose what he calls 'culturally inquisitive' questions: 'we realise you are from Leith right but, really though, where are you… Where is it you… And what they really want to know is my background' [Jantarasorn]. As well as the somewhat polite questions about his heritage, Jantarasorn also describes more racist encounters: 'Sometimes I will be walking down the street towards my favourite bus stop, and I will just hear from a moving car 'chicken fried rice'. They are inquiring as to whether or not I am hungry. The answer is always yes' [Jantarasorn]. By reversing the discourse, Jantarasorn resists the racist ideology behind the comments (Weaver, 2010). A longer discussion on the interplay of national identity and race can be found in the Discussion chapter. The following section outlines the findings on Scottish identity and social class.

5.2.5 Class

Scotland is commonly understood to have a different kind of class politics compared to England. As Maxwell explains, egalitarianism is a myth which is central to Scottish politics and identity:

> In its strong nationalist version, class division is held to be an alien importation from England. In the weaker version, it describes the wider opportunity for social mobility in Scotland as illustrated in 'the lad o'pairts' tradition. (Maxwell 1976, cited in McCrone, 2001a, p.79)

The first version of this myth is reflected in the radical socialist tradition of Scotland (Bambery, 2014, Boyd, 2015), something which Singh Kohli alludes to in his performance:

> The reason the Labour Party is dead in Scotland is because they couldn't even look after the working-class woman and man they were invented to represent… We need a genuine socialist movement in Scotland. We are a socialist country with a few Tories.

Working-class identity and socialist politics are heralded as defining characteristics of the Scottish nation. The Labour party is presented as betraying their roots, and failing the very people who they were elected to serve.

While similarities can be drawn with other nations, Scotland sees itself and its politics as distinctly left-wing, particularly in contrast to conservative England (Law and Mooney, 2006, Morton, 2011). Singh Kohli's assertion that Scotland is at its core a 'socialist country' may seem paradoxical considering that, by his own account, it lacks a socialist movement. This paradox can be explained if we understand class as not only a structural category, but also a cultural and political one (McCrone, 2001b, Morton, 2011). The existence of social class as a socio-economic category does not necessarily lead to a political class consciousness; the meanings and identities attached to class are subjective and varied. Moreover, an awareness of, and identification with, a particular class will not always result in class action, i.e., political mobilisation. (McCrone, 2001b, p.80). Thus, while Singh Kohli acknowledges Scotland's shortcomings in terms of class-based political action, particularly by the previous ruling elite (Labour), he reproduces the myth of Scottish egalitarianism by alluding to the inherent socially-minded nature of Scots. Conservative thinking is presented as something in the periphery ('a few Tories').

Scottish institutions (church, education, law) are seen as a reflection of egalitarian values. The Scottish education system, with its 'lad o' pairts' tradition (Anderson, 1985, Paterson, 2009, Bryce et al., 2018), has long been perceived as meritocratic. Yet, this is undermined by the

prevalence of fee-paying schools, which help maintain class stratification (McCrone, 2020). Fummey, who previously worked as a high school teacher, discusses this in his comedy:

> In Edinburgh in particular, there are these big posh private schools, George Watson's, Heriot's, Merchiston, Stuart Melville's, all these kind of schools and it matters going to these schools because you go to a school like that and you're set for life, do you know what I mean? It doesn't matter how much of an idiot you are, you go to a school like that, life is ok. [Fummey]

The kind of school one attends seems to have a determinant impact on life chances. Indeed, the question 'what school did you go to?' is a loaded one in Scotland: In the West Coast, it is a question about religion (catholic/protestant); in Edinburgh, it is about social status: 'your connections and social networks, and possibly even your values' (McCrone, 2020, p.24).

In recent years, increased access to higher education and geographic mobility have diminished the importance of private schools; they are a 'sufficient but not necessary condition for improving one's lot in life' (McCrone, 2020, p.43). Yet, some (Iannelli and Paterson, 2006, Morton, 2011) predict that cultural capital will help maintain a hierarchical system: even if access to a good education is theoretically open to all, inequality still increases because 'the upper classes have the resources to take full advantage of the opportunities on offer' (Morton, 2011, p.88). In Brady's performance, this contrast between access in theory and in practice is apparent:

> I went to a posh Uni, I went to Edinburgh Uni. I don't know if you know it, but it's like Hogwarts. And I went to a class called working class representations in literature, cause I thought it would be common, like me. [Brady]

The university is presented as middle class (a 'posh uni') and perhaps standing outside of reality (like Hogwarts). Brady's disappointment with her 'working-class representations' module further exemplifies class division. The lives of the working class, if they are discussed at all, are usually not stories voiced by or for working-class people (McGarvey, 2018, Maclean, 2020).

Brady's ability to access a prestigious university despite her working-class roots seems to validate the egalitarian myth. However, class inequalities persist as she faces additional

challenges compared to her colleagues: ‘if you are a middle-class student you don’t need to work in the summer, you just intern cause what is money, other than amusingly coloured pieces of paper’ [Brady]. Alongside material conditions, Brady also points to cultural and social capital as barriers for progression. Markers of working-class identity, especially in speech, affect how she is perceived: ‘I got this writing prize at uni from the Guardian newspaper – because they can’t hear your accent when you enter’. At one point, Brady discusses her experience of dating someone who is posher than her, and class difference is once again emphasised: ‘He said “you can really tell you are working class cause you pronounce it Guardian not Gua:rdian”’. It is evident from her narrative that class identity has an impact on her social relations and perhaps her career.

Class barriers can be hard to overcome. Those from working-class backgrounds may pass up on the opportunity to go to a prestigious university because they do not feel like they ‘belong’ there (Friedman and Lauriston, 2019, p.174). Moreover, while social mobility is accepted as positive good, it often comes at a cost, both emotionally and financially (Friedman and Lauriston, 2019, p.179). Fern Brady talks about this earnestly in her performance, particularly in relation to dating:

> I don’t fuck outside my social class. Youse are gonna say that’s elitist, love crosses all boundaries - No, it doesn’t. At the end of the day, we wanna go out with someone who, when we go to their parents’ house, the furniture doesn’t make us feel vaguely uncomfortable.

Here social class is presented as a form of *habitus*. As Bourdieu (2000) proposes, an ‘unconscious unity of class’ is forged through tastes and distastes (p. 77), and choice of furniture is a particularly telling marker: ‘Every interior expresses, in its own language, the present and even the past state of its occupants’ (p. 77). While consumption choices are anchored by material necessities and constraints, they are also shaped by socialisation and cultural resources (capital). Patterns of behaviour and taste reflect the capital (economic, cultural, social) of an individual, and consequently reproduce class positions.

In some cases, the comedians distance themselves from their middle-class position by emphasising their parents’ working-class origins:

> I had a very happy life. I went to Disney world as a child. I went to private school. I am very much loved by both my parents, who are still together. I am in a very, very happy family. My parents had sad, sad lives. They had poverty. [Ashley Storrie]

> 'My mum and dad are working-class but brought up me to be a wank. You'd think I'd be grounded but cultured. Instead, I am just a pretentious scumbag' [Christopher McArthur Boyd]

Boyd's self-deprecating tone when describing his aesthetic judgements (pretentious) shows a reflexive awareness of his class privilege and a disavowal of middle-classness. Both Storrie and Boyd seem to employ what Savage et al. (2010) call a 'mobility story', i.e., a device that allows them to 'acknowledge that they are now middle class, but as part of a story of how they had risen in the social ladder and, therefore, were not born into privilege' (p. 131). This kind of middle-class distancing is not uniquely Scottish – Savage et al. (2010) observe it in a wide sample of British participants. Yet, as McCrone (2005) explains, structural similarities between Scotland and England will nonetheless be understood and expressed differently in the two nations.

What is uniquely Scottish perhaps, is the intertwined connection between working-class and national identity. Scottish people are characterised by their unpretentious nature: 'the basic underlying belief that getting above yourself is a bad thing is essentially Scottish' (Craig, 2011, p.157). For example, it is common for Scots who have risen in the world to take pride in their 'proletarian roots' (Craig, 2011, p.157). Conversely, those who belong to the upper classes are seen as 'Anglicised' (Craig, 2011, p.158). Fern Brady illustrates this in her comedy as she asserts that she 'can't stand posh Scottish people. Posh Scottish people wanna be English, they've got something to prove'. Being Scottish and posh is perceived as inauthentic here, particularly in contrast to 'posh English people', who Brady describes as 'entitled but jolly'. This reflects Craig's (2011) observation that in Scotland, 'the real venom' is saved for ordinary Scots who turn their back on their Scottish and/or working-class roots (p. 159).

5.2.6 Gender

In many cases, stereotypical representations of Scottish identity are not only distinctly working-class, but also gendered (Breitenbach and Abrams, 2006, Martin, 2009). In his analysis of Scottish cinema for example, Murray et al. (2009) notes how the Clydesidism myth of the post-

industrial "hard man" is constructed in opposition to the "feminised" middle classes (p. 105). Moreover, research shows that young women in Scotland still experience and fear 'violence and sexual harassment, social pressures and continuing inequality' (YWCA Scotland, 2016, Batchelor, Armstrong and MacLellan, 2019). Fern Brady provides a personal account of the issue as she tells the audience about her previous, abusive relationship:

> I remember the first time he chased me out of a restaurant, I thought 'this isn't normal'. Then quickly it just became an everyday thing…There was never a convenient moment to go [to friends and say] 'yes he is great, but sometimes he strangles me, and not in a sexy consensual way'.

In her performance, Fern Brady inadvertently connects gender and the experience of (not) belonging. Unlike Fummey and Singh Kohli, whose identities are built on an attachment to their locality, Fern Brady's lived experience of locality is perhaps one of fear rather than belonging. This is illustrated by her worry that her ex, who still lives in Edinburgh, will hear about her show and will 'have another go at killing me' [Brady]. This raises the question of who belongs to the city (Fenster, 2005), or indeed the nation (Ranchod-Nilsson and Tetreault, 2000, Mulholland, Montagna and Sanders-McDonagh, 2018).

At the same time, scholars point out that women are a symbolic representation of the nation, and thus face 'a variety of pressures to conform to idealized models of behaviour' (Ranchod-Nilsson and Tetreault, 2000, p.70). Fern Brady critically address this in her show: 'what makes a good woman in a patriarchal society is how willing you are to do this to men over and over again: 'Oh wow! All your opinions are so interesting and valid'. Other female comedians also touch on gendered pressures. For example, the pressure to have kids: 'people have been putting pressure on us for years about it 'why have you not got kids??' [Jay Lafferty]; to be passive in conversations: 'I've met some men who are like oh women should be a wee bit quieter' [Janey Godley]; to look younger: 'I like to tell people I'm 30, because for 25 I'm alright. But for 30, I'm fucking banging' [Kimi Loughton]; to look thin: 'oh you look so thin… cause that's the highest compliment a woman can have over any career achievement' [Fern Brady].

Jay Lafferty's show discusses gendered 'labels and expectations' at length. She focuses on the Scottish word Besom (which is the title of her show), thus placing her critique of gender firmly within the context of Scotland. After describing the etymology of the word as originally meaning 'a woman of low moral values', she concludes: 'just to put that back into context, it

is traditional in Scotland for our grandmothers to call their grandchildren tiny whores'. Lafferty expresses her discontent with the fact that the word is 'only used for females. It's not used to males. It's only for little girls in the family'. Yet, rather than rejecting the word altogether, she seeks to find a male equivalent:

> I want to come up with a male equivalent for besom - like a hesom, that's what I'm looking for. So for a Scottish male. It's obviously got to mean somebody with low moral value. Somebody who has strange sexual appetites, a new Scottish word.

Lafferty's search for a male equivalent of besom can be viewed as a type of mock language reform, which shines a light on the significance of gendered language structures.

The term Besom is not only linguistically interesting, but it also tells us something about Scottish society. Sociolinguists acknowledge that 'the vocabulary of a language is an inventory of the items a culture talks about and has categorized in order to make sense of the world' (Romaine, 2000, p.26). Gender is significant in the reproduction of minority languages, like Scots. As Romaine (2000) explains, female speakers in a traditional household would either pass on their language to the children at home, or indeed reject their regional ways of speaking in favour of the dominant language with more social capital (Romaine, 2000, p.147). It is interesting then that gender is seen as an important factor in Lafferty's example – besom is a word used by grandmothers.

The use of Scots is often associated with the working class, but it is also adopted by an educated middle-class for whom Scots is a symbol of Scottish nationalism, and/or an important part of Scottish history which they wish to preserve (Aitken, 2015a). While we do not get a full picture of the role that Scots language or 'Scotticisms' (Aitken, 2015a) play in Lafferty's family, we do get Lafferty's reflections:

> for this show, I went all the way back, right back to 1800s... the first recorded usage was in the etymological Dictionary of Scottish language – I was surprised we had one of them!

Her surprise at the existence of a dictionary of Scottish language tells us that she had either not considered Scots a language, or had not considered it an object of serious academic study.

Lafferty looks back at history to find out the origin of the word 'besom', and to understand systemic sexism. As Romaine (2000, p.133) observes, 'the existence of sexist language is not simply a linguistic but a social problem'. By analysing its origin and unequal usage, Lafferty follows the path of other feminists who argue for language reform as a way to 'engender social change' (Weatherall, 2005, p.10). Of course, it is important to note the humorous nature of her comments – they are not a serious call for language transformation (after all, she never does come up with the equivalent male word). Rather, the joke merely holds a mirror up to society and shows us the gendered inequalities inherent in our speech.

5.2.6.1 Masculinity

As scholars have noted, masculinity is frequently framed through the lens of 'crisis' as men try to navigate changing social norms and structures (Ross, 2013, p.16). This is a recurring theme in the data. In a speech that very much resembles the argument against Scottish independence, Scott Gibson resolves his crisis of masculinity through dependence:

> Men are the weaker sex… We need women. You need to accept it. We need structure, control. Men are children. Men are idiots. We like to think we are lone wolves, we couldn't survive by ourselves. [Scott Gibson]

While his rhetoric seems to elevate women to a position of superiority, it perpetuates an essentialist view of gender in which women must take on a nurturing role. Media representations of gender in recent decades have often portrayed working-class men in the household as 'buffoons' who need to be managed by their female partners (Gentry and Harrison, 2010, p.77). The childlike man accepts his ineptitude and consequential dependence on women. Scotland too is represented as a weak dependant within popular culture (e.g., *Trainspotting*) and scholarly work (e.g., Nairn, 1997, 2003).

Some forms of masculinity seem to reconfigure traditional gender roles for a post-feminist world. The 'new lad' (Ross, 2013) represents a male identity whose preoccupation with sex, football, and drinking leave him in a state of perpetual adolescence (Hansen-Miller and Gill, 2012, Brabon, 2013). In the present research, lad discourse is prevalent in the performances of older male comedians. In one example, Raymond Mearns uses objectifying language to talk to the young women in the audience: 'look at all that jailbait in the front row. Are youse twins? Are youse sisters? Double jailbait! Are you a working girl? [laughter] I mean do you have a

job? [Raymond Mearns]. In another example, Fred MacAulay offers a somewhat nostalgic version of 'boys will be boys':

> Today, if you want something you just google it. Oral sex? Google it. Up it pops. I'm pretty sure. Different for us back in the day wasn't it fellas? Trial and error. Remember that? And there was a lot of error. Thankfully just the only one trial. Not proven. [Fred MacAulay]

The style of comedy is reminiscent of working men's club stand-up discussed in section 3.4.1.

This can be starkly contrasted with the 'laddish' young comics (Orbey, 2019) in the data. Daniel Sloss critiques the problematic gender scripts perpetuated by older men:

> Listen to how your grandad met your gran, I guarantee it's this story: "well your gran didn't like me at first, but I wore her down". Awful. [Daniel Sloss]

Sexism is portrayed as a relic of a bygone era. Despite his 'new lad' aesthetic (Hall, 2014, p.46), Sloss is consciously critical of lad behaviour:

> I am a confident man, but I would never have the confidence to just shotgun dickpics. 'She's gonna fucking love this' – She doesn't even know your middle name! [Daniel Sloss]

This points to a reconfiguration of the 'lad' script with (some) young men trying to distance themselves from problematic toxic masculinity.

Other young male comedians openly discuss their feelings of inadequacy and the pressure to 'perform' a certain type of masculinity (Butler, 2002, Walsh, 2010). Gareth Waugh, for example, feels the need to change his behaviour in traditionally male environments:

> I do the very cliched guy thing. You know when you go to a garage and you pretend to know more about cars than you actually do. But I take it one step further right, last time I went to a garage, I caught myself walking in with a limp. [Gareth Waugh]

As Butler (2002) proposes, self-parody and hyperbolic exhibitions of seemingly 'natural' gender norms help to expose the illusion of substantive gender identity (p. 200).

In Gareth Waugh's comedy we see the contradictions of masculinity playing out. The 'new lad' discourse and its imperative of 'heterosexual promiscuity' (Hall, 2014, p.46) are critiqued by Waugh as he talks about his overly confident friend: 'what kinda deluded porn universe does he live in?' [Gareth Waugh]. At the same time, however, Waugh confesses he seeks advice from the same 'lad':

> I was talking to my mate about how I feel dead awkward, and how I don't want to feel like that anymore. He is a very confident guy, a bit of a lad. But very confident. A bit of a wanker to be honest. [Waugh]

On the one hand, he feels uncomfortable with the hypersexualised masculinity that is expected of him and exposes its ridiculousness. On the other hand, he defines himself in relation to the 'lads' he views as benchmarks despite their questionable behaviour.

The crisis of masculinity expressed in Gareth Waugh's performance serves as a metaphor for a crisis of nationhood. As Waugh asserts, 'it's hard to be socially awkward and Scottish', particularly since the current political climate calls for decisiveness and confidence: 'in the last 6 months we have had to vote 42 times. We have never stopped voting in Scotland, and I don't think I should be allowed to vote! I am a proper idiot' [Waugh]. For some scholars, this sense of inferiority is a product of Scotland's dependency as a nation without a state (Nairn, 1997, 2003). Scotland remains at a 'political and representational crossroads' (Schoene, 2004, p.124), mirroring the anxieties of the gendered self.

Another theme that emerges in relation to masculinity is the re-negotiation of fatherhood. Macht (2019, p.134) notes that in Scotland, the traditional role of the father as the 'disciplinarian who delivered the serious punishment upon his arrival at home' has waned in recent years – something which may be helped by the increased focus on children's rights and protection in Scotland. Scott Gibson acknowledges this changing landscape in his comedy: 'It was a simple time back then, you could raise people properly. Through fear… canny hit kids now. And they know that! The power has shifted'. Mark Nelson also laments the fact that 'you can't scare kids anymore'.

While the role of fathers is changing, the experience of parenting is not commonly discussed from the male perspective. This is something that Gibson addresses in his show:

> I know during pregnancy it's the mother that's important. But we don't talk about the fathers. We have come a long way, but we still have this weird thing with men. There is no conversation. It's worrying. [Scott Gibson]

Fatherhood continues to be presented as a 'part-time' or 'secondary' role compared to motherhood (Wall and Arnold, 2007, p.511). This is particularly problematic for Mark Nelson:

> I joined a mother and toddler group at our local catholic church. And you'll notice, mother and toddler group. There is no father and toddler group. It's a stigma most of you will never know – the stigma and suspicion of stay-at-home dads. [Mark Nelson]

The 'new father' represented in the media in recent years is 'more emotionally involved, more nurturing, and more committed to spending time with his children' (Wall and Arnold, 2007, p.510); however, there are limitations to this shift, as illustrated by Gibson and Nelson.

Unlike other comedians, Mark Nelson's experience of being both Scottish and a father are central to his comedy. He rose to fame thanks to his online videos which show his then 3-year-old daughter, Isla Nelson, as a political commentator. The videos were so popular that Isla was even named one of Scotland's 'most inspirational women under 30' (Sanghani, 2018). Yet, being in the spotlight as a father, he also attracted criticism: 'I get hate mail now. I get death-threats. Of all the horrific things I've said over the years, I've never had a death threat. I try to do something nice with my wee girl, people want me to die' [Mark Nelson]. The hostility is not just online. Nelson's experience at the toddler group in church was also unpleasant: 'they treated me with suspicion and contempt' [Mark Nelson].

There is still an uneasy relationship between masculinity and familial intimacy. As Aboim (2016) explains, 'the new male engagement in private life, a traditionally feminized sphere, is pervaded by the tensions between the predator and the provider' (p. 6). This tension seems particularly prevalent in the Scottish context, where masculinity is traditionally represented as violent (Abrams, 2017, Batchelor, Armstrong and MacLellan, 2019). This could help to explain why jokes about paedophilia are so common in Scottish comedy. Nelson, for example, talks about the amusingly accurate description of himself as 'the guy who does things with the little girl on the internet' [Mark Nelson]; Jay Lafferty jokes about the old days when there were 'local paedophiles'; and Gareth Waugh, uses a 'paedo' joke to exemplify why Scotland 'makes

the best idiots in the entire world'. The prevalence of this topic in Scottish comedy can be seen as an indication of the persisting anxieties that surround the idea of male familial intimacy.

5.3 The Politics of Comedy

5.3.1 The Edinburgh Fringe Festival

> The idea at the heart of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe is simple: anyone with a desire to perform and a venue willing to host them is welcome.
>
> (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, 2017, p.5)

The Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, as stated above, sees the Fringe as an unconstrained platform open to all artists. The structure of the festival is akin to a competitive free market: it is a 'survival of the fittest' environment where everyone has the 'freedom to fail' (Batchelder, 2006, p.81). Artists compete for the same audience as well as for awards, and risk huge financial loss, so it is particularly important to stand-out from the crowd. The participant observation data shows that the Fringe increasingly compels comedians towards a certain kind of performance, namely one that is 'edgy' in its form and content. This trend has been observed by other commentators (Batchelder, 2006, Quirk, 2018), who see it as the emergence of a new alternative comedy. The mainstream 'Jongleurs' style of comedy which attracts the 'common man and woman' (Quirk, 2018, p.90) sits in contrast to the supposedly more niche, experimental comedy associated with the Fringe, which as Friedman (2014a) observes, is preferred by those with high cultural capital.

The authenticity of this new alternative is challenged and parodied by some of the comedians (just as it was with the altcom of the 80s; see: 3.4). In Gareth Waugh's performance, for example, a voiceover self-referentially asks if the innovative format of Waugh's show is just a gimmick for the Fringe:

> Voiceover: you have a format-based show, riddled with gimmicks, and notions of grandeur far above your status. And you are willing to do anything to get attention. Is that about the size of it?
> Gareth Waugh: Aye probably.
> Voiceover: Congratulations Mr. Waugh, welcome to the festival.

As Batchelder (2006, p.26) highlights, the competitive structure of the Fringe leads artists to employ 'desperate tactics' to attract attention. In Waugh's performance, the attention-grabbing strategy is, ironically, his mocking commentary on desperate Fringe tactics.

As well as innovative formats, personal and traumatic stories are seemingly favoured by comedy critics. Fern Brady admits that she had to do something controversial in her show because the people who win the awards tend to have traumatic stories in their performance – 'blame comedy critics and not me' she says. Another comedian tells a faux traumatic story before commenting on the fact that 'last year the guy who won [the Edinburgh comedy award] did a whole show about being sexually abused. If people take this seriously enough, I could maybe win some awards' [Marc Jennings].

Standing out is a key element for success when it comes to awards. Rosco McClelland, who won the Scottish Comedy Award in 2016, sees himself as different from suit-wearing comedians who usually win: 'for some reason, this rock 'n' roll idiot [points to himself] won it last year!' [Rosco McClelland]. It is worth noting that the Scottish Comedy Awards emerged as a response to the perceived marginalisation of Scots at the British Comedy Awards (Scottish Comedy Awards, 2013). The aim was to create a forum where Scottish talent could be recognised and celebrated. Yet, as one comedian observes, the Scottish Comedy Awards are not without problems: 'I'd like to win Scottish comedian of the year. I feel like I've got a good chance because I am both white and a man. No seriously, the finalists last year, all of them were white men.' [Kevin McPadden]. The question of representation has become more salient recently, with the 2018 project 'Fringe of Colour' trying to address the 'overwhelming whiteness' of the Edinburgh Fringe (Wolfe-Robinson, 2019). Yet, as Janey Godley points out, (white) men are still overrepresented: 'You know there are two pages of Chrises in the Fringe brochure. That's how many Chrises there are in the Fringe' [Janey Godley].

As well as the apparent lack of representation, some performers emphasise the persistence of sexist attitudes towards female comedians. Lafferty tells the audience that she is used to unfavourable reactions from men: 'As a female comic, I'd walk on to the stage, and there would be gentlemen with their arms folded looking at me going "that's a woman"'. Fern Brady tells a similar story:

> The taxi driver asked me what my job was, and I said comedian. And he said 'a female comedian?!' I went yeah, 'I know we are still illegal here'. We had the same

> problem in Scotland, that's why I left. I would walk on stage when I started doing comedy here, and people would see I was a woman very early on. And they would fold their arms like this, devasted, as if to say why is the stripper talking. [Fern Brady]

Brady, Godley and Lafferty allude to the fact that stand-up comedy is a gendered space overrepresented by male comics, with an enduring perception that women are not as funny as men – a perception that scholars have shown to be based on gender bias (Kotthoff, 2006, Mickes et al., 2012, Hooper, Sharpe and Roberts, 2016).

The Edinburgh Fringe is also a site for symbolic power struggles (Bourdieu, 1991). As Bartie (2014) explains,

> the Edinburgh Festivals have in the past been referred to as "impositions", events that were "not Scottish" on account of them being in Edinburgh (a city sometimes charged with being more 'English' than 'Scottish'), being concerned with international arts, and being run by people who were 'outsiders'. (p. 12)

The London-centric nature of the Fringe is referenced by some comedians who see Edinburgh as 'London's loft conversion' [Raymond Mearns]. As one comedian points out, Scottish comedians make up a small percentage of the Fringe programme, despite the festival being hosted here: 'It is rare to see a Scottish comedian at the Fringe. There is about 100 or so shows at this venue and I am one of the only Scottish acts' [Marc Jennings].

The festival transforms Edinburgh, producing a particular kind of creative hub that 'risks disregarding or replacing existing or former local culture' (Thomasson, 2015, p.224). Comedian Gareth Waugh highlights his local identity as he thanks the audience: 'I really appreciate you guys coming in. I didn't expect to get anything near this - It's a dream come true to be *from Edinburgh* and to be doing the Fringe in the Gilded balloon, it's amazing' [own emphasis]. The remark frames the idea of performing at the big venues as far from reach for local artists, mirroring Scott Gibson's claim that '70% of the work [in Scottish comedy] is at the back of a pub' (Logan, 2017). While the Scottish Comedy Awards provide more visibility and recognition for local artists, some still feel that the festival could do more to cultivate Scottish talent.

5.3.2 The functions of stand-up

How the comedians define comedy can indicate how they want their performance to be interpreted and received. While not all comedians self-reflexively discuss the function of comedy, some do provide interesting insights. A point of departure here is the role of comedy as entertainment. For Janey Godley and her daughter Ashley Storrie, deliberating over the meaning of comedy is a futile exercise: 'Stop explaining comedy, stop talking about it and just do it' [Janey Godley]. As the duo imply here, comedy is about laughs; to overanalyse it is to dampen its effect (a fact that leaves comedy scholars in an unfortunate predicament!). Chris Henry also foregrounds entertainment as the primary role of his comedy: 'we are from different places, but we are all here for one thing and that is (hopefully) an hour of laughs'. The implication here is that humour is uncomplicated – and that may indeed be the perspective of the audiences too. As Lockyer and Pickering (2005) point out, 'most of the time we don't think about how humour and comedy work or what they may entail' (p. 10).

In this sense, comedy can be regarded as an aesthetic experience, much like other forms of art or play. As humour scholars (Morreall, 2009, Brodie, 2014) have noted, it is precisely because stand-up happens within this play frame that it has the capacity to makes us think about the social world in a new light. While Janey Godley advocates against overly analysing comedy, it could be argued that by taking this stance, she disarms her audience, allowing her message to filter through. There is an added familiarity to her show, both literally and figuratively, as it consists of an open and seemingly honest conversation between a mother and daughter. Moreover, the performers interact with the audience in a natural and effortless way, perfectly creating an 'illusion of intimacy', to use Brodie's (2014) concept. While the performance might be framed as non-consequential play, Godley and Storrie present insightful social commentary, which will be discussed further in this chapter.

In contrast to Godley and Storrie, some comedians in the data talk more explicitly about what they see as the function of comedy. For Hardeep Singh Kohli, comedy is political: 'This show is really about my life and politics and my politics matters so much to me because for me politics is about people'. His comedy is, in many ways, about human connection. But it is also an opportunity to inspire action:

> It's time to rise up in the most peaceful radio 5 type rebellion. We will still listen to the Archers. We still eat croissant. But let's change the people who fucking rule

> us. Let's make sure more of us are looking after us. Because we can't rely on them anymore.

Vladimir McTavish also focuses on societal change at the end of his show, by imparting some Stoic wisdom: 'Don't try to do anything about stuff you can't change… shit you can't change - just live with it'. McTavish emphasises the importance of focusing on the things we *can* change: 'Every so often when you get an election or a referendum, you can choose the kind of society you wanna live in'.

Both Singh Kohli and McTavish push for leftist change, pointing to the Grenfell fire as an example of social inequity and injustice: 'choose to live in a society where poor people aren't forced to live in houses that go up in flames like a box of matches. Choose to live in a society where the rich are held to account and the poor aren't made to pay for the crimes of the rich' [McTavish]. In this example, the intertextual reference to *Trainspotting* also serves to reinforce the association of Scotland with the working-class. This kind of left-leaning comedy – left in the sense that it urges the audience to challenge the status quo – is not uniquely Scottish. Indeed, as Quirk (2018) observes, stand-up is generally assumed to be more 'compatible with left-wing ideology and less coherent with right-wing ideology' (Quirk, 2018, p.19). Not all stand-up comedians lean to the left of the political spectrum, but conservative values are arguably 'pushed to the margins' in British comedy (Quirk, 2018, p.21). This is certainly corroborated in the present data, as most Scottish comedians are liberal, critical of the Conservative party, and advocate for social justice and equality[3].

Some see comedy's potential to change minds. Richard Brown believes that comedy should be 'challenging' – it can make people laugh about things they might not agree with, and therefore open them up to new ways of thinking. Brown is markedly self-reflexive at the end of his show as he admits that it is 'easy to say things from a privileged position. I might be working class,

[3] The dominance of liberal views in the data is not fully representative of Scottish attitudes. Scottish right-wing political comedian, Leo Kearse, is one notable exception from the world of comedy. Kearse has also engaged in real life politics by standing in the Scottish parliament elections 2021 as a member of Laurence Fox's Reclaim Party (Mason, 2021)

but statistically the odds are in my favour' (referring here to his position as a straight, white man). He even goes on to explain the intent behind some of his jokes:

> Nothing I do, I do to offend people…. The thing about David Bowie? I didn't do that to offend people, I wrote that because I don't think celebrities should be getting a pass for fucking underage girls. And the level of thought that went into that - I did think about the fact that I am not, nor have I ever been a 15-year-old girl. So maybe I have no right to talk about it. [Brown]

With this, the audience is given Brown's preferred interpretation of the material, namely social critique rather than controversy for its own sake.

Humour can function as a communicative strategy. As Fern Brady explains: 'comedy is an art, and when you see good comedy you will always have it in your brain. It is the most effective way of communicating with people'. Brady covers some heavy topics in the show, including her own experience of domestic violence. During some of her most difficult moments, she was comforted by the realisation that art is the 'closest we can get to other people's brains'. Bruce Fummey looks to educate as well as entertain, even describing his shows as 'edu-comedy' (see: Analysis of Interviews). In his stand-up performance, he talks' to the audience about Schrodinger's cat, Newton's law and basic physics, and notes: 'that wasn't very funny, but at least we learned something!' While science is not the main focus of his show, he takes the opportunity to impart some knowledge. Scottish history is another topic that Fummey tries to educate his audience about, correcting some common misconceptions in his show 'Macbeth…Without the Shakespeare Bollocks'. Comedy in his case is not an end in itself, but a tool for both entertainment and education.

Some comedians define comedy in ways that mirror Freud's relief theory (see: 3.2.1). For instance, Scott Agnew compares his stand-up show to Catholic confession: 'I am here yet again confessing, looking for absolution'. The role of comedy for him is cathartic, and perhaps more about the performer than about the audience. A different type of catharsis is presented by Rosco McClelland, who writes his show about his experience with Long QT syndrome: 'writing this show about having this thing, I kinda got over it. That's why it's called *How I Got Over*'. Rosco's performance is inward looking, with comedy playing an almost therapeutic role. Daniel Sloss also points to the therapeutic function of humour: 'I remember the toughest times I have ever gone through in my life, and the things that got me out of it were my friends making

fun of a situation, even if it was a serious situation, they would always make a joke and it would make me laugh, and I think yeah, it's all silly in the long run isn't it?'

5.3.3 Taking Offence

While much can be said about the ethics of humour and the limits of 'comic licence' (see for example: Lockyer and Pickering, 2005, Gantar, 2005, Smith, 2019), it is also true that 'humour is only possible because certain boundaries, rules and taboos exist in the first place'. (Lockyer and Pickering, 2005, p.14). The successful comedian must establish comic license, in other words, they must manufacture an 'atmosphere in which social practices may be questioned, and the boundaries of consensus tested' (Quirk, 2015, p.107). Some strategies were identified in the data as ways of establishing comic license. When comedians veer into potentially offensive territory, they comment on audience response as a way of creating a bond between them and that particular audience. For example: 'I am glad you laughed at that, I have had a lot of Christians in the last few days who didn't laugh' [Jay Lafferty]. In Chris Henry's case the jokes do not land as well, which he mitigates by saying 'There is only a couple of people brave enough to laugh at that one. Everyone else is going 'holy fuck!'' From this exchange, transgressing the consensus of the room is presented positively ('brave').

Despite the comedians' efforts to establish comic licence, they run the risk of failing. For Brodie (2009b) the successful comedian must not only make the audience laugh, but also tread the line of disapproval: it is the comedian who 'is risking the most, that tends to be the more memorable' (p. 80). Comedians who make offensive jokes are therefore also signalling to the audience that they take risks. Wis Jantarasorn illustrates this after joking about the IRA: 'I said that at the weekend, and there was a guy in from Belfast, and I thought I was gonna die'; similarly, Richard Brown's joke about paedophilia is acknowledged as dangerous: 'That's the only joke I've ever done where someone stood up and started shouting at me'. In these examples, the comedians recognise the potential offense of their jokes and take on the burden of risk.

Some comedians distance themselves from their offensive material. During his crowd work at the beginning of the show, Chris Henry jokes about national military stereotypes: 'The big difference between French people and Scottish people is if someone steps into our territory, we would fight them'. After a tepid reaction from the audience, he quickly adds 'I don't know why I do that joke; I am a peace-loving man, I shouldn't do that joke'. This signals to the audience

that the material does not reflect his actual views. He backtracks on the joke by saying 'No, I actually prefer how you [the French] do things, because we have fucking nuclear warheads'. The opposite strategy is taken by Struan Logan when one of his jokes does not land: 'I went to the cashier and said excuse me mate, trying to find a picture of the prophet Mohamed. The cashier said sorry sir, we are a not-for-pro[phet] organisation'. Silence ensues, to which Struan replies 'you guys are tense today'. With this response, Struan places the responsibility of the joke's failure on the audience without reflection on his positionality.

In some cases, the comedians anticipate offence, and use it to discuss the larger issue of language use. Particularly interesting for the present thesis was the mention of the word 'cunt', which as many comedians explained, has a different meaning in Scotland:

> if you learned to speak English outside of the borders of Scotland don't be offended by the use of the C word. It happens quite a lot over the next hour but this in Scotland is what we use to join other swear words together. It fulfils the twin functions of hyphen and preposition. [McTavish]

The same sentiment is shared by Fred MacAulay, who apologises for the swearing in his show with a disclaimer: 'I do apologise if anybody has a nervous disposition, there is a wee bit of bad language. Which we share in Scotland, we all do it.' Both comedians establish swearing as part of Scottish identity, and in this sense, place it outside the realm of offensiveness. At times, a direct comparison to English identity is made: 'The English they are kind of a bit more touchy. An English comic said to me [cunt] is the one word you must never use on stage' [Bruce Fummey].

Naturally, such contrasts flatten the heterogeneity that exists in England. Fox's (2017) analysis of Northern stand-up comedy, for example, highlights how the notion of a 'civilised' (Southern) Englishness is contrasted with the 'loud, swearing, crudeness' of the Northern comic archetype (p. 58). However, Fox also notes that the Northern comic stereotype has led some to self-censor their linguistic register: 'For this show in Edinburgh I'm just not swearing …When I swear I do sound like Bernard Manning. So you take that out' (Moorhouse cited in Fox, 2017, p.73). This is not the case with the Scottish comedians in this study.

Fummey's discussion of swearing is particularly interesting because he not only links swearing to Scottish identity, but also pushes back against the arbitrary way we decide on the

offensiveness of language: ‘words are just words – they are just an arrangement of letters that you can choose to bind you or to set you free’. Yet, as he later notes, this choice is also embedded in power relations. Fummey illustrates this by retelling an interaction he had before a gig:

> He said no, I can’t use that word. I said tell me this: Can I use the word niggnog? He said Oh yeah, I don't see a problem with that at all. I said, can I use the word darkie? He said Oh yes, I don’t think anyone will be upset. So I can use the racial insults niggnog and darkie, but I can’t say cunt because the first two apply to me and the third one applies to you? [Bruce Fummey]

The contestation in this exchange exposes the volatile nature of comic meaning, and indeed language more generally. As Lockyer and Pickering (2005, p.132) observe, the ‘power relations present in any given context will decide what the dominant interpretation will be, and, further, that the nature of those relations will determine the consequences of such interpretations’. The identity of the joke-teller and the audience are presented as central to how meaning is interpreted.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the findings from the analysis of the stand-up shows attended by the researcher in 2017. The first half of the chapter focused on the politics of comedy and the Fringe. The festival is presented here as inherently political: it brings to the fore tensions between competing interests (e.g., artists, reviewers, critics, audiences, producers). By looking at the way the comedians discuss their own work on stage, the analysis found four main functions of comedy. The first is the most ubiquitous – comedy is about laughter. The fact that comedy is understood as a form of play is important, because it is this cloak of playfulness that allows the comedians to critically engage with more serious topics in a safe way. A second function of comedy is that of politics. Some comedians actively encourage their audiences to think about political issues, and to make a change.

Hardeep Singh Kohli and Vladimir McTavish are good examples of this, as both end their shows by urging the audience to change the people in power, and to be more socially minded. Other comedians see comedy as a communicative strategy that can help them shine a light on particular issues or explain complex ideas. Bruce Fummey does this through his self-described

‘edu-comedy’, while others like Richard Brown, describe their performance as a form of social critique. Lastly, comedy can also function as a cathartic experience for both the artist and the audience, as illustrated by Scott Agnew’s metaphor of Catholic confession. In all cases, however, comedians are still seeking to make audiences laugh. It is only through humour that comedy becomes a potentially successful tool for changing minds, communicating ideas, or releasing tension.

Although the playful nature of comedy theoretically grants the comedian liberty to tackle taboo topics, there is a fine line between humour and offence. Comedians use various strategies to establish comic license and create consensus, but they always run the risk of failing. Particularly interesting for this research is the use of swear words, which the comedians anticipate might be perceived as offensive by the audiences. The word ‘cunt’ is used by many performers, and established as part of Scottish culture. Bruce Fummey critically discusses the nature of offence as he observes that racial slurs are considered acceptable by the same people who decry the use of swear words like ‘cunt’. He exposes the power relations that are at play when the claim of offence is made.

The chapter discusses the way identities were represented by the performers, particularly focusing on nation, locality, race, class and gender. The complexity of Scotland’s relationship with England is apparent. Some comedians, Singh Kohli in particular, see Scotland as a postcolonial nation that has historically been oppressed by its neighbour, while others try to dispel the anti-English stereotype. The use of symbolism to project national identity is employed by some. McTavish and Craig Hill both play with the discourse of Tartanry, using the tartan or the kilt to attract audiences, but subverting these traditional representations of Scottishness at the same time. Self-deprecating negative stereotypes of Scotland are used in some performances, but there is equally a sense of pride and optimism. The comedians convey the contradictions inherent in the construction of Scottish national identity, whereby pride and shame are experienced simultaneously. This schizophrenic tendency, as some have called it, is characteristic of postcolonial nations.

Scotland’s complex relationship with England aside, it is clear that the notion of Scottishness is embedded in a postcolonial discourse. The notion of Britishness is critiqued by a few comedians for being conservative and middle class. Politeness is understood to be a key element associated with Britishness, but as demonstrated here, politeness can have different meanings. British politeness in particular is linked to a discourse of civility that has historically

been used to demarcate boundaries of class and race. The idea of a British culture is expressly critiqued by Richard Brown and Jamie McDonald, the latter of whom uses the UK citizenship test to expose the absurdity of such cultural boundaries.

Locality is particularly salient in the data as a form of identity construction. Glaswegians tend to embody the polar attitudes of pride and shame, and show attachment to their working-class roots and Scottish identity. They see Edinburgh as posh and perhaps less Scottish. Comedians from Edinburgh on the other hand, present a grittier image of the capital, associating it with *Trainspotting*. Just as in Welsh's novel, Leith is envisaged as separate from Edinburgh, symbolically existing as its own country.

The non-white comedians show a particularly strong connection to locality, as illustrated by Hardeep Singh Kohli and Bruce Fummey. Both use local stereotypes extensively, a strategy that arguably functions to signal their status as insiders. Yet despite clearly identifying with the locality and with Scotland, these comedians are often miscategorised as outsiders. They must work to prove their Scottishness, something that both do in a self-conscious way: you have to be more Scottish than the Scots, as Fummey explains. Singh Kohli creates a bond with the audience through his use of photographs, which helps to create the illusion of intimacy and authenticity as he talks about his personal connection with Scotland.

Class is another important dimension of Scottish identity. The myth of egalitarianism continues to have a lot of currency, with some comedians describing Scotland as a socialist, working-class nation. Moreover, Scotland's seemingly accessible higher education system helps to sustain the myth of egalitarianism – although Fern Brady and Bruce Fummey point to the continuing class hierarchies in education. As the literature suggests, Scots are more likely to claim a working-class identity even if they fall outside of that category. This is seen in the data, as middle-class comedians emphasise their working-class roots. Moreover, class is defined by taste or cultural capital rather than income. This helps to create the distinction between the working-class as the real Scots, and the middle-class as Anglicised. Fern Brady's critique of posh Scottish people illustrates this.

In the gender section of the analysis, the patriarchal ideology inherent in nationalism is discussed. In contrast to the romanticised attachment to the nation that is expressed by some of the male comedians, women see it through a more critical lens. Fern Brady talks about leaving Scotland after her own experiences of sexism. Jay Lafferty discusses the sexist meaning behind

the Scottish word ‘besom’, thus exposing the way language reproduces unequal gender relations. Moreover, as the symbolic representation of the nation, women are put under pressure to conform to gendered norms, something that several of the performers touch on. The crisis of masculinity is also explored in this section. Scottish identity has frequently been represented in traditionally masculine forms – the working-class ‘hardman’ or the highland warrior, for example. In reality, however, Scottish identity and masculinity are composed of contradictions – a sense of both inadequacy and superiority.

6 Analysis of Interviews

6.1 Understanding the comedian: 'We are on the periphery of society'

The interview phase of this study sought to discover additional information from a small sample of Scottish stand-up comedians about their views on comedy and identity (see Figure 11). The interview scheme was split into three sections: personal questions, questions related to identity, and questions related to comedy. For most of the interviewees, stand-up comedy currently sits alongside other creative projects and endeavours. All the comedians interviewed have done other types of creative jobs, including TV, radio, theatre, writing. Stand-up, then, is simply one medium through which the comedians express themselves creatively.

Interviewees	Gender	Locality	Ethnicity	Years of Stand-up
Fummey, Bruce	M	Perth	Non-white	10–15
Lafferty, Jay	F	Glasgow	White	10–15
McAllister, Keir	M	Glasgow	White	10–15
McTavish, Vladimir	M	Glasgow	White	35–40
Shandley, Megan	F	Edinburgh	White	0–5
Singh Kohli, Hardeep	M	Glasgow	Non-white	5–10

Figure 11: Attribute Coding

The comedians have varying levels of engagement with politics in their comedy. Vladimir McTavish and Keir McAllister's brand of comedy is political satire. The two are both from Glasgow originally, and have presented as a double act on several occasions. Their joint Fringe shows 'Look at the State of Scotland' (2012) and 'Aye Right? How No?' focused specifically on the question of Scottish independence. Keir McAllister is married to comedian Jay Lafferty, who is also interviewed in this study.

Lafferty is from the outskirts of Glasgow and has been a regular on BBC Scotland's 'Breaking the News'. Her stand-up comedy is less political than McTavish and McAllister, but Scottish culture remains a central topic. Her first solo Fringe show, 'Besom' in 2017 (analysed in the previous chapter) is followed by 'Weesht' in 2018 and 'Jammy' in 2019, thus keeping up the theme of using Scottish words as a catalyst for her social commentary.

Bruce Fummey is from Perth, and the son of a Scottish mother and Ghanaian father. He has previously worked as a high school teacher, something that he describes as 'a bit like doing stand-up comedy, but slipping in a bit of education when the kids aren't looking' (Fummey, 2020). This is the approach he takes with his comedy too. As well as occasionally teaching the audience about physics (e.g., 'The Greek the Apple and the Time Machine' at the Edinburgh Fringe 2005), Fummey also frequently does shows about Scottish history (e.g., Fringe 2016 'Alba: Scotland the Origins' and 2017 'Macbeth Without the Shakespeare Bollocks'). In the year of Indyref, he also took part in the political discussion with his show 'Aaah'm Votin YES' (2014).

Hardeep Singh Kohli is a comedian of Indian descent who was born in London and grew up in Glasgow. He is perhaps best known for his radio television work, as well his appearance on Celebrity Big Brother 2018 – the same year the present interview was conducted. Yet, he is also known as a political commentator, and his 2017 Fringe show 'Alternative, Fact' tackles important political issues.

Lastly, Megan Shandley is a comedian and actress from Edinburgh, who is relatively new to stand-up, with four years' experience at the time of the interview. Her comedy is observational, and based on personal anecdotes. Her motivation to start doing comedy is slightly different from the others since she came to it as an actress: 'when you leave drama school, acting jobs are few and far between in many cases…I just wanted to keep performing, and I liked the artistic freedom of being able to write something, and then go up and do it'. Doing comedy has also opened the door for other acting jobs and comedy roles for her.

All of the interviewees describe the role of the comedian as one of social observer. McAllister remarks that the performer has a responsibility 'to try and at least do something that will give an insight'. In order to do this, the comedian must be able to not only experience life, but observe it from a certain distance, as Hardeep Singh Kohli eloquently explains:

> We are on the periphery of society and we have to be there. Because we run in, we observe, we experience, we go back out again, and write. From this kind of hermetic position in the periphery.

Singh Kohli reaffirms the familiar idea of comic distance and superiority, whereby 'the ironic observer is necessarily detached from what he observes' (Watson, 2015, p.63).

The interviewees describe comedians as having a particular type of personality. For Singh Kohli, the stereotype of comedians being 'loners and sort of depressive' holds true. Jay Lafferty, when talking about why there are relatively few women in comedy, asks: 'is it because women are less delusional and needy?', touching here on the common stereotype of the comedian in constant search for validation (Martin, 2007, pp.223–225). Much has been said about the psychological profile of the 'clown', and the tears that may hide behind the laughter (Dessau, 2012, Naessens, 2020; see literature review). This study does not focus on the psychology of the comedian, although this too is an interesting area of research. What is relevant here is the social significance of the comedian, which as described by the interviewees, is that of an observer who can look at society from a distance while also remaining authentic. Keir McAllister explains that 'the best comedians are the ones that audiences believe in'. This opens up a space for social critique as the stand-up comedian, much like court jesters of the past, are given 'leeway to tell the truth' (Romanska and Ackerman, 2017, p.30).

6.2 Defining Stand-up: 'It's all about story'

For the most part, the interviewees describe comedy as an artform. However, within this broad umbrella, they make some more specific categorisations. Humour is described as distinctly human by Hardeep Singh Kohli – a notion that dates back to Aristotle, who claimed that 'no animal but man ever laughs' (Aristotle, *Parts of Animals*, 3.10, 673a28). In joint laughter we build human connections and create community, and it is this function of comedy that interests Singh Kohli. He highlights the immediacy of the live stand-up performance, framing it as an 'unspoken contract between the audience and the performer'. Although comedians naturally plan their material in advance, the live stand-up experience creates an illusion of spontaneity, which audiences are happy to go along with (Lockyer and Myers, 2011, Quirk, 2015).

At the same time, no matter how premeditated, the performance is ultimately co-constructed between the comedian and the audience. A temporary community is formed during the live

comedy event. That is the view of stand-up presented by Singh Kohli: ‘It’s all about story, you know? ‘Cause story is about community. When people commune. I mean you can tell stories to yourself, but storytelling is the externalisation, ergo the community. So, when comedy is at the heart of story, you know?’ The same point is made by Megan Shandley: ‘it’s like a story, and people are sat there, and they’re invested in your story’. They echo the view of other scholars (Koziski, 1984, Brodie, 2009b) who categorise stand-up as a contemporary continuation of the storytelling tradition (see: 4.2.3).

The fluid nature of comedy is emphasised in the interviews: ‘Comedy is always changing’ [Hardeep Singh Kohli]. Of course, the constant search for change is not just found in comedy, it is a feature of (post-)modernity (Giddens, 1991, Bauman, 2000). Indeed, it is perhaps our constant search for renewal that makes stand-up comedy so appealing. Much like the impetus for ‘personal growth’ that defines the modern subject (Giddens, 1991, p.78), comedy for Singh Kohli ‘is about fresh and new and constantly churning the old stuff, getting rid of it’. In the context of the Edinburgh Fringe, the impetus for novelty is driven by the need to stand-out in a competitive environment; but as Singh Kohli explains, stand-up comedy in general needs to be ‘fresh’ in order to be authentic. This point is made by Lockyer and Myers (2011) in their analysis of comedy audiences. Unlike other live performances such as music concerts, where the audience expects to hear familiar tunes, the live comedy gig is about ‘expecting the unexpected’ (Lockyer and Myers, 2011, p.175). This follows the logic of incongruity theory, which sees humour as something that causes amusement precisely because it violates our expectations (see: 3.2.2).

We can define comedy as a form of entertainment: ‘primarily, stand-up is there to make people laugh’ [Keir McAllister]. However, behind the laughter, there are also deeper motives at work - they all refer to a desire to engage with serious issues through their comedy. Lafferty for example, talks about feeling a ‘responsibility to say something that mattered’ [Lafferty]. This ‘serious’ side of comedy will be explored further in this chapter. What is interesting here however, is the weight that the comedians put on the entertaining side of comedy. McAllister believes that ‘the primary role is always, “is it funny?”, but the best comics will take that and do something special with it’. This contrasts with Fummey, who places a greater emphasis on the educational role within his stand-up, which he dubs ‘Edu-comedy’. For him, the primary aim is to educate, and the secondary aim is to entertain: ‘you want people to leave wiser than when they came in, and if they can, hopefully have a laugh along the way’ [Fummey].

The free market logic of the comedy scene adds significant pressure on the comedians, as McAllister explains: ‘we’re all freelance so if you can’t do the job, you go off on an angle that is trying to talk politics or preaching when you’re on stage, you won’t get booked again’. Here we start to see stand-up comedy as not just an artform, but as a business, with all the expectations and constraints that that entails. As Lafferty puts it, ‘you’re just really there to make people laugh. And that is the job’. Meeting the expectations of the audience is a key part of doing your job well: ‘whether you’re trying to get across a serious political message or not, I think ultimately you have to make an audience laugh’ [McTavish].

The comedians are faced with the challenge of entertaining very diverse audiences. Geographical differences are observed, particularly the divide between Edinburgh and Glasgow: ‘I am very Glaswegian if I’m gigging in Glasgow…But in Edinburgh I would never play it like that because you’ve got much more diverse tourists’ [Lafferty]. All of the interviewees observe that Glasgow comedy audiences respond to local references and local accents. McAllister calls it an ‘echo chamber’, as the audience just ‘wanna hear their own voice heard back to themselves the whole time’. Edinburgh on the other hand, is a ‘cosmopolitan city’, and in that sense, ‘it is much like playing London’ [McAllister]. Knowing the specificities of the audience and being able to deliver what they want is an important part of the performance. For McTavish, this geographical divide means that Glaswegian comedians are likely to struggle in Edinburgh: ‘As soon as they come to Edinburgh, they’ve got Americans, Australians, English, various different Europeans in the audience who some of them have never been to Greggs bakers. And they wonder why it’s not working!’ [McTavish]. This seems to validate Brown’s (2013) claim that Scottish comedy (or perhaps more accurately, Glaswegian comedy) is ‘stubbornly non-exportable’ (p. 2013).

Likewise, good comedians who go to Glasgow may struggle. McAllister tells the story of an Italian comedian whose performance did not do well in Glasgow; at the end of the set, he was told: ‘oh it’s not that you’re not funny mate, it’s just that Glasgow likes to hear Glasgow’. The inward-looking Glaswegian style of comedy has implications for the present research. For example, what the comedians describe as Scottish might in fact be typically Glaswegian characteristics. Moreover, considering the international reach of the Fringe, McTavish suggests some audience members might struggle to understand region-specific material. Consequently, identity will likely be presented differently at an Edinburgh Fringe show compared to a

Glasgow comedy gig. The particular dynamics of the Scottish comedy scene and of the Edinburgh Fringe will be explored in the following section.

6.3 The comedy scene: 'Now it's the new pop'

For the comedians interviewed, there is something quite distinct about the Edinburgh Fringe. As McAllister puts it, 'the Fringe is an entirely different beast'. For one, it is a very large festival in terms of the number of acts, and the number of people who attend. McTavish describes the Fringe as 'massive', and 'dominated by comedy'. He points out that 'every year for the last 20 years people have been saying it can't get bigger than this', and yet, every year it gets bigger. The comedians at the Fringe usually perform every night for three weeks, in an environment where 'everything's extreme', and that can take a toll on their mental health [Megan Shandley].

Moreover, the rapid growth of the Fringe has changed the nature of the festival. McAllister sees a big discrepancy between what the Fringe was originally, and what it has become: 'the irony is that the Fringe was set up to make sure that people had access to entertainment for next to no money, that it was the masses, that it was non-partisan, and it was non-elitist'. However, it has essentially become an expensive, 'corporately driven' event that only benefits promoters – the very opposite of what it was intended to be [McAllister]. As he puts it, 'people think the Fringe is like Christmas, but it's more like Easter. There is a lot of suffering, and someone is getting crucified by the end of it'. Incidentally, this joke is also made in his show, Topical Storm*,* during a bit about the challenges of being a Fringe performer. This illustrates Colleary's (2015) claim that the comic 'I' on stage is not separate from, but a continuation of the self (see: 4.2.3). McAllister advocates for a reform of the Fringe in the interview: 'money should not be the thing that stops you from participating in this festival, and that I think is key to the nature of it, and the questions that need to be asked by the Fringe board'.

One of the ways in which this problem can be addressed is through the free Fringe initiative. McAllister appreciates the 'motivation behind the free Fringe', since it can put a lot of power back in the hands of the performers. Yet, the success of a show will still largely depend on venue and timeslot: 'if you're playing a wee basement bar at midnight, that's a tough gig. If you're in the bigger ones, the likes of the free Fringe venue at the Espionage or Canongate, which have a reputation of being good free venues for a lot of years, then you stand a better chance' [McAllister]. Moreover, the rift that exists within the free Fringe can be problematic:

‘there was a huge division between the two main proponents of the free Fringe, which is PBH and the Free Festival… and that creates problems because one of the promoters doesn’t like the comedians gigging for anybody else in the free Fringe and all the rest of it. [McAllister]. For those who do the regular Fringe and the free Fringe, the same financial problems persist: ‘if you do a lot of these free shows, the promoters get all the money, and basically the only reason you do it is free advertising’ [McTavish]. McAllister concludes that the free Fringe is ‘the closest that we’ve got to anything that’s fair on the Fringe, but it still needs a lot of work’.

At the same time, the massive scale of the Fringe can be a positive thing. It allows comedians to reach a much ‘wider demographic’ [McAllister], and to ‘build a hell of a following’ [McTavish]. There is more segmentation of different types of comedy, more choice available, so ‘people will come and find you out’ [McAllister]. In McAllister’s case, people might find him and go to his show because he is ‘known as a left-wing comedian’ and that’s ‘what they’re looking for’. Similarly, Megan Shandley describes the Fringe as being centred around the performer: people come because they are ‘invested in you’. This also means that comedians need to figure out who they are on stage, it is not just about punchy jokes [Shandley]. As Fummey explains, ‘you have people for an hour [at the Fringe], and they don't mind you telling them a story’ [Fummey]. This contrasts with comedy clubs on a Saturday night, where comedians do 20-minute sets and have to be ‘more aware of the fact that not everyone there is there to see you. So you kind of have to meet the audience halfway in what you do in terms of subject matter’ [McTavish].

It is not just the Fringe that has expanded and changed, but the comedy scene in general. In the 80s, it moved ‘away from joke-based comedy to more alternative comedy’ [Fummey]. Though the Alternative Comedy had its own problems with authenticity (see: 3.4.1), the era retains an almost mythical status. Stand-up comedy, as McAllister explains,

> ‘came from those kinda folk clubs, that were around in the 70s and 80s. That’s how Connolly became big, that’s how Jasper Carott became a comedian, it was the little clubs … the last time that comedy went through a bit of a boost was when Thatcher was in power in the 80s and you had Rik Mayall and Adrian Edmondson and all those guys’.

In line with the findings from Quirk (2018), stand-up comedy is presented as type of artform that is generally left-wing and critical of elites and corporations – at least in its early years.

McAllister claims the left-leaning tendencies of comedy are based on the fact that 'artists are interested in people, so if you are interested in people, you're gonna be left-wing. As opposed to corporates and all the rest of it'.

More recently, stand-up comedy has become an increasingly mainstream form of entertainment: 'Comedy went through this period of being the new rock 'n' roll. And now it's the new pop' [Lafferty]. While there is still 'more of the left attached with comedy' [McAllister], it might not be as alternative as it once was (See: 3.4.1). Those who are new to the scene, however, view it quite positively: 'the comedy scene here is great. It's you know, very close to everybody'. Shandley talks about the scene as a community, one that can be protective and insular, but at the same time, willing to help newcomers 'if you can prove yourself'. This contrasts with Lafferty who recounts the changes she has witnessed: 'it's huge now. It's too big…I started comedy when it was still very much underground. And then it went through a kind of surge, and that was fab, and the clubs merged and then television shows and radio and that's great, and then it tipped over to social media, and things going viral'.

Social media scrutiny is presented as a particularly worrying aspect of today's society, an issue that also raises questions about 'free speech' (see: 3.4.1). Combined with the magnitude of the comedy scene, it means that it is 'much harder now as a young comedian starting out to rise to the top' [Lafferty]. Because the internet is both unforgiving and permanent, 'you have to be so much better. You can't fail' [Lafferty]. This contrasts starkly with the comedy space a few decades back, when comedians could take the time to experiment, make mistakes, and grow: 'we spent ages being shit. Can't be shit now. You have to come out and be amazing in order to get anywhere. You know, I spent sixteen years getting good' [Lafferty].

The comedians are not only conscious of these changes, but are reflecting on solutions, and trying to shape the comedy scene themselves. Lafferty, for example, runs the 'Bonefide' night at the stand comedy club, which is 'about giving comedians – professional comedians – an opportunity to fail' [Lafferty]. McAllister sees the stand-up comedy scene going through another boost, and potentially going back to its alternative roots:

> There was a show at the Stand there called Lefty Scum. And it was Jonny & The Baptists, Josie Long and a whole load of lefty comedians and it was interesting you know… So there is a little bit of that happening again, but we'll see how far it goes this time.

An important distinction to draw is of that between stand-up comedy on TV and in clubs: 'if you go to the clubs, it's far more raw, and people have a far greater platform to say things that they wouldn't normally say' [McAllister]. The interviewees advocate for more inclusive spaces for voices that have traditionally been marginalised in comedy: 'I think that in a time of crisis we need to turn to fresh voices and fresh perspectives' [Singh Kohli].

The scale of the Fringe also has an impact on Scottish comedy. Scottish comedians feel they are on the margins of the Fringe, while the mainstream is dominated by performers from the South of England, as McTavish explains:

> you could even draw your geographical parameters narrower than that. While there were not huge amounts of Scottish comedians up, if you were to actively seek out comedians from the north of England, there would be fewer of them. I mean, it's almost like London and the Southeast corner of England is such a huge percentage of shows at the Fringe. [McTavish].

The desire to appeal to a broader audience means that some topics might be side-lined: 'it's a massive international festival, how many people are that interested in Scottish politics?' [McAllister]. Scottish political comedy is described as 'niche' by McAllister. However, he also points out that some Scottish comedians are able to do 'much more incisive stuff about Scottish politics' abroad than in Scotland – Danny Bhoy being one example. This may say something about what Scottish audiences expect from comedy. McAllister believes there is a 'fatigue of Scottish politics' here that might not be the case abroad amongst the 'expat communities'.

The Scottish comedy festival is mentioned as an example of the way in which local acts can be promoted at the Fringe. The Scottish comedy festival is like a mini-festival inside the Fringe, established in 2012 as a platform to showcase 'acts from the comedy circuit in Scotland' (British Comedy Guide, 2019). McAllister clarifies that their policy is not one of promoting 'Scottish comedy' per se, but 'people who live in Scotland'. Places like the Stand also do 'best of Scottish comedy' nights, where they showcase Scottish comedians. However, being in the Scottish comedy circuit all year round means that comedians can build a name for themselves outside of the festival – something that can be a good and a bad thing, as McTavish points out: 'local acts can suffer a bit…I think you can suffer from having been seen a lot throughout the rest of the year. Like 'och well I can see them anytime this year'' [McTavish]. The following

section will continue to explore this theme, highlighting the external constraints that shape Scottish comedy.

6.4 Constraints: 'There is always a kind of compromise'

Comedians have to negotiate the potentially disparate aims and expectations held by other actors, such as the audience, the comedy clubs, and producers. The extent to which comedians feel like they can discuss politics, for example, is sometimes curbed by audience responses: 'you've got to make people laugh. So, there is always a kind of compromise' [McAllister]. Political fatigue is also cited: 'there is a limit to how often you can just engage with [political] stuff' [McTavish]. When they do decide to include political content, they have to take into account the potential political views of the audience: 'I do a big bit about Brexit in my show in Scotland. I can never do that bit in England because most people in Scotland are far more pro "stay and don't leave the EU" than in England' [McAllister]. Yet, while it is sometimes possible to pre-empt the views of the audience members, the comedian always risks being wrong: 'there will be times when you come up with a joke and think it's great, but audiences just don't like it, you know' [McAllister]. However, for McAllister the knowledge that some audience members might be offended should not drive the performance: 'that doesn't mean I have to pander to people's sensibilities'.

Constraints can also come from institutions rather than the audience. In one example, Fummey talks about a potentially offensive part of his show in which he chants "Fuck the Tories": 'they didn't censor what I said, but what they did was they got the techie guy to turn down the volume on the mic when I got to that point every night' [Fummey]. The comedy club, as Fummey highlights here, can try to influence the material of the performers. Shandley, on the other hand, sees the comedy clubs as useful resources: 'I think places like the Stand are great, because they're all about progress. And the Monkey Barrell too…they're always happy to dish out advice, and they're always about progressing'. This is not necessarily the case with television work. McAllister talks about the risk of offending, and the consequences it can have: 'producers won't risk their jobs over a joke. Comedians will'; but comedians who do say something 'out of line' are in danger of being boycotted by producers [McAllister].

The constraints can be more insidious when it comes to gender. Lafferty acknowledges that she has 'probably experienced discrimination' but has not always been aware of it. Yet, from a more structural level, it is possible to see discrepancies. For example, she draws attention to

the token woman phenomenon in panel shows: ‘we’ve got our woman, and that’s it, we’re good’, Lafferty says, tongue in cheek. The same critique is made by Singh Kohli: ‘if you put four women panellists on a news quiz, the letters you would get! Think about all the years when there were four men. Not a fucking letter sent’.

There is also a danger of being ‘boxed in’ as a Scottish performer. Lafferty recalls the time when somebody within the production industry told her: ‘now they’ve got their working-class Scottish female’. The comment was made in reference to another comedian who appeared on Live at the Apollo, and thus implied that Lafferty’s own career opportunities would be curtailed by the success of another woman. Performers are made conscious of what ‘industry’ wants, and this can be limiting:

> A lot of people said to me, you shouldn’t advertise that you are an actress, as well as a comic. And this is the thing, they box you in here. People are always like, stay in your lane. Well, do I have to stay in my lane? Why can’t I just do things I love? And be good at loads of things. [Megan Shandley]

If you have a Scottish accent, you might only be seen for ‘traditional Scottish roles’ as an actor [Shandley]. While Scottish comedians can also be boxed in as ‘niche’, as McAllister observes, Shandley’s experience in both acting and comedy gives her a different perspective. As a Scottish actress, people will typecast you immediately, but with comedy, ‘if you’re funny, you’ll be fine’ [Shandley].

Comedians are also constrained by money in a variety of ways. They are conscious that both the institutions that hire them, and the audiences that attend the show, are paying: ‘at the end of the day, you’re a monkey boy. You know people pay 20 quid to see you and make them laugh so you’ve got to do the job’ [McAllister]. The sentiment is echoed by Lafferty: ‘people are paying a lot of money to come out and be entertained’. This puts pressure on the comedians and shapes their performance: ‘you go to a comedy show, it’s 30 quid for the babysitter. 30 quid for drinks and dinner, 30 quid on the tickets, you’re down a hundred quid. I better be fucking good’ [Singh Kohli]. For Shandley, the pressure is freeing. Even if other comics or promoters dislike you, there is a space for you because ‘if you can make punters laugh, they will pay you to play the club’. Acting, on the other hand, is ‘down to so many external factors, other actors, the way you look, who else has been cast, all that kind of stuff’ [Shandley]. For Shandley then, the power relations are inverted in comedy as the performer is in control.

A more deep-seated problem is the financial structure of the comedy world more generally. Comedy has been an increasingly dominant part of the Fringe – something that could be attributed to the fact that it is so cheap to put on a stand-up comedy act compared to other artforms like Theatre [McAllister]. Despite the growth of comedy, the comedians themselves see very little of that money: 'they work their ass off for a month and then owe money by the end of it' [McAllister]. According to McAllister, comedians and other staff are 'exploited', and it can be difficult to challenge the system: 'I've heard rumours from journalists who have told me that they've been warned off stories where they tried to chase the money in terms of where it goes in the Fringe'. The commercialisation of the Fringe has also been explored by scholars (Frew and Ali-Knight, 2010, Friedman, 2014b) who note that it is extremely expensive for comedians to 'stage shows, to select venues close to the centre of town and to pay for rents which quadruple in price during the period of the festival' (Frew and Ali-Knight, 2010, p.248). As one commentator observes, the Edinburgh Fringe appears to have 'sold its soul to the two arch enemies of the arts: commercialism and capitalism' (Stark cited in Frew and Ali-Knight, 2010, p.248).

A recurring concern cited by the comedians is the London-centric nature of the comedy scene. London is portrayed as the 'epicentre of comedy' [Lafferty] - national television is co-ordinated there, so 'comedians have to go down to London and break London in order to make it' [McAllister], and there is a stronger 'vehicle for pushing women forward' there [Lafferty]. The Fringe is also seen as London-centric. As mentioned above, there appears to be an over-representation of comedians from London at the festival [McTavish]. For Fummey, this means that the Fringe ultimately promotes and values English comedy: 'you get people coming up from London, for the Fringe, and imposing their idea of what comedy is' [Fummey]. Such comments suggest a power imbalance, where 'London' has control over the direction of the comedy scene, and consequently voices that do not conform to its standards are somewhat excluded, at least at the national level.

London is in many ways the gatekeeper of (national) fame. Scottish comedians can break through the barriers, but at a cost: 'it was interesting actually to see Scottish comics winning awards last year, but again they were more- they fitted into that mould that London wanted' [Fummey]. However, fame is not presented as the key motivator for most of the comedians: 'I'm not doing this to be a famous comedian. I'm doing this because I love it' [Lafferty]. Rather than competing in London, most of the comedians interviewed here are keen to have a

conversation in Scotland about the future of the country. This raises the question of how comedy is used as a political resource by these comedians.

6.5 Comedy as Political resource

Despite the constraints outlined above, one of the key positive aspects of the Fringe is that it allows the comedians to speak more freely about their chosen topics. This is in part because there is less pressure to be funny: 'where you're doing twenty-minute sets at a comedy club, you better be funny within 30-60 seconds, you know what I mean? Whereas, doing an Edinburgh Fringe show, you can not be funny for 2 minutes and it doesn't matter' [Fummey]. Secondly, comedians can tailor their show in more specific ways: 'there might be a really burning issue that interests you, and you can do a Fringe hour about that because it's in the short title, it's in the 40 words, that that's what the shows about [McTavish]. For Shandley, comedy provides a lot of freedom compared to acting: 'there is nobody relying on you, and you don't have to think about anyone else, it's just you and the audience'. In short, 'you've got the platform to do what you want to do' [McTavish].

Nonetheless, the comedians are very aware that comedy is entertainment first and foremost, and thus tend to downplay their impact. A comedian is not 'going to change people's attitudes overnight' [McTavish]; after all, the audience is there to be entertained: 'they don't want necessarily to be educated as well' [McAllister]. Talking about current politics in a satirical way is increasingly difficult because politics has arguably *become* satire: 'it's difficult to parody the absolute ridiculous. And that's the situation that we are in now is that a lot of it is just signposting, and you just go "what is this?!"' [McAllister]. Shandley observes that while politics has become more relatable, 'it is difficult to find a different angle' or something new to say on the topic of Trump or Brexit.

Despite dismissing comedy's potential to influence the audience's beliefs and actions, the interviewees point to a range of social functions that comedy can have. Simply pointing out the ridiculousness of politics can offer a much needed 'cathartic release for audiences' [McAllister]. Moreover, seeing your views represented on stage can help people to feel less alone, perhaps creating a sense of community, and a call for activism: 'comedians I think have a job to go "yeah, you're not the only person thinking like this, maybe we could do something about it? What do you think? Maybe we should all get really annoyed about this?"' [Lafferty].

Of course, sometimes the audience members might be confronted with views that differ from their own. Here too, comedy can have a positive impact, in that it de-naturalises the taken-for-granted. Comedy can make people 'aware that not everybody thinks the same' [Lafferty]. On rare occasions, it might even change attitudes: 'if I can make a Tory voter laugh at the Tory government… it might make them think twice about how they vote next time round' [McTavish]. Indeed, critiquing power is a key aspect of comedy for the interviewees. They talk about the need to punch up, not down, and to speak truth to power. Yet, they are nonetheless cautious about the impact that critique can have, because 'whether power listens or not is another thing' [Lafferty]. At the very least, however, comedy can offer an escape: 'you have been delivered away from reality and you've had an hour and a half, two hours, of just laughter. Which is hugely important' [Singh Kohli]. Megan Shandley also comments on the therapeutic function of comedy, claiming that 'laughter and joking is a way that people deal with pain and grief'.

By discussing personal issues on stage, comedians can process their own trauma and make people feel more connected. Lafferty talks about her journey with IVF in one of her shows, a topic that resonated with many other women: 'lots of people would come up at the end and share their story… It was nice for someone to hear it on a stage, and for somebody else to talk about it and not feel like such a freak' [Lafferty]. For Singh Kohli too, comedy is about building a community through stories. By building connections in this way, comedy is presented as having the potential to offer alternatives. It can 'shine a light on solutions' [Lafferty].

6.5.1 Comic Licence: 'I think you can joke about everything'

While comedy is commonly seen as a platform that affords comedians the freedom to express ideas, the extent of 'comic licence' is debatable, as discussed in the previous chapter (see: 5.3.3). This is particularly pronounced in the case of televised stand-up. McAllister talks about how the landscape has changed in recent years, pointing to the Russel Brand and Jonathan Ross controversy as a turning point: 'that was a huge watermark in terms of comedy on television in this country'. He describes 'Sachsgate' as a culture shock that is having a continuous impact on comedy; producers 'are now incredibly afraid of what is said on telly', and the media frenzy that is caused by anything 'out of line' means that 'you need to be incredibly careful about how you go about what you say to the media' [McAllister].

The BBC's mantra of impartiality means that, according to McAllister, 'there is a restriction on how political' televised comedy can get. While he is reflective about his own privilege as a white man, McAllister seems uneasy about this changing landscape. Megan Shandley holds a similar view, asserting: 'I think you can joke about everything. There's always going to be people who disagree, there's always going to be people who take offence, but as long as you do it in the right way…' [Shandley]. In this sense, Shandley suggests that the issue of free speech is 'less about what topics are off-limits and more so how you're approaching the topics'. Shandley illustrates this point by discussing Shane Gillis, and the racist 'jokes' that cost him a job at SNL (Pengelly, 2019):

> 'Shane's podcast came out and he was being racist towards Chinese people. And the way he dealt with that, you know, he is like 'I am a comedian, I push boundaries'. But it was just racist' [Shandley].

However, like McAllister, Shandley is weary of how we police language today: 'cancel culture freaks me out. It scares me because I'm just like, is there anything on Twitter that I've written, and then you say, well, even if there was, you know, you could apologise, but well, actually now an apology is not good enough'. For her, this makes the world 'really dangerous'. McAllister too sees comedy as an open platform, where no subject is a 'no-go'. In his view, the subject matter is not important, it is about how you handle the topic: 'I've seen comedians handle difficult subjects and do incredibly well… I mean, I can say some horrible things, but as long as they are aimed at the right people then that's OK' [McAllister].

For Lafferty, there are subjects that are no-go: 'should I talk about things that I have no understanding of? No!' She illustrates this with Louis C.K.'s reference to the Parkland shooting: 'You've never been involved in a fucking shooting, you know? You're punching down. You're punching down on victims. Make a joke about the shooter. Fine. Punch up. Do I think we should do that either? Nah, not that particular reference, but punch up'. Lafferty does, however, differentiate between 'can' and 'should': while 'there's things comedians shouldn't talk about…I don't think there is anything comedians can't talk about. As we've seen, you know, they duly open their mouth and say things that they shouldn't say' [Lafferty]. As Lafferty suggests here, comic license is intimately linked to questions of identity and power: who is making the joke, who is the butt of the joke, who is in the audience, and what is the power dynamic? Gender and class emerge as particularly relevant characteristics in the Scottish context.

6.5.2 Gender Inequality: 'I used to be embarrassed to call myself a feminist'

The male comedians interviewed seem to be very conscious of their own privilege as men, and the need to 'punch up' rather than down in their comedy. Singh Kohli in particular talks about his feminist journey: 'I used to be embarrassed to call myself a feminist because I thought that's so fucking weird. But now I am so proud to be a feminist'. He clearly shows an interest in gender issues, and argues for equality from a pragmatic standpoint: 'It is about a better society…Is our world doing so well that you're gonna block a woman with that potential?' This pragmatism leads him to prioritise gender over racial issues: 'Is it a better use of my time to fight for 5% of the population? Or is it a better use of my time to fight for 51% of the population?'

There is a contrast between reality and aspiration in the way that Singh Kohli talks about equality. He confesses his own limitations with regard to feminism: 'I am fucked up, I'm still not nice to women. I'm still a patriarchal man'. He also discusses religion, describing Sikhism as the 'only true gender equal religion' - at least in the scripture. When it comes to the way the religion is practiced in real life, he acknowledges that it is 'fucked, caused men always get control and fuck women off and subjugate them blah blah blah, we all know that'. These examples illustrate how the desire to be a better, more enlightened man is presented as a value in itself, which is separate from one's actions.

Indeed, the aspirational desire for equality is perhaps more valuable than action, since the reality of patriarchal control is presented as immutable. This is illustrated again when Singh Kohli praises a sketch by Louis C.K.

> Interviewee: You should watch this. About how men are the biggest risk to women. It's always astonishing that a woman ever goes out on a date.
> Researcher: Oh yeah, I've seen that.
> Interviewee: Right? It's fucking genius. I mean that's Louis.
> Researcher: Yeah, well…
> Interviewee: Well, we can talk about that another time.

In light of the Louis C.K. controversies, my response to Singh Kohli's praise is somewhat hesitant. The issue remained unspoken, but this interaction suggests that Singh Kohli saw Louis as someone who talked about gender inequality in a powerful way, and that this should be remembered, and perhaps separated from his actions.

The function of comedy as driver of social change has been emphasised by various scholars (Gilbert, 2004, Meier and Schmitt, 2016, Chattoo and Feldman, 2020). Some of the comedians are conscious of this potential, and look to make a change. Lafferty talks positively about the #metoo movement: 'I think it's amazing, and that goes without saying, for a lot of people, that women have this voice and that you know, that male privilege is being called into question'. She has discussed issues of gender in her comedy, particularly at the start of her career: 'in the beginning, I talked a lot about being a female comedian, because I was very young, and it seemed like a thing. And there were fewer of us. And there is still fewer of us'. While she acknowledges that there are fewer female comedians, she is hesitant to attribute this to any particular cause: 'We can talk for ages about why that is. Is it because of children and being at home? You know, there's plenty of women who have children, who are comedians, and who make that work… is it because women are less delusional, and less needy? I don't know'.

At the same time, Lafferty admits that she has conflicting feelings about feminism, particularly the way that it can exclude people: 'I just feel like sometimes people try and make it a lot about them, And it's not. It's a movement. It's for everybody.' She is also critical of the media frenzy around #metoo and the ease with which we can remain passive spectators: 'we do spend a lot of time reading about it and getting all the juicy details and following all the clickbait links. But are we really listening? And are we really trying to make a change to our own behaviour?'

For social change to take place, we need to go beyond 'slacktivism' (Dennis, 2018). Lafferty follows her own advice and takes action. She uses her platform to create spaces that support diversity:

> I run Besoms as a night now which is about diversity and about representation… I really want to support talent, whether they're female, male, gay, straight, black, white, trans, whatever, I don't care.

Despite the relative 'meritocracy' of comedy compared to other artforms [Shandley], comedy is still a business with entrenched power dynamics. As Chattoo and Feldman (2020, p.191) note, 'hearing and seeing comedy and comedians with diverse life experiences and voices requires alternative spaces', and this is what Lafferty advocates for here.

6.5.3 Class distinction: 'You don't get a huge amount of rich people going to comedy clubs'

As highlighted in the literature review (see: 4.3), Scottish identity is often linked to left-wing politics and a working-class identity. This is asserted by McAllister, who claims the issue of class has 'always been a strong feature of themes that [Scottish comedians] want to talk about'. In fact, comedy itself could be viewed through the lens of class. For McAllister, class 'plays a big role in terms of what you laugh at' – a finding that is also found in the literature (Friedman, 2011, 2014a, Friedman and Kuipers, 2013) The interviewees describe the comedy scene in general as working-class: 'you don't get a huge amount of rich people going to comedy clubs. It's not a thing that they do, unless it's like very specific comedians, you know, and very specific circumstances' [McAllister].

Corporate events are given as examples of when comedy might have a predominantly wealthy audience. McAllister adds: 'I don't do corporates for that very reason'. Fummey also talks about the contrast between comedy club gigs and events that cater to rich audiences:

> I turned up and it was in a high-end jeweller's shop full of regular customers. Who is a regular costumer in a…right? And I went in and I did the same set that had been going really well in the other promo shows that I was doing, but they hated me, right? And I was like, I was stunned. I feel that there's a bit of material I do that in a club, a comedy club, works really really well. But it actually made things worse, because they weren't… but that was my misjudgement, you know what I mean?

Their remarks echo the findings from Friedman's work, which demonstrates the 'strong cleavages in comedy taste' in Britain (Friedman and Kuipers, 2013, p.182). Friedman found that upper middle classes exhibit a taste for 'complex and original comedy' (p. 182) and reject lowbrow comedy, while lower classes value funny and sociable comedy that revolves around the 'aesthetic of everyday life' (p. 192). Taking into account the confluence between class and national identity in Scotland, it would be interesting to see how the cleavage highlighted by Friedman operates within the Scottish comedy scene.

6.6 Identity and Politics

6.6.1 Scottish Identity: 'It has changed beyond all recognition'

What stands out in the interviews is the sense that Scottish identity is in flux. McAllister alludes to Scotland's inferiority complex (see: 4.3) when he notes that 'in Scotland, we never thought our politics was important enough to take the piss out of' [McAllister]. The Scottish referendum is presented as a turning point in this regard: 'it was an awakening in a way for a lot of Scottish acts… all of a sudden, they can start talking more openly about Scottish identity, particularly Scottish political identity' [McAllister]. McTavish also views Scottish identity as constantly changing: 'within my lifetime it has changed beyond all recognition, but I think even over the last 5 years for example, it has changed'. Such changes arguably bring division, as some commentators have pointed out (McKenna, 2014, The Scotsman, 2018, The Guardian, 2020). However, for Singh Kohli, Scotland has always been divided.

The idea of homogenous nation is presented as a myth: 'This nonsense about Scotland being a divided country now - we were always fucking divided! It's whether we chose to see the division or not' [Singh Kohli]. The difference now, is that the division lies between those who support independence, and those who, as Singh Kohli puts it, don't 'feel comfortable enough in their own ability to run the country'. For him, those who vote against independence have simply internalised a narrative of inferiority, making Scotland 'the only country in the fucking world to vote against its own self-determination' [Singh Kohli]. Putting aside the inaccuracy of his statement, it is clear that Singh Kohli sees independence as an imperative that is held back by a kind of false consciousness afflicting those who oppose independence.

Singh Kohli uses a gendered metaphor to describe the false consciousness holding Scotland back:

> Scotland in many ways is a modern-day woman, riddled with inadequacies, gifted and imposed on it by a patriarchy. There is nothing wrong with this woman. It's just the objectification of this woman, the constant criticism of this woman, and the belittling of this woman, has made this woman forget how fucking amazing she is. [Singh Kohli]

The feminisation of the nation is explicitly presented as a psychological trauma forced upon Scotland by an external oppressor. This places Scotland within a postcolonial discourse. Puri

(2008) explains how colonial projects relied on gendered connotations of the masculine coloniser (emphasis on conquest, adventure, ownership) and the feminisation of the colonised (virgin land, entered, owned). These depictions, Puri explains, had significant consequences for the psychology of both colonised and coloniser (Puri, 2008, p.135).

Singh Kohli's rejection of nationalist discourse (British and Indian in particular) could be viewed as a rejection of the feminised postcolonial depictions that reproduce the Scottish inferiority complex. Later in the interview, Singh Kohli critiques 'the oppressive nature of the English media on us' and 'the oppressive nature of central diktats on education'. He builds a narrative of a supressed national consciousness as we are 'not learning our own history. Not knowing who we are' [Singh Kohli]. Glasgow is framed as a city of political resistance. Singh Kohli describes it as a socialist, friendly city, a city of 'compassion, caring and connection', something that he attributes to the historical highland influence in Glasgow. Gender comes up again when Singh Kohli claims that Glasgow is 'defined by our women'. However, here women are described in more masculine terms: 'we should have sent them over to Afghanistan, we would have finished it in two weeks, got back and put the washing up the next day!' He draws comparisons between Punjabi and Glaswegian culture, claiming they both have 'strong women, a great sense of polity, and religious influence'.

Despite having a strong sense of their own identity, both Singh Kohli and Fummey are shaped by the experience of having their identity questioned. In one example, Singh Kohli talks about a conversation he had on the train: 'And I didn't know what he meant by "your lot". So, I went "Oh you married a Sikh woman?" He said "No you fucking dafty, I married a Glaswegian woman"' [Singh Kohli]. Fummey on the other hand, talks extensively about the racism he experienced growing up mixed race, claiming that in those days, 'you kind of had to fight for your Scottish identity'.

White comedians have the privilege of not having to defend their claim to Scottish identity. For Lafferty, national identity was not a salient topic until later in life: 'I hadn't really thought about my Scottishness until I met my husband [McAllister], who is, as you already know, a patriot'. She describes her husband's upbringing as being different from hers in this sense: 'we argued about the telly… They argue about politics'. National identity also becomes more salient when she gigs abroad, something she describes as a point of connection between her and the audience: 'They don't know what it's like to be Scottish, but they know what it's like to be whatever nationality they are'.

Lafferty sees Scotland as a very open society, attributing this to Scottish emigration: ‘Scotland will always, I hope, welcome people from all over the world. Cause we went all over the world’. Brexit, on the other hand, signifies the opposite of openness, and makes ‘British’ and ‘Scottish’ identity seem antithetical to each other: ‘It’s just really devastating. I find it really difficult to make peace with being British and not Scottish. Because I think that being Scottish is a very different thing’ [Lafferty]. McTavish also sees Scotland as a welcoming and open society, and talks proudly about how people ‘want to identify’ with the country, although he is conscious that this image of an inclusive Scotland might not match reality. However, he nonetheless emphasises the importance of this aspirational construction of Scottish identity: ‘Scottishness was all about being inclusive and being left-wing and caring for everyone in society. And of course, that’s the aspiration. I am not sure whether we are any better’.

6.6.2 Locality: ‘I feel like a stranger in Aberdeen, and Edinburgh disappoints me’

For some participants, national identity is understood through the experience of locality. One specific element is cited by Fummey as a marker of belonging: ‘irrespective of what you look like, if you come out with the right accent, you’re Scottish’. He dismisses both birthplace and race as markers of national identity, claiming that accents tell a much more accurate story:

> To me, it’s the accent I listen for to identify somebody, because that tells you where they’ve lived, what they’ve sucked in, what they’ve- you know what I mean? Whereas, having a piece of paper that says ‘I was born in this piece of real-estate’, doesn’t really kind of do it to the same extent. [Fummey]

However, he acknowledges that racial markers did play a much bigger role in the past.

Coming from a mixed background, Fummey experienced racism first-hand, and talks about his struggle to be accepted as Scottish when he was younger:

> people challenged your Scottishness in the 60s and 70s where you kind of weren’t allowed to be Scottish – people would say ‘where you from’, you’d say ‘Perth’, and they go ‘no, where were you born’, and you say ‘Perth’, and they say ‘well, where's your ancestry?’… Nowadays people don’t really question, you know. It’s a more multicultural kind of world. [Fummey]

Fummey emphasises locality (Perth) in the interview, much in the same way he does in his show.

Singh Kohli too asserts his identity through locality: 'I'm Punjabi and Glaswegian, or a West coaster. I feel an empathy with Ayrshire, and I feel an empathy with the Westcoast. But I feel like a stranger in Aberdeen, and Edinburgh disappoints me'. He goes on to deconstruct the notion of national identity:

> I used to call myself Scottish-Indian, like on the census forms and that. But Indian is meaningless, actually meaningless. Just as British is meaningless. You know what I mean? It's a created notion. [Singh Kohli]

While Singh Kohli seems to critically imply here that national identity is a social construct, he later depicts Scottish nationalism through an essentialist, postcolonial lens, a theme that will be explored later in this chapter. For McTavish on the other hand, Scottish national identity is presented as constructed and malleable: 'it's a state of mind, it's not about where you come from, it's about how you identify with the country' [McTavish], a rhetoric that is similar in nature to that put forward by the SNP (Leith and Soule, 2011).

Interviewees from Glasgow describe their local identity as an important element of their performance. McAllister, for example, will 'Glasgow right up' if he is gigging in Glasgow on Saturday night. There is a conscious performative aspect to his local identity as he notes that 'jokes about Scottish identity will always get a laugh'. Glasgow is described as having an 'incredibly strong identity', but is critiqued for being a city that wants to 'hear their voice heard back at them' [McAllister]. He cites the examples of *Still Game* and *Chewin' the Fat* to illustrate how our comedy is 'always that classical, mainly West Coast Scotland, and it's always the chav and the ned' [McAllister]. For him, that makes it harder for the content to reach a wider international audience. Using the same old tropes represents a kind of 'small mindedness' and a continuing sense of inferiority: 'that's what it is to be Scottish, we've got such a little man syndrome with our identity that we constantly have to go "we may not be the big ones, but we are the ones you can get drunk with and hang out with" and it's a parody of itself' [McAllister].

For those who are not Glaswegian, the Glasgow comedy scene can feel exclusionary, as Megan Shandley explains:

> I still struggle with Glasgow a bit. Less so now because I've kind of got my act. But when I first moved up, they were like "urgh, an Edinburgh girl who has lived in London for a bit. She must be a Tory".

Shandley is perceived by Glaswegians as Anglicised and as a Tory – a misconception that she quickly dispels in the interview, but that nonetheless makes performing in Glasgow the 'hardest gigs'. Edinburgh in contrast is described as having a cosmopolitan audience and a welcoming comedy scene, and her experience gigging in the north (Elgin, Aberdeen) has also been positive. Her experience points to the confluence of class, politics and national identity in Scotland, which is discussed in the following section.

6.6.3 Political Identities: 'A much more left-wing country than England'

All of the interviewees agree that the political landscape, both in the UK and more globally, has changed considerably. As Lafferty puts it, 'It's going to shit. I don't know how you can think anything else at the moment, it's terrifying'. Shandley describes politics as 'a joke', and McAllister notes in his observation of Trump that politicians have taken on the role of comedians: 'the guy's writing his own material. There's not a day goes by when there's not a tweet you can't go "oh my fucking God"'. This can lead to a crisis of satire, as reality becomes funnier than comedy: 'it's difficult to parody the absolute ridiculous' [McAllister]. This is exacerbated by the speed with which politics is moving: 'jokes become redundant. So you used to be able to do a joke and it would last but you can't do that now.' [McAllister].

On the other hand, Shandley proposes that comedy has become more political because political discourse is now so pervasive in our daily lives: 'you very rarely do a show where someone doesn't touch on politics', she claims. Brexit and Trump are everywhere:

> now everybody has a vague idea, so you can make jokes… You can make it accessible for everybody… And I think it would be silly not to do that, because it's current and relevant. [Shandley]

However, the ridiculousness of politics can result in a lack of engagement: 'we've been to the polls 7 times in 3 years, and that's more often than most Scottish people eat fruit. People are tired. Brexit's rolled on for ages, Trump's rolled on for ages' [McAllister]. Shandley expresses a similar view, admitting that she finds it hard to keep up with politics: 'it's changing all the time. I'm totally interested in it. But it's like hard to keep track of everything'. For Lafferty,

this lack of engagement is made worse by the fact that we are reluctant to act: 'We as British people and Scottish, we accept things. Like told to us by the powers that be, the man, or whoever' [Lafferty].

The Scottish independence referendum is held up as a moment when people did act. Fummey talks about how his own level of engagement in politics changed at that time: 'I was involved in the independence campaign and after that I joined the Green Party, and I never thought before that, I never ever thought that I'd be a member of a political party'. Lafferty too talks about being more reflective about politics, and indeed her own identity, because of the referendum, while McTavish points to the enthusiasm that 'came from both sides', not just the Yes voters. Shandley attests to this as the only comedian in the interview data to vote No: 'I voted No in the independence referendum, and when it was happening, I was quite involved'. Enthusiasm also came from outside of Scotland, as the referendum attracted international media attention: 'we were the focus of the world – or so we thought' [McTavish].

While both Independence and Brexit fuelled satire, the level of engagement with politics varied geographically:

> two years ago, when there was a huge uptake for political comedy in Scotland, there wasn't in England. People in England just didn't want to engage in that way, whereas I would say the coin has totally flipped the other way round, and I find in England and, particularly in London, and in the north of England, there is a real appetite, you know, for political comedy. [McTavish]

McTavish notes that 'there was a hell of a lot of apathy around Scotland about the independence referendum say in 2012 and 2013, but the minute 2014 kicked in people were really engaged'. Similarly, there was political apathy in Scotland in the run-up to Brexit: 'People either thought it was a full-blown conclusion, or they were pro-European, but not pro-European enough to be too bothered about it' [McTavish]. Some suggest that enthusiasm for politics will return with Indyref2: 'I think that if we talk about another referendum on independence I definitely think that we would see another spike in people talking about it and doing that thing again' [McAllister].

The Scottish independence referendum clearly fuelled high levels of political engagement. For McTavish, the Yes campaign managed to reach people because it was more about 'a celebration

than about fact' [McTavish]. In the lead up to Indyref, 'culture was as important as policy' [McTavish]. Despite losing the vote, there is still a feeling of success in the way he views the event: 'when the referendum was first announced, the Yes vote would be in the 20s of percentages, and we got a hell of a lot in the last 6 to 9 months' [McTavish]. The referendum is portrayed as a reflection of the essence of Scotland: 'a huge mirror was thrown up at the country' [McAllister], and for McTavish this metaphorical mirror showed a very positive image of Scotland: 'when you are dealing with the politics of hope, you have got a better message to sell than if you're dealing in fear' [McTavish].

In stark contrast, Shandley sees the Yes campaign as hope without substance:

> I feel like we are better to be part of the UK with devolved power. And I felt the Yes campaign was way too much. Based on the supposition of hope? Yes, we can do it. But like where are the figures to support that? Basically, I voted No because I don't think we are financially stable enough and maybe now, yes, but in years to come I don't think that we have the money to be an independent country, and I just feel like it could work, but also couldn't work.

Shandley does not have her mind made up when it comes to party politics, but she is put off by nationalism: 'All I know is I am not an SNP supporter. The nationalist agenda doesn't really float my boat'. She is in the minority within the comedy scene, as she herself admits: 'most of the Scottish comedy circuit are a Yes. And they are vehemently Yes'.

The comedians emphasise the importance of listening and understanding the other side. Despite being a strong supporter of the Yes campaign, McTavish acknowledges that 'we've got to understand the reasons why that campaign didn't work, we've got to understand what Scottish people are after as well' [McTavish]. Similarly, Singh Kohli talks about how 'we need to remember that we have two ears, and only one mouth. We need to listen because we need to learn' [Singh Kohli]. Lafferty also empathises with the other side: 'I would love to think that people will embrace [independence] and go with it, and vote… but I do think people are tired. And I think more instability is terrifying'. Shandley attests to this as, at the time of the interview, she continues to oppose independence because of the uncertainty it brings: 'it's too risky. Because if we leave that's it'. Nonetheless, much like the Yes supporters, Shandley sees the importance of respecting the other side: 'I have my reasons, they have theirs… I mean

Nicola Sturgeon, I'll give it to her, she's a great politician. I have like quite a lot of respect for her and stuff even though I don't agree with the policies'

There is common ground among the comedians on the issue of Brexit as all of them are pro-EU. Shandley talks about being 'devastated about leaving'. Lafferty expresses a sense of hopelessness and horror at the prospect of Theresa May's Brexit deal:

> it's like the People's Vote is the steps, and Theresa is going "no, I'm not taking the steps, I am just going to try and climb this huge precipice. And if I fall and die, then so be it!" No, I think it's terrifying. I don't know how it's gonna get any better.

Lafferty sees a tangible change in her audiences after the Brexit result:

> 'as a compère on stage, when I say "have we got anybody in from Europe?" and now for the first time ever in Glasgow, there was nobody. I'm sure there probably was right, but nobody spoke out. And that's terrifying'.

Brexit is something that clearly represents a loss: 'the terrifying aspect of it is you know, I have nieces now, and hopefully at some point children, who won't have the same opportunities. Why are you doing that?' [Lafferty]. This echoes Browning's (2018) claim that Brexit has been a source of ontological insecurity.

Dissatisfaction with Brexit is tied to notions of fairness and justice. Firstly, Brexit is deemed unfair because the question of membership to the EU impacted the independence referendum: 'I think it's horrific that a lot of people voted [to stay in the UK] because they didn't want to come out of Europe' [Lafferty]; and interrelated to this is the notion that Brexit is being unfairly imposed on Scotland– we are being 'dragged out of Europe regardless' [Lafferty]. Moreover, the vote itself is considered exclusionary: 'in the independence referendum, non-British nationals could vote, whereas in the European referendum they didn't. It's disgraceful' [McTavish]. Lastly, it is deemed unjust on the basis that it closes down opportunities for future generations: 'why is that a good idea to take away their opportunities? After having benefitted from it for 48 years?' [Lafferty]. In short, Brexit is presented as leading to a worst future. For McTavish, 'the result of the Brexit referendum is actually worse than the result of the Scottish referendum in terms of the kind of world we want to live in'.

Some key differences between England and Scotland are highlighted by the interviewees. For them, Scotland was blindsided by Brexit precisely because the two countries have different worldviews: 'this has always been a much more left-wing country than England has, so we never really saw that coming' [McAllister]. The issue of immigration in particular is portrayed as something that the two countries diverge on: 'Scotland doesn't see as much immigration as England does, and they certainly don't feel it to the same degree that England did' [McAllister]. Consequently, this means that the Brexit campaign was received very differently in Scotland: 'We never understood how deep that inherent racism was that was within the Brexit campaign' [McAllister].

The response to the EU referendum has also been different here. The comedians emphasise Scotland's pro-immigration stance:

> I think the response to the European referendum in Scotland has been very much more of… "no, look we are a wider community, and there are all these other people who have come to Scotland and we want them to stay" [McTavish].

Support for a more open immigration policy is justified first and foremost on the basis of economic necessity: 'various economists have come and said actually after Brexit, Scotland will need to have a different policy on immigration from the rest of the UK, cause we need it more than everywhere else. We've got an ageing small population' [McTavish]. However, it is also an issue that is tied to identity: 'the people who come here do identify as Scottish' [McTavish]; and with Scotland's history of emigration: 'Scotland will always welcome people from all over the world. Cause we went all over the world' [Lafferty].

With the Leave campaign seemingly 'reclaiming the idea of Britishness' (Browning, 2018, p.343), many British Remainers have felt alienated from their own national identity. In the context of Scotland though, this feeling of shame can find a resolution through a reaffirmation of Scottish identity, which stands in stark opposition to the unrecognisable notion of Britishness rejected by Remainers. Lafferty exemplifies this well as she talks about feeling '…. embarrassed for the UK. And I think now more so than ever, I feel more Scottish than I've ever felt. I wear it with Pride'. Brexit is presented as a catalyst of hope when it comes to independence: 'I think that [Brexit] will be the impetus for Independence. I hope it is.' [McAllister].

At the same time, some of the interviewees acknowledge that the political landscape in Scotland is more complex than it seems: 'you don't have to be a maths statistician to work out quite a lot of people who voted No voted Remain and there were also people who voted Yes who voted to leave' [McTavish]. This in turn has implications for the future of the SNP, and for Independence, as McTavish points out: 'I think that took the SNP by surprise, I think that kind of explains away their disappointing showing in the General Election, I think they assumed their core vote were all pro-Europe, they weren't'. Moreover, as Singh Kohli highlights, by characterising Scotland as a left-wing country, we risk masking the ideological diversity that exists: 'Scotland is a socialist country, but it's not as socialist as people think… we have a vibrant middle class. We have lots of Tories here.'

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the main findings from the interview phase of the research. It started by presenting the role of the comedian, which is namely one of observer and truth-teller. Stand-up comedy is described as an artform and a kind of storytelling. It relies on the emotional connection that is built between the audience and the performer: every live performance is different, and this creates an illusion of authenticity. The primary goal of the comedian is to make the audience laugh, and as the interview responses show, live comedy needs to adapt and change in order achieve this because audiences expect the unexpected. The interviewees point to a divergence of comedy tastes between Glasgow and Edinburgh. While the latter is perceived as a cosmopolitan city much like London, Glasgow is described as inward-looking: Glasgow wants to hear Glasgow. The interviewees also observe a class divergence in comedy tastes with the claim that rich people do not go to comedy clubs.

The comedy scene itself has changed over the years, going from alternative underground clubs, to mainstream media, to social media. This can make it much harder for new comedians because the scene is too big, and the Internet is unforgiving. Lafferty emphasises the importance of creating spaces for marginalised voices, and is sceptical of passive strands of feminism that critique without offering alternatives or taking action. The Edinburgh Fringe has also changed considerably, with interviewees generally describing it as too big, too corporate and too English. The large scale of the Fringe does bring some opportunities as the comedians can reach a wider demographic, and they can express themselves more freely compared to club gigs. However, the financial cost of the Fringe is presented as particularly challenging for

performers and audiences. The Free Fringe tries to address some of these issues, and while it too presents some challenges, the interviewees describe it as a fairer alternative.

Nonetheless, Scottish comedians can be particularly disadvantaged: Scottish comedy relies heavily on local references which might not be understood by international audiences; and local residents can see them at any point in the year, and so might choose other acts during the festival. The Scottish Comedy Festival, which also takes place at the Edinburgh Fringe, is cited as a platform that helps local artists gain visibility. However, the Fringe is generally perceived by the comedians as a London-centric festival – comedians, audiences and critics from the South of England are taste-setters at the Fringe and have a disproportionate influence on the direction of comedy at the festival.

The comedians tend to downplay the impact of their comedy, acknowledging that they are unlikely to change people's minds. However, three main functions of comedy emerge in the interviews: 1) it can create community as audiences see their views represented on stage. 2) it can challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and speak truth to power 3) and it can offer an escape from reality or a relief from pain. These are secondary goals, however, since the comedians are entertainers first and foremost. As freelance workers, they are conscious of the need to deliver a good product, i.e., make the audience laugh, in order to get booked for gigs. For Shandley, this is quite a freeing aspect of stand-up – it is a meritocracy, where anyone can succeed as long as they are funny.

Some comedians are watchful of political sensibilities. Most of the interviewees feel that there should be no taboo topics, as long as you are punching up. Yet, the emergence of cancel culture and the changing media landscape have limited the extent of comic licence – saying something out of line can now be very costly. On the other hand, Lafferty points out that just because they 'shouldn't' say something does not mean that they 'can't', as many comedians continue to have profitable careers despite causing offence. Comedians are willing to push boundaries, even if the gatekeepers of comedy, such as club owners and TV or Radio producers, are less likely to take risks. The Fringe is hailed as a space where comedians have more comic licence, but this comes at a cost as the Fringe becomes a commercialised and exploitative venture.

The second part of the chapter discussed the comedians' perspectives on identity and politics. They believe that Scotland is – or at least is *trying* to be – an open and welcoming society. Scottish identity has changed over the years, and as some comedians point out, Scottish

independence has become a dividing line. Singh Kohli, who is himself a strong supporter of independence, uses a gendered metaphor of Scotland as an abused wife. This frames Scotland as a feminised postcolonial nation, and England as the male oppressor. Glasgow is presented as a site of resistance, and in this sense, it arguably represents an epitomised idea of Scottishness.

There are moments when nationalism is deconstructed by the interviewees. Singh Kohli is particularly critical of British identity, which he sees as an invented notion. McTavish sees nationalist representations of Scotland as aspirational, and argues that Scottish identity is a state of mind. However, Scottish national identity remains particularly salient amongst the male comedians. For Fummey and Singh Kohli, this is partly because of misrecognition – as non-white Scots, they were forced to think about their identity and prove their Scottishness. Locality is important for both. Fummey sees accent as a defining marker of Scottish identity as it reveals a lot about one's lived experience, whereas Singh Kohli describes himself as Glaswegian first and foremost. Locality is also important in comedy, as Glasgow is perceived to be insular. Glaswegian comedians play up their Glasgow identity when they play there, whereas comedians from outside the city can struggle.

With regard to politics, the comedians find that satire has become difficult as politicians are already ridiculous. Political discourse is now part of the everyday, so it is impossible not to talk about it. On the other hand, it is harder to find a new comedic angle. Moreover, politics is moving so fast that political jokes quickly become dated, and audiences become tired of political material. Scottish political comedy in particular is described as niche. Indyref brought new levels of political engagement from comedians on both sides of the debate, but there has been some political fatigue lately. The comedians suggest that another major political event like Indyref2 would reignite the audience's interest in politics.

The EU referendum was a turning point for Scotland too, particularly due to the association of Britishness with the Leave campaign. Scottish Remainers are propelled into a stronger sense of Scottishness as they try to distance from themselves from a British identity. The comedians convey a sense of loss and anger at the Brexit result, which is seen as markedly unfair considering the Remain majority in Scotland. The Brexit issue serves to emphasise the differences between Scotland and England, with the former being described as more left-wing and more welcoming to immigrants, and the latter as having entrenched racism. Of course, these generalisations need to be taken with caution. As one comedian points out, politics and

identity in Scotland interlock in very complex ways. Not all SNP voters are pro-European, for example, and the supposed socialist impulse in Scotland must be weighed against the fact that there are lots of Conservatives here too.

7 DISCUSSION

In the previous two chapters, the main findings from the analysis were presented. Chapter 5 focused on the participant observation of the Edinburgh Fringe shows, and Chapter 6 outlined the results from the interviews. The aim of the chapter is to expand on these findings, and with reference to the literature, provide a better understanding of Scottish identity. The chapter starts with a summary of the study, which is followed by an in-depth discussion of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and conclusions.

7.1 Aims of the Study

The aim of this study is to understand the characteristics and patterns of identity construction, taking contemporary Scottish stand-up comedy as the field of analysis. As such, the present research sought to answer the following questions:

- How does Scottish stand-up comedy (re)produce representations of contemporary Scottish and British identities?
- What are the political elements that can be identified within contemporary Scottish stand-up?

To answer these questions, data was collected in two parts: the participant observation of Scottish comedy shows provided insights into the performative construction of Scottish identity, while interviews provided the comedians' perspectives on Scottish identity, politics, and comedy – concepts that are intimately related, and performative (see: 4.2). The notes from the participant observation, and the transcripts from the interviews were categorised and coded into themes and analysed with the assistance of Atlas.ti. The following section will discuss the results from the data analysis.

7.2 RQ1: How does stand-up comedy (re-)produce representations of Scottish identities?

The search for the 'real' Scottish culture (McCrone, 2001a, p.143), and for an 'authentic depiction of Scottish life' (Murray, Farley and Stoneman, 2009, p.179) has preoccupied

cultural critics for a long time. As the literature review demonstrates, dominant representations of Scotland in the 19th and 20th Century followed the traditions of Tartanry (stories of the Highlander defeated hero) or Kailyard (stories of parochial, rural community life). Like all stereotypes, these traditions offered an incomplete picture. Indeed, Tartanry and Kailyard are often seen as examples of a distorted, inauthentic and gendered image of Scotland (Craig, 1982, McArthur, 1982, McCrone, 2001a, Nairn, 2003), a claim that is strengthened by the fact that much of the cultural output about Scotland has been produced externally, and for a wider British or American audience. Clydesidism (stories of urban, post-industrial struggle) seemed to remedy that by offering realism, though despite being praised for its authenticity, it too is now seen as a historic discourse (Craig, 1983).

Evidently, many see a tension between the social realities of Scotland, and the 'inauthentic' representations articulated in many cultural outputs about Scotland. However, if we consider identity to be socially constructed rather than essentially given (see: Methodological approach), the more interesting question is not whether these stereotypical traditions reflect reality (for there can be no social reality that sits outside of discourse), but how the reality of identity is constructed: what purpose do these myths serve? How are they utilised, and by whom?

7.2.1 Tartanry

Though some may see Tartanry as a kitsch, romanticised, 'invented' discourse (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983) – a 'Tartan monster' as Nairn calls it (Nairn, 2003, p.153) – it is undoubtedly a 'potent symbol' (Brown, 2010, p.90). As such, it is utilised extensively in both film and tourism, two industries that are increasingly interconnected (Edensor, 2002b, p.158), to present Scotland to outsiders. Such representations, even when geared to an external audience, also shape how Scots see themselves. Scholars of Scottish tourism and heritage (McCrone, Morris and Kiely, 1995, Sim and Leith, 2013, Bhandari, 2014) highlight the link between Scotland's 'touristification' (Bhandari, 2014, p.130) and its construction of nationalism. As Davidson (2000) explains, 'staging for the tourist in fact contributes to the invention of national cultures, or more precisely, the formation of national consciousness' (p. 134). Just as Scotland's tourism sector seeks to create a distinctive image of the nation for outside visitors, comedians present an image of themselves to the cultural tourists who descend upon the capital during the Edinburgh Festival.

Of course, there are many differences between comedians and tourist organisations. The latter are economically motivated and primarily concerned with marketing places, consequently turning the nation into a 'commodity' (McDonald, 2002, p.54). Comedians must market themselves, i.e., their comic persona (Colleary, 2015, Quirk, 2015). In this process, discourses and symbols that relate to national identity can be leveraged. This point is made by Munro (2010), who argues that Tartanry's simplicity and instant recognisability have made it a popular element in Scottish comedy (p. 188).

The connection between tourism and comedy is also discussed by Brodie (2014), though here it is the comedian who holds the 'tourist gaze':

> the stand-up comedian is, on one level, a professional tourist, perennially casting his or her gaze on difference, to communicate that experience of difference to an ever-new audience. (p. 156)

Brodie also emphasises the comedian's adaptability, not only because they are travellers on tour for much of their career, but because their material must be tailored to 'local contexts'.

In the context of the Fringe, stereotypically Scottish representations can function as a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) that helps to distinguish the comedian. This is the case with Vladimir McTavish and Craig Hill, who both use Tartanry as a playful caricature in the promotion of their shows (see pages 134-135), building on the tradition of 'comic tartanry' presented by Munro (2010). For Craig Hill, the kilt is more of a staged performance than the performative doing of identity in everyday life (see: 2.3.2). In an online interview, he comments: 'I don't wear a kilt in 'real' life!' ... It's an important part of me getting into character' (Student Rag, 2020). Though the kilt is a staple for Hill – something he has incorporated into his performances for the last 21 years – he tends to play with its symbolism, with variations like pink or black leather. His 2017 show in particular seems to mix Tartanry with Clydesidism with his aggressive pun and *T2*-like stance (see 5.2.1). He displays a kind of kilted 'masquerade', much like what Pittock (2010) describes as the 'mixture of humour and aggression' in Tartanry, which is 'mocking yet celebratory' (Pittock, 2010, p.46).

A kilt is also used by comedian Hardeep Singh Kohli as he appears on stage. Singh Kohli's use of tartan differs from McTavish and Hill because it disrupts the familiar racial boundaries of Scottishness. It can be seen as a form of 'disidentification' (Muñoz, 1999, Medina, 2003) in

that it subversively re-articulates the dominant culture. Though tartan is traditionally associated with Scottish ancestry and heritage, it is common for ethnic minority Scots to embrace these symbols and indeed re-invent them. The creation of an Islamic and a Sikh tartan (The Scottish Register of Tartans, 1999, 2012), for example, exemplify the openness of tartan as a national symbol. Singh Kohli's kilted performance can be read as an assertion of identity that is commonplace for Sikh men in Scotland, according to Hopkins (2014). Although Sikhs are placed in the position of 'stranger' in some contexts, Hopkins (2014) claims that rather than defensive withdrawal, young Sikh men in Scotland tend to assert their Scottish identity and engage with 'interethnic relations' (p. 1577). As these examples illustrate, Tartanry now 'embraces whole spectrums of different meanings beyond relatively simple publicity often associated with the tourist industry' (Hume, 2010, p.82).

7.2.2 Kailyard

The kailyard tradition, which stems from the literary world, has been highly influential in establishing well-known characterisations of Scottish life – but has been equally derided by critics for its parochial image of Scotland (McArthur, 1982, Bold, 1983). Even at its height over a century ago, kailyard texts were already accused of not reflecting the values of a 'modern' Scotland (Nash, 2007, p.130). Despite the critics, elements of kailyard discourse have persisted, and as Nash (2007) rightly points out, kailyard is only unreal if we seek in it a representation of Scotland as a whole (p. 130). Some of the main elements of this tradition – which Nash (2007) describes as an 'idealised portrayal' (p. 225) of an unchanging 'humble and religious' rural community (p. 22) – can be identified in a couple of the comedy performances.

Marjolein Robertson talks about her life in Shetland, and Fred McAuley discusses his ancestry (family from Lewis and grandfather from Harris), and both explain to their audiences some of the peculiarities of island life. Robertson emphasises the importance of drinking in the island: 'we have a very special relationship with alcohol. In that we abuse it'. This is contrasted with the binge drinking of the cities. Though Aberdeen was her first 'taste of culture' the desire to return to the familiarity and safety of home can be felt: 'after you watched a grown man rolling around in his own vomit for five hours, you will say "get the me the fuck out of Aberdeen. I want to be on the boat [back to Shetland]" [Robertson].

Vladimir McTavish also references the islands of Scotland in his show, though in a less personal way. In a bit about fundamentalism, he tells the audience about the 'Wee Frees' (Free

Church of Scotland) and reads a supposedly genuine letter written to the gazette by someone in the Island of Lewis complaining about TV scheduling on Sundays, the day of the Sabbath. The triviality of such a complaint is emphasised by McTavish: 'God knows the reaction you would get if you propose opening a gay sauna'. The joke relies on the contrast between the concerns of the modern world, and the adherence to tradition in closed off Scottish communities – a common theme in Kailyard. In Robertson's and McAuley's show, there are also references to a closed off world, which are exaggerated for comic effect: so tight-knit as to verge on incestuous, and so safe that crimes only occur accidentally. Though these representations of traditional communities are, for the most part, conveyed in a positive way (with the exception of McTavish), they depict the 'parochialism' critiqued by some scholars (McArthur, 1982, Nairn, 2003).

7.2.3 Clydesider

A common Scottish stereotype found in the data is that of the Clydesider. This tradition can be characterised by its emphasis on male working-class toughness. Early Clydesider representations valorised the socialist and communitarian politics of industrial workers in the Clyde region, while later portrayals grappled with the consequences of industrial decline (Murray, Farley and Stoneman, 2009, p.93). It is the political version of Clydesidism that is presented by Hardeep Singh Kohli as he recounts the Scottish spirit of 'socialist' revolution; the industrial history of Glasgow ('we built the ships that sailed all over the world…'); and the post-industrial workers forgotten by both Conservative and Labour governments in the 20th Century.

On the other hand, the stereotype of violent masculinity is also reinforced by many of the comedians, often in reference to Glasgow or surrounding towns like Paisley. The reputation of the rough, heavy drinking hardman is used for comedic effect: 'Glaswegians only have two emotions, happy and punch!' [John Scott]. The representations of Clydeside are often contrasted with an Anglicised and seemingly less authentic Edinburgh. For example, McTavish compares Edinburgh's gruesome past, which now serves as a tourist attraction in places like the Edinburgh Dungeon, and the reality of the West Coast's violent present, where life expectancy is low and murder is 'hardly an unusual occurrence' [McTavish].

As Leith (2014) points out, though Tartanry continues to be the dominant representation of Scotland, modern urban depictions in films like *Trainspotting* have also been highly influential

both nationally and abroad (p. 200). The recognisability of the film is evidenced by the fact that it is referenced in several of the comedy performances in the data (perhaps because *T2* (Bradshaw, 2017) was released in the same year). Vladimir McTavish uses *Trainspotting* as a point of contrast with middle-class Edinburgh, and employs the theme music of the film at the end of his show. Renton's nihilistic monologue '…Choose your future. Choose life… But why would I want to do a thing like that?' is rewritten as an optimistic message that alludes to Independence politics: '…Choose hope, don't choose fear. Choose Freedom.' [McTavish]. McTavish thus disrupts the drug-fuelled image of Edinburgh which may now feel outdated in gentrified Leith – 'it looks different doon here, man, aw developed' as Spud comments in Welsh's sequel to *Trainspotting* (Welsh, 2003, p.351).

With his message of hope, McTavish also moves away from the pessimism that has characterised Scotland for so long. As Leith and Sim (2020) highlight, Scottish films have tended towards 'hopelessness…with key characters caught in a downward spiral of drink, drugs and personal crises' (p. 55). With increased political devolution and the campaign for Independence, some have argued that an alternative discourse of hope has emerged, which is counter-acting the Scots' 'crisis of confidence' (Craig, 2011, Yule and Manderson, 2014).

On the other hand, Edinburgh comedians Wiz Jantarasorn and Rick Carranza use *Trainspotting* to illustrate the 'roughness' of the capital. Jantarasorn describes Leith as a crack den, where the currency is in 'ounces and grams'. Though Jantarasorn is playing up to the recognisable image of *Trainspotting*, there is some truth in his jokes. Radical changes have taken place, but the number of drug-related deaths in the capital are still higher than the UK average (Brocklehurst and Lowther, 2020). Jantarasorn and Carranza thus highlight the tension that exists between the two Edinburghs – the postcard front that is presented to tourists, and the bleakness of the schemes.

Ironically, Leith too is becoming a commodified tourist spectacle. The 'banana flats' made famous by the book has been awarded Category A status, thus making it part of Scottish Cultural Heritage (BBC News, 2017). Englishman Tim Bell offers guided strolls through some of *Trainspotting*'s locations with his 'Leith Walks' tours and his *Choose Life. Choose Leith: Trainspotting on Location* book (Bell, 2020). Even the dreaded trams of Edinburgh have made reference to the *Trainspotting* franchise with their #Tramspotting social media campaign. But as Stebbing (2018) points out, there is something disturbing about this kind of PR exploitation of the harsh realities of addiction:

> I couldn't help but feel total confusion recently when I was sat near a clinic for the homeless and disadvantaged in Haymarket, watching an addict foam at the mouth as a tram came five-mile-per-houring down the street, decked out in none other than its very own heroin-chic #Tramspotting logo
>
> (Stebbing, 2018)

Stebbing highlights the clash between the two Edinburghs (MacLeod, 2008), and the mythicisation and commodification of Scottish representations. Drawing on Goffman, MacCannell (1973) observes how tourist settings 'produce the impression that a back region has been entered even when this is not the case' (p. 589). This is illustrated in the above example, where Scotland's drug problems are used as a front-end performative spectacle of 'staged authenticity' (McCrone, Morris and Kiely, 1995, MacCannell, 2008, Black et al., 2015, McCrone, 2017); the extent to which such representations are 'authentic' can however be questioned – as discussed in the following section.

7.2.4 Beyond Stereotypes?

Though Tartanry, Kailyard and Clydesidism offer a starting point when thinking about Scottish representation, some (McArthur, 1982, Nairn, 2003) see these stereotypes as reductive, outdated, or inaccurate – most notably they flatten or omit the complexities of class, gender, region, and race. Others emphasise the hybridity of Scottish culture and argue that these traditions can intertwine in interesting ways (Brown, 2010, 2020, Torricelli, 2020). Indeed, we see this in Craig Hill's mix of Tartanry and Clydesidism, or in the repurposing of *Trainspotting* in McTavish's performance. However, the use of recognisable Scottish iconography is fairly limited in the data. Only around half of the Scottish comedy shows in the sample (17 out of 38) reference their Scottishness at all in their Fringe catalogue entry, and 3 of them reference local identity (Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Shetlands). This means that most do not employ their Scottish identity as a signifier in their marketing strategy, even if they go on to reference it in their show. There may be multiple reasons for this absence. The first and most obvious one is that national identity may simply not be very salient for these comedians. After all, national identity is just one among many social identities; its salience, 'depends on how people choose to "identify" themselves at key social moments, and for what purposes' (McCrone, 2001a, p.195).

A second factor could be that signifiers of 'Scottishness' may not carry much weight in the context of the Fringe. Keir McAllister alludes to this in his interview: 'it's a massive international festival, how many people are that interested in Scottish politics'. Though there is value in presenting a Scottish perspective, it might attract a smaller demographic. A similar dilemma is outlined by Townley and Gulledge (2015) in their discussion of 'Scottishness' in the field of publishing: 'the symbolic power of 'Scottish publishing', although having resonance, is insufficient to challenge or counterweigh the economic capital in being able to ensure markets' (p. 131). In other words, Scottishness carries symbolic capital in some instances, but there is a risk of being 'pigeonholed as Scottish' and/or being 'sidelined in London' (Townley and Gulledge, 2015, p.131).

This may well be the case in comedy considering the apparent dominance of London-based artists and critics. After all, Scottish comedians have indeed been side-lined when it comes to comedy awards according to the creators of the Scottish Comedy Awards (2013). Moreover, popular Scottish comedy shows rarely gain international recognition (Hibberd, 2010). For Keir McAllister, this may be because Scotland can be parochial in its output: 'we need to get out of this small mindedness and start going "Ok, let's write comedy for the world". And that doesn't mean to say that you have to strip all the Scottishness out of it but stop using that as a central reference point'.

Though we seem to have moved beyond the 'Scottish cultural cringe' (MacMahon, 2004, Kay, 2012), whereby Scots felt embarrassed about their own culture, this study also points to the persistence of the Scottish inferiority complex, and as McAllister observes, we remain inward-looking in terms of output. Of course, these findings show a very limited picture as they are centred on the Edinburgh Fringe. Considering the West-coast dominance of Scottish comedy, it would be interesting to see how the same comedians promote themselves at the Glasgow Comedy Festival, for example. After all, Glasgow likes to hear Glasgow, as some of the interviewees point out. This means we might see place identity being employed differently in other contexts, as 'actors play the "identity card" appropriate to the circumstances'(McCrone and Bechhofer, 2015, p.195).

7.2.5 Representing (postcolonial) Scottishness

This chapter so far has discussed the three main stereotypical representations of Scottishness. This section will go beyond the stereotypes, delving deeper into the content of the shows.

Representation, as Hall (1997) defines it, is how we give meaning to things: 'the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce…' (p. 3). Such stories are not produced in a vacuum; they circulate in a shared cultural space, where power relationships influence what we accept as truth (Foucault, 1972, 1980): what stories are told, by whom, and with what effect? (Langellier and Peterson, 2004).

In stand-up, the comic frame mediates the process of representation, but as Colleary (2015) explains, 'telling 'genuine' versions of the self is a vital and central component of stand-up' (p. 53). Of course, the craft of comedy involves a certain manipulation of the audiences' perceptions, and the presentation of the comic self is integral to this. Referencing Goffman (1956), Quirk clarifies that:

> The comedian is, therefore, arguably no more manipulative than anybody else. Yet it is clear that the persona is a manipulative device and, often, it is one that the comedian can use quite consciously to manage their audience's interpretation of their material
>
> (Quirk, 2015, p.137)

In other words, we all partake in the process of 'impression management' (Goffman, 1956), but this process might occur more consciously in a comedy show. It is a space where the 'performers encourage the reinforcement of their, or their audience's cultural identity by the use of cultural signifiers' (Brown, 2010, p.180).

This research focuses on Scottish identity, but it also acknowledges that identities always intersect. We cannot isolate Scottishness from notions of gender, class, race, and locality that give meaning to the concept. The analysis therefore takes into account not just the explicit references to national identity, but also how the performers (re)present other social identities. One of the ways in which Scottish identity can be read is through the postcolonial lens (Gardiner, 2000a, Macdonald, 2006). Connell (2003, 2004) has rightly critiqued the problematic usage of 'postcolonial' language in the Scottish context for deceptively painting Scotland with the brush of oppression (see: 4.3.4). Yet, the postcolonial narrative has gained much traction, particularly in Scottish literary studies (Farred, 2004, Gardiner, 2006, Homberg-Schramm, 2018), but also in popular culture, as evidenced by *Trainspotting*'s famous 'colonized by wankers' quote (Welsh, 2011, p.78).

This research too points to the ways in which postcolonial discourses frame popular understandings of Scottish identities. The narrative of a historically oppressed Scotland is evoked quite explicitly by some comedians (e.g., Hardeep Singh Kohli, Bruce Fummey), and Scotland's inferiority complex emerges through self-deprecating humour. Additionally, the representations of gender (male anxieties), race (marginalised minorities), and class (myth of egalitarianism) also fit the narrative of a postcolonial nation. However, the use of postcolonial concepts in this study should not be understood as an endorsement of a colonial historical narrative of Scotland. Rather, it shows that regardless of historical material conditions, a postcolonial lens can help to explain the current cultural conceptualisations of Scottish identity. These elements will be discussed further, to examine how postcoloniality emerges in the performances.

7.2.5.1 A man is a man for a' that

A very clear example of postcolonial discourse can be seen in Hardeep Singh Kohli's narrative of the nation. He jokes with English audience members ('thanks for coming and colonising') and reinforces a distinction from England by emphasising Scotland's egalitarianism. Indeed, egalitarianism comes up in many of the performances and interviews – for example, McTavish, Lafferty, and McAllister all describe Scotland as a more open and left-leaning society than England. Though there is evidence to suggest that Scotland is in fact currently further left of the political spectrum than England, the differences are not as wide as is generally thought (Mann and Fenton, 2017a). As Morton (2011) observes, 'Scotland's social class structure has increasingly converged with that of Great Britain to the point that they are almost indistinguishable' (p. 87). For McCrone (2001a), it is precisely because of the similarities between the two nations that the myth of egalitarianism persists: 'It is an ideological device for marking off the Scots from the English, which seems to grow in importance the more the two societies grow similar' (p. 103).

While Egalitarian values are not uniquely Scottish, the myth does form an integral part of Scottish nationalist discourse. As one MSP asserts, 'we are *naturally* egalitarian and communitarian in spirit' (George Reid cited in Newby, 2009, p.313, own emphasis). The word 'naturally' is particularly significant here because it endows Scots with essentialist characteristics. In this version of the narrative Scots are seen as 'primordially equal', while inequalities are judged to be 'man-made' (McCrone, 2001a, p.91). McCrone explains these assumptions, claiming that an activist interpretation of the egalitarian myth 'takes the

coexistence of man-made inequality and primordial equality, and argues for an active resolution of this apparent anomaly in favour of social equality' (p. 91). This is evident in Singh Kohli's performance, as he simultaneously presents Scots as naturally egalitarian, while also critiquing existing social inequalities in the country. This forms the basis of his call for activism, to 'take responsibility of our community in our country' [Singh Kohli].

Crucially, the egalitarian myth also lends itself to postcolonial interpretation. A historical analysis can point to the apparent egalitarian structures of Scottish church and education, best illustrated by the 'lad o' pairts' tradition, which also designated social class divisions as an 'alien importation from England' (Maxwell, 1976, p.5). A contemporary version of the same narrative persists: policies like free tuition or free prescriptions can serve as evidence of Scotland's egalitarian spirit (and its divergence from England). At the same time, the very real material inequalities in Scotland can be understood as a result of a Westminster Government that does not prioritise Scotland.

This 'neo-colonial' (Gardiner, 2004b, p.ix) rhetoric is crucial to the Independence movement. As interviewee Bruce Fummey puts it, 'Margaret Thatcher did more for the Scottish National Party than the Scottish National Party ever did'. The anti-Thatcherite sentiment in 1980s Scotland, and additionally, the austerity policies of a Conservative Government in the 2000s helped to solidify the idea of a Democratic deficit: 'the notion of an 'alien' government imposing its neo-colonial will has intensified, considerably reducing the recurrent question mark over the point and the necessity of independence from Britain' (Macdonald, 2006, p.120). This viewpoint has only strengthened as the past general elections have once again resulted in a UK Government that does not seem to reflect Scottish values. Independence can then be framed as a pragmatic answer to a constitutional question. No longer about ethnic claims, or cultural homogeneity, the neo-colonial narrative opposes the political system of the UK for being undemocratic and unrepresentative of Scotland's interests.

Remnants of anti-Thatcherism and current anti-Tory sentiment are present in many of the comedy shows. McTavish serves a strong critique of Thatcher as he labels her 'an evil cunt' [McTavish], while Singh Kohli highlights the ideological divide in the UK when he tells the audience 'I couldn't vote Conservative because I would have been put out the house' [Singh Kohli]. Conservative ideology is thus presented as something in the fringes of society, rather than the mainstream. Bruce Fummey, for example, makes a dig at the UK Government's Prevent strategy, while reinforcing the notion of Conservatism as alien in Scotland: 'what

would count as extremist views in rural Perthshire? If a 14-year-old boy tells me he's joined the young Conservatives?' Scottish politics, it would seem, has been shaped by popular narratives 'of class and nation, of calling ourselves Centre-Left and anti-Tory' (Torrance, 2012, p.85).

Of course, by highlighting their working-class identity, Scots paradoxically reinforce class-hierarchy: 'their inclination to relate to the lower rungs on the ladder, in contrast to the English, reveals that rather than implying a class*less* society, the egalitarian belief suggests a different class society to England' (Morton, 2011, p.91). The narrative is nonetheless a powerful one, with implications for the construction of national identity. More specifically, this association of national identity with working-class membership seems to result in a psychological attachment to working-class identity, regardless of one's objective class status. In other words, those who proclaim a middle-class status and/or vote Conservative are likely to be seen as less Scottish. McDonald points to this with his prediction of the 'middle-class just en masse relocating south post-independence'. However, the asymmetric relationship between Scotland and England is highlighted as he jokes that 'they will get to the border and realise England have rebuilt Hadrian's Wall…It's now being patrolled by gun-toting Morris men' [McDonald].

The data shows that those who are middle-class tend to emphasise their mobility story or other working-class credentials, as is the case with McArthur Boyd, Ashley Storrie, and Fern Brady. While some studies have noted that 'the language of class is in retreat' in Britain (Bennett et al., 2009, p.211), and in some cases, an active disavowal of working-class identity is taking place, it would seem that the opposite is found in Scotland. The implicit association between working-class status and Scottish identity leads to a sense of 'middle-class guilt', which Bell (2004, p.98) explains as the 'feeling that one cannot be authentically Scottish if also middle-class'. Fern Brady's dislike of posh Scottish people illustrates this well; 'posh Scottish people wanna be English', she says. The kind of Scottish Anglicisation that Brady refers to is linked to the notion of English cultural imperialism, i.e., the assertion of a cultural hegemony by an 'Anglocentric elite' (Connell, 2003, p.49).

In postcolonial discourse, Scots' 'Anglicised' behaviour can be explained as the product of their desire to appear 'civilised in the face of cultural-hierarchies that refuse to recognise Scottishness as capable of civilization' (Connell, 2003, p.44). The very notion of 'civilised' behaviour is, of course, a loaded and contested concept. Mills' (2017) work on English politeness and class shows that 'British' codes of politeness (i.e., reserved, impersonal, indirect

communication, RP English), have traditionally been used to demarcate Britain from its colonies. As Craig (1996) puts it, 'it is not by our colour that we have stood to be recognised as incomplete within the British context, it is by the colour of our vowels' (p. 12). Craig's comment usefully illustrates the link between class, accent, and national identity. Though the presumption of whiteness embedded in his analysis is problematic, he does show how discourses of class racialise Scots as the Other to Britain's "dominant cultural group." (Connell, 2003, p.43). Indeed, as McCrone points out, 'Scotland was not only configured by class conflict, but some even spoke of the country as a class in and of itself. Describing Scotland as an "ethno-class colony" of England…' (McCrone, 2001a, p.78).

In Fern Brady's performance, we see this notion of a distinctive ethno-class. Though she is self-conscious about her own working-class style of speech (which she describes as a 'disgusting guttural accent'), the inauthenticity of posh Scottish accents is worse. By mimicking the English, Scots wear the 'mask' of the coloniser as some would put it (See: Beveridge and Turnbull, 1989, Craig, 1996): they internalise the culture and ideology of the dominant group and devalue their own. This assimilation can be read as a mark of subjugation (Stroh, 2016, p.10); being Anglicised is not the same as being English (Bhabha, 1984, p.130), as Brady observes.

Accent is also an important marker of identity, particularly for non-white Scots like Singh Kohli and Bruce Fummey. In Fummey's case, accent is seen as the only significant marker of national identity: 'if you come out with the right accent, you're Scottish'. Singh Kohli emphasises accent as marker of difference: 'when I hear an English accent in Scotland, it seems to cut through the air'. The importance given to accent and Scottish language more generally (Jay Lafferty, for example, discusses Scots in her performance) can be seen as a form resistance to linguistic and cultural Anglicisation. Though linguistic oppression is not as central to nationalism in Scotland compared to Wales or Ireland, it is nonetheless a grievance that some Scots express. Singh Kohli, for example, critiques the 'oppressive nature of the English media' for devaluing Scottish language and culture.

The concept of mimicry can be applied here but from a different perspective. In Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008 [1952]), and in the subsequent employment of his work to Scottish postcolonialism (Beveridge and Turnbull, 1989, Craig, 1996), mimicry is interpreted negatively: it is the effects of an internalised ideology and sense of inferiority. However, mimicry can also be understood as a subversive act, as Bhabha (1984) proposes: 'the menace

of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority' (Bhabha, 1984, p.129). This is illustrated by Christopher K.C., a Glaswegian comic of East Asian descent who talks about others' reactions to his Glaswegian accent: 'I was at a house party in Glasgow and someone came up to me and said "some people are not happy about your impersonation of a Scottish accent. Frankly they find it racially insensitive"'.

The unease felt by some at the encounter of 'mimicry' illustrates Bhabha's point about its subversiveness: 'the observer becomes the observed and "partial" representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity and alienates it from essence' (Bhabha, 1984, p.129). In Fern Brady's example earlier, the incongruity of being posh and Scottish relies on an essentialist notion of identity: the accent is seen as a mask that hides one's true self. In Christopher K.C.'s performance, however, the incongruity of an East Asian ethnicity with a strong Glaswegian accent is presented as an authentic hybridity: 'this is genuinely my real voice' he says. From this perspective, 'mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask' (Bhabha, 1984, p.129).

Setting aside the question of authenticity, however, it must be noted that non-white Scots encounter misrecognition and have to work harder to prove their Scottishness. As Christopher K.C.'s example illustrates, racial presumptions about Scottish identity still exist, even if minorities are accepted into the fold under certain conditions. To quote Bhabha (1984) again, racial minorities might be seen as 'almost the same but not quite'– or indeed, 'almost the same but not *white*' (p. 130). Scotland has, after all, had its own problems with racism (Davidson et al., 2018), and as scholars have noted, "classic" representations of Scottish identity tend to be white and male (Prieto Arranz, 2004, Murray, Farley and Stoneman, 2009, p.102, Leith and Soule, 2011).

The discourse of race in Scotland is complicated by the fact that Celts were historically considered Other, with thinkers like Robert Knox and John Pinkerton emphasising the distinction between Lowland Scotland as 'ethnically Teutonic and Saxon, as opposed to the 'Celtic' Highlands' (Pittock, 2001, p.14). The notion of the 'wildness, savagery and uncivilized indolence of the Highlander' (Pittock, 2001, p.14) has some parallels to the colonial discourse of overseas British colonies. At the height of British Imperialism, the 'barbaric Other' rhetoric justified enforced displacement of locals from their land, as well as 'civilising missions' aimed to tame and modernise colonised territories (Stroh, 2016, p.19). In Scotland, the Highland

Clearances serve as a concrete example of such colonial practice, though perhaps one that is 'internal' in nature (Hechter, 1975, Stroh, 2016). The ethnic divisions within the empire are further illustrated by the great famine in Ireland, which was exacerbated by the British government. The famine produced mass displacement of the Irish population, many of whom settled in the West of Scotland (Devine, 2012, Walker, 2016b).

This brings us back to the Scottish egalitarian myth, which as Davidson et al. (2018) observe, also contains an element of racial inclusiveness. Scotland tends to be seen as more tolerant of diversity compared to England:

> The myth of an egalitarian society – one that is more inclusive, more welcoming of migrants and with more progressive attitudes towards minorities when compared to England – is one of the most enduring and powerful
>
> (Davidson et al., 2018, p.63)

The anti-colonial tradition in Scotland can be a point of 'relative commonality' for some ethnic minorities (Mycock, 2012, Davidson et al., 2018, Devine and McCarthy, 2018). As one respondent in Hussain and Miller's (2006) study explains, 'Scots understand colonialism – from their past history they understand what ethnic minorities feel' (p. 16).

Colonial history is also referenced in the present study. Despite being from Glasgow, Singh Kohli feels a deep connection to the Highlands and sees their colonial oppression as part of Glasgow's history: Highlanders who came to the city during the Clearances would meet under the 'Hielanman's Umbrella' he says, and for him, 'a major part of Glasgow's friendliness is the Highland influence'. He explains his own familial connection to highland ancestry: 'my wee brother married a lassie from Lewis. So we have Highland blood in the family, which is such a point of pride for me'. He also draws comparisons between Punjabi/Sikh and Glaswegian culture, and asserts that both have socialist politics and egalitarianism as part of their heritage (Also see: Ballantyne, 2006). This shows that the symbolism of ancestral origin does not necessarily lead to an exclusionary ethnic nationalism. Rather, history is repurposed for the (left-leaning) political aims of the present. The 'history of Scotland as an emigrant sending nation' (Meer, 2015, p.11) can serve as further justification for Scotland's openness, as highlighted by Lafferty: 'Scotland will always, I hope, welcome people from all over the world. Cause we went all over the world' [Jay Lafferty].

This ‘inclusive’ vision of Scotland is, as Leith and Soule (2011) demonstrate, prevalent in elite conceptions of the nation. The SNP in particular has sought to distinguish itself as a party for social equality. Since the 1990s at least, the party’s re-articulation of its political message ‘encouraged a rejection of exclusory ethnic constructions of Scottish nationalism that had typified the SNP’s understanding of the nation’ in the past (Mycock, 2012, p.55). An ethnically inclusive civic nationalism has dominated in the past few decades, and it is the assertion of social democratic values rather than some nostalgic notion of ‘ancestral tradition’ that drives contemporary Scottish (political) nationalism (Jackson, 2020, p.3). However, as Jackson (2020) explains, no nationalism can in practice ‘restrict itself to a purely political national identity, since it is necessary to substantiate and legitimate that identity in each case by reference to a particular (and unchosen) history and culture’ (p. 3). In other words, just as the ethno-symbolist school would suggest, history does play a role. The examples from the data show that Scotland’s multi-ethnic origins, anti-colonial tradition, and status as an emigrant nation contribute to the myth of egalitarianism that fuels contemporary Scottish nationalism.

7.2.5.2 Bella Caledonia

In contrast to the political nationalism outlined above, Scottish identity can also be understood through psycho-analytic analogies. As Nairn (2003) explains, the Scottish nation has a ‘split personality’: it is paradoxically strong in the sense of its cultural identity, and weak in the sense of a national political consciousness (Nairn, 2003, pp.161–162). In both cases, however, a psychological diagnosis of the nation is provided, which is linked to its (self-)colonisation. Examples of this are seen in the data through references to the ‘Scottish psyche’ [Vladimir McTavish], and its propensity to express pride and shame simultaneously [Gary Little; Vladimir McTavish; Rosco McClelland]. Sectarianism emerges as a recurring source of shame, though this is contrasted with a tongue-in-cheek sense of pride – ‘we are very good at it’ [Rosco McClelland].

As scholars have noted, nationalism is a gendered discourse (Nagel, 1998, Schoene, 2004, 2018). In countries that have ‘struggled against a colonising “father”’, gender matters even more so (Reizbaum 1992, cited in Stirling, 2008, p.78). This is a point expressed by Hendry:

> Being a woman is difficult enough. But being a Scottish woman is more difficult still because of Scotland's position as an oppressed colony of England, and a nation with severe psychological hang-ups.
>
> (Hendry 1987 cited in Stirling, 2008, p.78)

Though the nation is often affirmed through feminine metaphors (e.g., motherland) and representations (e.g., Britannia), it is men who define and defend the nation. Indeed, the fear of an enemy penetrating the nation's borders gives purpose to such things as a ministry of defence. In the case of Scotland, the nation is, at least in the minds of many independence supporters, already under the control of external forces.

It is telling that the nation as a 'victim' is also presented through a gendered analogy in the data. Hardeep Singh Kohli provides a clear example with the assertion that Scotland is like a 'battered wife' who stays with her abusive husband: 'We're told "oh you got the Barnett formula". That's like "here's twenty quid for the week love. Go make yourself pretty." You know? We've got our income sequester'. The nation as a victim is used again by another comedian, who tells his audience: 'voting Conservative is a bit like domestic abuse isn't it? You're never going to own up to a stranger if you do it' [McTavish]. This can be read as the reproduction of the 'woman-nation-victim allegory' found in some Scottish writing (Stirling, 2008, p.77). The victim-abuser interpretation also ties in with the once popular theory of 'core-periphery' dependency in the relationship between Scotland and England (Wallerstein, 1974, Hechter, 1975, Smout, 1980, Steed, 1986, Stroh, 2016).

Women have historically been 'relegated to the margins of polity' (Kandiyoti, 1991, p.429), and denied agency over their own lives – voting rights and abortion laws serve as two examples of this. Consequently, the lived experience of nationhood is 'gender-specifically disparate' (Schoene, 2004, p.85). We see this in the data with the contrast between Hardeep Singh Kohli, for whom locality and nation represent belonging, and Fern Brady, for whom the nation could be interpreted as a dangerous space. Though women symbolise the nation, they play a paradoxical role: 'women *are* the landscape, just as they *are* the nation, but they do not inhabit the landscape' (Stirling, 2008, p.23).

Due to Scotland's predicament as a nation without a state, the landscape is often depicted in contradictory ways, as both beautiful and deformed (Stirling, 2008). Just as a woman's beauty

is often juxtaposed with the notion of deception, i.e., the angel/devil dichotomy (1989), the 'photogenic and attractive appearance of Scotland' can be said to mask its 'monstrous political reality'(Stirling, 2008, p.93) – or indeed its monstrous social reality. This is illustrated by McTavish's performance as he contrasts the 'scenic beauty' and 'splendour' of Edinburgh and the islands with the 'hellish' and 'grim' parts of the Central Belt. But we also see other contrasts ('postcard' Edinburgh and 'crack den' Leith, Highlands/islands and Urban areas, or Edinburgh and Glasgow), that illustrate the so-called 'Caledonian Antisyzygy'.

To return to the 'psychology' of the nation, we have two issues that connect to gender. First, the external gaze of the state and of the 'sons of the nation' disciplines the behaviour of women. The weight of gendered expectations is expressed by many of the female comedians – one example is Jay Lafferty's objection to the unequal codes of morality embedded in Scots language (i.e., Besom as a slur used for women and not men). Secondly, the patriarchal notions within nationalism (the nation as mother/home, the male citizen as defending the nation from attack) places the men in a state of crisis. If we take the modernist definition of nationalism as a 'political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent' (Gellner, 1983, p.1), then Scotland's predicament makes it 'monstrous' in some way (Stirling, 2008). This notion is quite emotively expressed by Nairn (1997, 2003), who repeatedly uses the gendered metaphor of a 'castrated' and 'impotent' Scotland. The psychological trauma of this 'castration' is said to lead to an 'inferiority complex' (Beveridge and Turnbull, 1989, Craig, 2011), overcompensated for with hypermasculinity in the case of Scotland.

Sectarianism is one way in which hypermasculinity is expressed in Scotland. As MacMillan (2000, p.15) describes it, sectarianism is part of the national unconscious – it is 'sleep-walking bigotry'. Scott Agnew's performance offers an example of how entrenched these identities are, as the seemingly incompatible worlds of football and queer masculinity combine:

> a kink tends to be something that scares you the most at some point then you fetishize it into something that turns you on. A bit of sports kit, I'll be in my Celtic top, you'll be in your Rangers top. Cause even in the gay community in Glasgow, the sectarianism isn't going away.

Though sportswear is a popular fetish in queer spaces more generally, the sectarian slant makes this anecdote particularly Scottish. The fetishization of football and sectarianism is, as he himself admits, the product of fear. Growing up in a heteronormative and religious

environment, his homosexuality transgresses the boundaries of acceptability (of the Church at least), and as Meek (2015) observes, 'non-heterosexual Christians are more likely to suffer from feelings of anxiety and guilt related to their sexual orientation' (p. 138). The myth of the 'homophobic, sectarian, hard-drinking, violent, working-class Glaswegian male of industrial Clydeside', combined with institutionalised homophobia, can have powerful effects that last into adulthood (Meek, 2015, p.158). Agnew's struggle with mental health and his attempted suicide are perhaps real-life examples of such effects.

Masculinity is not only in crisis for queer men, however. Rick Carranza's struggle with masculinity and mental health occur despite his heterosexual identity. In Carranza's case, it is his love of Star Trek that makes him an outsider. Football is used as a way to perform heteronormative masculinity: 'suddenly, because I had that [football knowledge] I could go to the pub and I could make conversation… I fitted in'. The separation between his private self ('Trekkie') and public self (football fan) mirrors the homo (private)/ 'straight-acting' (public) performance that many queer men engage in (Zhu, 2016). Both Carranza and Agnew thus illustrate how, in a heteronormative society like Scotland, masculinity becomes 'fragile and anxiety-ridden', and 'continuous boundary work [is] being done to uphold and defend the heterosexual order' (Haywood et al., 2017, p.64).

The myth of a hypermasculine Scottish identity and the gendered analysis of the nation, started long before devolution. Nairn's (2003 [1977]) diagnosis of Scotland's 'neurotic' state as a 'castrated nation' is particularly influential in the early 80s; McArthur's (1982) seminal analysis of Scottish cinema also emerges in the 80s, and mirrors Nairn's argument of a deformed Scotland. McArthur (1982) critiques the 'stunting effects Tartanry and Kailyard have had', favouring instead the 'realistic' depictions of male, working-class struggle found in 'Clydesider' films (p. 52). However, Scotland has seen dramatic political and social change in more recent decades, which have affected national identity (Bechhofer and McCrone, 2009, McLeish and Brown, 2012, Bond, 2015). As Turner (2017) points out, 'devolution exposed the construction of national identity and in doing so disoriented the ideas of Scottishness that had been imagined across twentieth century Scottish nationalism' (p. 307).

This 'crisis' of identity need not be viewed negatively, however. Rather, it can be considered an opportunity to re-imagine a different Scotland. This is the argument made during the Yes campaign by those who envision post-independence Scotland as a blank slate:

> the event of independence would constitute radical rupture from the past, destroying the Union, yet opening a timespace of creative potential for (re)generative reconstruction.
>
> (Manley, 2019, p.16)

Turner (2017) offers a similar analysis with regard to Scottish masculinity post-devolution. The disorientation caused by devolution is viewed as 'a productive state through which Scotland's identity – and hegemonic power structures more widely – are renegotiated' (p. 307). Consequently, we see a move away from traditional hypermasculinity towards a 'queering' of Scottish identity. Queering here is not narrowly defined as LGBT; rather, it is broadly understood as an attempt to 'disrupt the regulating patriarchal heteronormative construction of nationhood' (Turner, 2017, p.8). Thus, in Turner's (2017) argument, not only has Scotland become more tolerant of different gender expressions and sexualities, but this trend is indicative of a fundamental change in the construction of Scottish identity.

Though it is impossible to know for certain how lasting these changes are, it is fair to say that a re-evaluation of Scottish identity has taken place in the last few decades. An unexpected finding that emerged from the present research was the re-negotiation of Scottish male identity by the performers. There is a rupture with the past, and a re-imagining of the future when it comes to masculinity. As Gibson explains, 'you would raise kids differently back then… through fear' [Scott Gibson]. Both Mark Nelson and Scott Gibson highlight the need for more open discussions about fatherhood and masculinity more generally, and Nelson talks about the challenges of being a stay-at-home dad. Other comedians like Christopher McArthur Boyd, Gareth Waugh and Rick Carranza openly discuss their feeling of inadequacy as straight men, while Scott Agnew and Andrew Sim present their experiences as queer. Though the problematic elements of Scottish masculinity continue to be referenced (i.e., violence, sectarianism, football), the performers have also opened up a space for a different kind of masculinity, one that is less rigid in its parameters.

7.3 RQ2: What are the political elements of Scottish stand-up?

In this study, the political is tied to performativity and identity, as discussed in sections 2.3.2 and 3.3.3. The performative is political because 'any speech act or other form of bodily conduct is necessarily performed within a social space of potential, if not actual, contestation' (Glass

and Rose-Redwood, 2014, p.13). Similarly, in discourse analysis the political is understood as the 'the ever present possibility of antagonism' (Mouffe, 2005, p.17). The 'political' therefore expands beyond the realm of governmental institutions. For Schechner, artistic performances always sit somewhere on a continuum between efficacy if it seeks to 'effect transformations', and entertainment if it is done 'for its own sake' (Schechner, 2003, p.130). The purpose of stand-up comedy can be categorised along similar lines: political efficacy on one end, and laughter affect on the other. This requires reflection on 'how political meaning is conveyed' (Roussel and Banerji, 2016, p.14), as well as the intent of the artist. The politics of 'doing art' is also important to consider. This can be defined as 'the specific social relations through which the art and the artist are socially constituted' (Roussel and Banerji, 2016, p.14). This is particularly relevant when looking at the complexities of the Edinburgh Fringe.

The Scottish comedians interviewed in this study gave various answer with regard to the function of stand-up, with a distinction drawn between Fringe and non-Fringe shows. Stand-up outside of the Fringe is described as primarily entertainment: 'you're there to make people laugh – that is the job' [Jay Lafferty], whereas the Fringe festival is a space where serious issues can be addressed more effectively because of the freedom it affords, and the longer format of the shows. Though stand-up comedy is 'used in various ways and for different reasons' (Chattoo and Feldman, 2020, p.142), Scottish comedians tend to view comedy as having at least the *potential* for political efficacy, whether that is by educating the audience on particular issues, calling out injustices and speaking truth to power, or even changing people's attitudes. The Edinburgh Fringe in particular is a carnivalesque space where such political contestations can take place. The following section will discuss these elements in more detail, starting with the political nature of the Fringe.

7.3.1 What is 'political' about the Edinburgh Fringe?

As Bakhtin tells us, carnivals celebrate 'temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order' (Bakhtin, 1984, p.10). The month of August in Edinburgh can be viewed through this 'carnivalesque' lens (Bakhtin, 1984, Jamieson, 2004); it is political precisely because of its potential to break down hierarchies and transgress quotidian social order. As Igrek (2017) highlights, 'the freedom of imagination is itself a transformative process' (p. 248); moreover, the ephemeral nature of live performance 'conjures up the precarious "emptiness" of the now, and, in so doing, provides a distinctive force opposed to the representational economy in which we live' (Thrift, 2008, p.233). This kind of transgression can be found in

abundance at the Fringe: every year is unique, with different shows and unexpected performances. As the Fringe Society puts it, 'anything and everything goes': Edinburgh is completely transformed as 'unknown spaces morph into Fringe stages' and normal hours of operation are extended, turning the city into a '24/7 celebration of arts and culture' (Street et al., n.d.).

It is hard to deny the carnivalesque spirit of the Fringe as we consider its origins (performers rebelling against the more established Edinburgh International Festival), and its enduring capacity to break from the constraints of everyday life. As some scholars emphasise (Highmore, 2001, Crichlow, 2013, Igrek, 2017), carnivalesque spaces have the potential to be 'mobilized against the capitalist system' (Jamieson, 2004, p.68). Indeed, some of the comedians point to the liberating aspect of the Fringe – unlike the comedy club setting during the other 11 months of the year, Edinburgh in August is not about making money (for the performers at least); it is a place where they can deliver their own creative vision and social commentary.

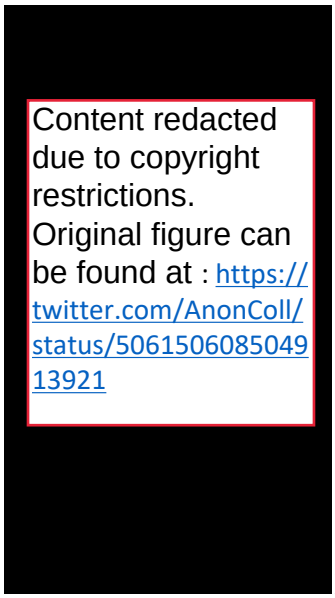

Figure 12: Anonymous collective (2014)

The comedians also suggest that antagonism exists between local and global, between Scotland and England, and between competing interests (the city council, the residents, new artists/established artists, reviewers, critics, audiences, tourist industry, businesses, etc.). In contrast to the anti-capitalist hopes of the carnival literature above, the Fringe can be viewed as 'a model neo-liberal capitalist market, with all the collateral social damages that entails' (Harvie, 2020, p.103). The free market logic of the Fringe makes it a highly competitive 'jungle' (Gardner, 2015): to stand out, performers need to open their wallets and their overdrafts. The high financial cost of performing (and even attending) the festival thus creates a barrier for those without the means to participate, and exploits the many who do (Jamieson, 2004, Saville, 2017a, Harvie, 2020) – something that McAllister emphasises in the interview.

Borrowing from critical urban theories (De Certeau, 1984, Gardiner, 2000b, Lefebvre, 2016), the Fringe can be viewed as colonisation of everyday life: it 'invades every possible nook, cranny, stinking underground bar, dilapidated university building and public toilet of Scotland's capital and calls it a venue' (Bano, 2016). The excitement of the festival disappears

just as quickly, leaving behind debris, empty venues, and overpriced flats (Saville, 2017b) leading locals to ask: 'what about the other eleven months?' (see Figure 12). For Shin et al (2006), colonisation in this context is 'denoted by the concept of cultural festivals being tools of economic development and image improvement' (p. 3). They draw on Habermas' concept of the 'colonisation of the lifeworld' (Habermas, 2015, Khan, 2019) to highlight the tensions between the system that plans and manages a festival space, and the lifeworld of civil society.

As Edinburgh competes for tourists and investors, the festival becomes a way to 'attract a wealthy target market' (Jamieson, 2004, p.66). The unregulated free market of the Fringe demands little accountability from venue owners and managers, and despite the incredible profits made by those at the top, poor working conditions and low-paid/unpaid work for those at the bottom are the glue that holds the festival together. As McAllister explains, 'the only people who are making money out of it are the promoters', and the result is a festival that is 'elitist' and 'corporate' [McAllister]. This 'colonisation of the lifeworld' disproportionately affects people of colour and working-class artists, who are less likely to receive support or promotion compared to their white, middle-class counterparts (Wolfe-Robinson, 2019). The Edinburgh Fringe runs the risk of becoming, like many other arts festival around the world, a commodified 'carnival for élites' (Waterman, 1998, p.69, Langman and Ryan, 2009, Braun and Langman, 2012). We can interpret the Fringe festival then as a site for political struggle as it raises the questions: who has the 'right to the city' (Harvey, 2008, Brenner, Marcuse and Mayer, 2012, Lefebvre, 2016)? and 'whose festival is it anyway' (McCrone, 2019, p.301)?

The Fringe might not have any formal gatekeepers – 'No individual or committee determines who can or cannot perform at the Fringe' (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, 2017, p.5) – but 'tastemakers' like critics and reviewers perform that function informally (Shrum, 1996, Frew and Ali-Knight, 2010, Friedman, 2014b). The comedians interviewed have a love-hate relationship with tastemakers; they search for recognition but are critical of the disproportionate influence that awards have on the direction of comedy: 'there's been a cultural change and the awards people drive that' [Fummey]. This cultural shift results in more 'serious' or cerebral types of comedy. A similar point is made by Godley, who chastises the overly analytical comedian, who is more concerned with discussing comedy than actually 'doing' it; and Marc Jennings, who observes a trend in comedy awards towards the narrative of trauma.

Despite its open and welcoming ethos, the financial barriers of the festival, and its unofficial gatekeepers (venues, promoters, reviewers) make the festival exclusionary. Importantly, the

structure of the Fringe appears to exclude Scottish performers, who make up a very small proportion of the Fringe:

> it is an international festival, but less than 10% I think, of the acts in the festival are Scottish and less than… I would say none of those have any funding from any kind of agency other than themselves […] I mean it's not that we should be over-represented at the Fringe, but we should be represented! [Keir McAllister]

The interviewees have also pointed to forms of resistance against the white, middle-class and English homogenisation of the Fringe. Lafferty turned her Fringe show 'Besoms' into a regular comedy night that showcases under-represented performers – 'funny people need opportunities' she says. McAllister and McTavish see the Free Fringe, despite its flaws, as an alternative, fairer space within the festival. The Scottish Comedy Festival, which also runs within the Fringe, offers more visibility for Scottish comedians. As scholars have noted, people will find creative ways to resist (Jamieson, 2004, Shin, Stevens and Kim, 2006, Munro and Jordan, 2013) despite attempts by the 'system' to colonise the festival.

7.3.2 What is 'political' about Scottish comedy?

Political comedy tends to be understood as 'humour that directly addresses the content of the political sphere' (Holm, 2017, p.62), in other words, humour that satirises or comments on Government and politicians. In this sense, McTavish's observation that 'Theresa May looks like she has just been raised from the dead' fits the category, as does this analogy: 'Ruth Davidson enjoying marriage equality is like that guy in Tiananmen square enjoying a tank ride' [Richard Brown]. Yet, despite their subject matter, the first example does not take a political stance (rather, it ridicules the individual), while the second points to the flaws (and contradictions) of Conservative ideology. This illustrates complexities of the 'political' label. What we take to be political comedy might engage with politics as a subject matter without necessarily doing 'political work' (see: 3.3.3).

In Britain, comedy about politics enjoys continued success, but as Wagg (2005) points out, it has relied on 'political consensus':

> when making fun of politicians, you made fun of them all… if your comedy was to flow from a specific political position (invariably, in practice, a left position) you accepted the responsibilities of that position and became an activist (p. 266).

Though the consensus may have changed since Wagg's (2005) observation, a distinction could still be made between comedians who satirise politics more generally, like Keir McAllister and Vladimir McTavish, and political activists who 'leverage' comedy for specific social and political goals (Chattoo and Feldman, 2020), which some have dubbed "laughtivism" (Popović and Djinovic, 2018). This is a point made by Lafferty. She sees comedians like John Oliver as taking on the activist role: 'what he does is a bit different', and it has the potential to have a tangible political impact. Lafferty's goal is more micro: 'you can make people feel better or feel heard'.

7.3.2.1 The Gender Politics of Comedy

The social construction of political comedy is particularly relevant here as this thesis is concerned with identity. If the social processes defining comedy as 'political' or 'apolitical' are not neutral, then we can interrogate how *identity* influences this construction. Though stand-up is a live medium, mainstream success is largely dependent on television appearances (Aston and Harris, 2013, p.160), and the kind of political comedy with the most reach tends to be male-centred (e.g., *The Daily show*, *Last Week Tonight*, *Mock the Week*, *Have I got News for You…*). In panel shows, the humour emerges from the 'fast-paced, insult-based, banter between the panellists' (Weber, 2017, p.43).

Just as Singh Kohli and Lafferty observe (see: page 154), panel shows have traditionally been male spaces, that have been defensive about their lack of diversity. *Mock the Week* in particular has been accused of encouraging 'cruel and sneering attitudes' (Davies and Ilott, 2018, p.49), and being 'one of the most unwelcoming panel shows towards women' (Weber, 2017, p.54). Some scholars have dubbed this the 'crass ceiling', defined by Webber (2013b, p.79) as 'the seemingly shifting invisible limit (or tolerance) for a woman's public mode of the expression of humor' (p. 79). Though more and more women are (self-)described as political comedians, men still dominate in this subfield, and some continue to ask the age old question: are women even funny? (BBC, 2019).

Much of what we consider to be political comedy, including the panel shows referenced above, relies on a hostile form of humour that ridicules individuals, rather than providing a substantial critique of the political system. The near endless number of comic jabs at Trump's 'psychotic satsuma' appearance [Keir McAllister] is a case in point. Because of cultural and gendered expectations, such reliance on ridicule can be perceived as a masculine style of humour (Hakola, 2019, p.43). Of course, as Gilbert (2004) has noted, comedy in general can be

considered ‘aggressive’, but that does not mean that it is ‘inherently male’ (p. 173). To put it another way, ‘female comics are not being “male” by being aggressively funny’ (Gilbert, 2004, p.173).

However, there can be structural barriers that hold women back from doing comedy. Jay Lafferty suggests that childcare responsibilities, or fewer points of entry can be detrimental. When comparing the comedy scene in Scotland and England, Lafferty claims that ‘the vehicle for pushing women forward in London is a little bit more intense’, though she acknowledges this is likely driven by higher demand. In any case, it is relevant to note that very few Scottish comedians make it to panel shows down south, let alone Scottish female comedians (Fern Brady is a recent exception). Those who follow the comedy scene in Scotland will likely have come across the ‘Queen of Scottish comedy’, Janey Godley (Brooks, 2019); or Jay Lafferty, whose joke about Theresa May’s Brexit deal on Breaking the News made it to the New York Times front page (The Newsroom, 2019); or Isla Nelson, the 3-year-old ‘political influencer’ who won a Scottish Comedy Award in 2017 (BBC, 2017, Sanghani, 2018). Despite a wealth of female talent, the comedy scene in Scotland continuous to be ‘overwhelmingly male-dominated’, and has ‘an “insidious” culture of sexual harassment and exploitation’ according to some commentators (Horne, 2020).

7.3.2.2 The political aesthetics of comedy

If we are to understand how comedy operates politically, it is important to look beyond subject matter. The aesthetics of comedy, i.e., its form and structure, can be understood with reference to the main theories of humour discussed in the literature review (superiority, relief, and incongruity). But this must be combined with the analysis of political efficacy: to what extent is it conserving social norms or rebelling against them? For example, MacAulay’s bit about Brexit clearly has a ‘disciplinary’ function (Bergson, 1911, Billig, 2005):

> What we have learned is that it was a demonstration of democracy, and I dare say, there might be some people here who voted Leave and you are perfectly entitled to do that. Anybody vote Leave? [One person cheers] Well don’t let us keep you, fuck off! [MacAulay]

The humour here relies on incongruity as the punchline forces a cognitive shift from Leave (Brexit) to leave (the room). With the latter meaning, the joke is rendered less politically

offensive, but there is nonetheless a hint of mockery that serves as a social corrective. Rather than subvert social norms, MacAulay re-enforces the Remain identity of Scotland.

A more 'subversive' example can be found in Daniel Sloss' comedy, which is political in its aesthetic form:

> People are raised to think that life is precious… it's not […]
>
> [if you could pick someone to be killed without repercussions] Can you honestly tell me you don't think you would be able to make the world a better place?
>
> [Silence]
>
> I know, it's uncomfortable right?
>
> I would pick Trump. He seems like a bad egg.

Trump is merely the backdrop for the joke here, as the humour emerges from the discomfort that Sloss creates for the audience. Following Freud's relief theory, we can interpret this comic bit as a safe manifestation of repressed aggression. It creates tension but does not resolve it – or resolves it only partially, and challenges prevailing norms of behaviour (i.e., that killing is always bad). As Sloss calls upon the audience to question hegemonic values, he opens up a space for the political.

We can further analyse the political elements of comedy through the lens of 'political temperaments' (Martin, 2015) in artistic practice: interventionist art, seeks to make the familiar strange (defamiliarisation), 'so that prevailing rules and norms can be considered contingent and fungible'; and utopian art makes the strange familiar (refamiliarisation), 'so that the seemingly impossible ambition of social transformation appears plausible and actionable' (p. 5). The communal aspect of stand-up emphasised by Lafferty and Singh Kohli in particular can be understood as a way of making the strange familiar. For Lafferty, comedy can shine a light on solutions and make people feel heard, and as a result, effect change. People 'need to hear themselves back' to realise they are not the only people who think that way – that is what builds community [Lafferty].

In Singh Kohli's performance, the use of photographs for storytelling is a particularly interesting example of refamiliarisation, as it resembles the way one might present a slideshow to an audience of close friends. But refamiliarisation can also happen with more specific calls

for action. For example, Singh Kohli and McTavish both end their show with an appeal to left-wing egalitarian politics, asking the audience to 'change the people who fucking rule us' [Singh Kohli]. The democratic-socialist utopia that both comedians strive for is made actionable through voting: 'Every so often, whenever it is when you get an election or a referendum, we all have the ability to choose the kind of society you wanna live in.' [McTavish]. Moreover, McTavish suggests, albeit cautiously, that social transformation is possible through comedy. When it came to Indyref, political comedy functioned as a form of civic engagement [Lafferty, McTavish], and some audience members reportedly did change their mind [McTavish].

For others, humour is used to 'defamiliarise' (Martin, 2015), i.e., problematise taken for granted assumptions and norms. Such comedy is 'political' not because it aims for a particular political goal, but it contests and reconfigures sedimented meaning (Mouffe, 2005). In this sense, some comedians are 'political' merely by the fact of their existence on stage. As Gilbert (2004) notes, 'marginal humour', i.e., humour performed by 'marginalized individuals' expresses 'resistance to hegemonic structures' (p. 175), and encompasses a 'constellation of… political effects' (p. 179).

Non-white Scottish comedians are often compelled to self-deprecatingly address their identity early on:

> My accent says freedom. Whereas my hairstyle says legalise it. [Singh Kohli].
>
> You can all relax, I am not the supreme leader of North Korea. [Wiz]
>
> I know exactly what you're thinking cause of my ethnicity and my accent… and I am lactose intolerant. [Christopher K.C.]

As Muñoz (1999) explains, the 'majoritarian subject' has the privilege of taking up the 'fiction of identity' with ease; contrastingly, identity for minoritarian subjects (like Singh Kohli, Wiz, and Christopher K.C.), is predicated on 'hybrid transformations' (p. 5). With Fringe comedy having a predominantly white audience, it is no surprise that comedians of minority ethnic backgrounds need to address their identity in order to correct potential misrecognition.

It is interesting to note that some white comedians also employ the same strategy. For example, Marc Jennings starts the show addressing his own Glaswegian identity: 'when the other acts hear my accent, they just think I'm here to fix something'. Misrecognition occurs, but not

because of race. Rather, he is an outsider in a predominantly English and middle-class space because of his Glaswegian accent and the related connotations of class that it brings. Ironically, Megan Shandley reports having the opposite problem. When performing in Edinburgh, she can be apolitical, but in Glasgow she is an outsider, and her identity is politicised: 'they were like "urgh, an Edinburgh girl who has lived in London for a bit. She must be a Tory." I am not by the way'. These examples illustrate how the comedian's identity can produce different affective responses and political effects by subverting the taken for granted.

7.4 Summary of Discussion

This chapter began with a discussion of Scottish identity in relation to the three main traditions of Scottish cultural representation. There are parallels drawn here with the tourism industry, since the Fringe audience is made up of cultural tourists, and the performers themselves also have a 'tourist gaze' as they observe 'Otherness' and tell stories about it. The analysis also found that the kilt is a performative symbol that reasserts national identity, particularly for minority Scots, and Tartanry is often mixed with other cultural traditions to provide self-parodic performances. Examples of Kailyard are also found in the data, with island life depicted as religious, closed-off, and close-knit.

The Clydesider discourse holds the most currency in the data. *Trainspotting* is regularly mentioned in the performances, though this intertextual reference is used differently between East coast and West coast comedians. The latter tend to see Edinburgh as posher, richer, and at times, less Scottish than Glasgow, while East coast comedians emphasise Leith's roughness. In both cases, however, the image of the working-class, rough, substance-abusing Scot is ever present. Though the stereotypes of Tartanry, Kailyard and Clydesider continue to play an important role in the cultural representation of Scotland, the comedy performances in this study move far beyond them. Aside from the few examples discussed, Scottish iconography is not widely used at all. Most Scottish comedians do not in fact emphasise their Scottishness in their promotional material. This could be because Scottishness makes the performance more 'niche', or because national identity is less salient, or indeed because overt expressions of Scottishness still hold some association with parochialism.

The narrative of a colonised (postcolonial) Scotland is prevalent in the data. The discussion centred on three main elements of this narrative: the representations of class and race (myth of egalitarianism) and gender (male anxieties). It found that the working-class identity is central

to the construction of Scottishness. Middle-classness and Conservatism are considered in some ways less Scottish – they lie on the fringes of Scottish society, or are a result of English interference (Anglicisation). Scottish comedians place an emphasis on their working-class credentials, even if they are objectively middle class, and 'Anglicised' posh Scots are perceived negatively for 'wanting to be English'. This points to the inferiority complex often discussed in the literature as resulting from the historical colonial framing of civilised Brit/uncivilised Celts. The anglicised Scot is seen as less authentic because they are merely imitating the coloniser (mimicry as subjugation). A Scottish accent is thus an important marker of authentic Scottish identity.

Egalitarianism also extends to race, as the Scottish nation presents itself as open and progressive. The Scottish accent is important here too, as accent is seen to trump race for some comedians. For minority Scots, a thick Scottish accent can also disrupt essentialist notions of white Scottish identity (mimicry as subversive). Ancestry is also referenced as a marker of national identity, but the examples in the data suggest that the symbolism of ethnic origins and ancestral tradition does not necessarily lead to an exclusionary ethnic nationalism. The mixed ethnic heritage of Scotland Celts/Lowland Saxons/Irish immigrants/'New Scots' also adds to the egalitarian myth, as Scotland is naturally a 'hybrid' identity. History is thus repurposed for the progressive politics of the present.

The Bella Caledonia section presented a discussion of psychoanalytic descriptions of the nation, which often rely on gendered metaphors. The postcolonial narrative of psychological trauma seems to play an important role in popular understandings of Scottish identity: a nation without a state is impotent, emasculated, and feminised. The struggle against the paternal, colonising power is akin to the struggle of an abused wife, dependant on her partner who continuously tells her she cannot leave and could not make it on her own even if she tried. The trauma of Scotland's 'castration' is said to lead to an inferiority complex which has traditionally been expressed through hypermasculinity. The literature suggests that devolution has exposed the construction of national identity and in doing so has disoriented the gendered assertion of Scottishness. This creates a potential for a renegotiation of masculinity, which is evident in the data, particularly in discourses of fatherhood.

The second part of the chapter discussed the political elements in Scottish stand-up. First, it established that no single function of comedy is presented by performers, but all agreed that comedy has at the very least the potential for political efficacy. The analysis proceeded to the

politics of the Fringe. The festival is in many ways a ‘carnivalesque’ space that disrupts social order and creates a liminal space with potential for social transformation. However, the Fringe’s liberating potential is curtailed by its damaging economic structure whereby producers/promoters profit, and performers accrue debt. The Fringe is expensive for performers and audiences, making it an exclusionary festival that arguably provides a carnival for elites. The power relations in the Fringe are highlighted as despite its egalitarian ethos, the festival has various informal gatekeepers who drive comedy tastes. Scots are under-represented and seem to lack support from Creative Scotland and recognition from British comedy awards. This raises the question of who the festival is for. This pessimistic picture is counterbalanced with the evidence of forms of resistance such as the Scottish comedy festival, Scottish comedy awards, the Free Fringe to name but a few examples.

Scottish comedy is also understood as political in its content and aesthetic form. A distinction is drawn between political comedy that takes aim at politicians more generally, such as the aggressive superiority humour of panel shows, and the kind of comedy that is political because of its subversive rather than disciplinary effect. This is followed by an analysis of the ways in which comedy is political for its refamiliarisation or defamiliarisation function. It was shown that many of the stand-up shows emphasised community-building, and utopian politics. As such, they make the seemingly impossible seem tangible. Conversely, other performers de-naturalised taken-for-granted assumptions. Most notably, the hybrid identities of minority Scots are read as political because they disrupt hegemonic presumptions about Scottishness as white. The data also pointed to the misrecognition encountered by white performers on the basis of class.

8 CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the identity construction and political function of Scottish stand-up comedy. More specifically, it aimed to investigate how Scottish comedians perform their identities, and whether Scottish stand-up comedy functions as a political resource. The Edinburgh Fringe – the world's largest arts festival – was chosen as the data collection site for this study because of its international acclaim and undeniable influence on the UK's comedy scene. The festival encompasses contradictions and tensions between local, national, and global interests and as such, is a political and contested space. After all, Scottish comedians at the Edinburgh Fringe are performing "at home" but to an international audience. This makes it a fruitful place to investigate the performative construction of Scottish identity. Based on the purpose of the study, two research questions were investigated:

- How does stand-up comedy (re-)produce representations of contemporary Scottish and British identities?
- What are the political elements that can be identified within contemporary Scottish stand-up?

In order to answer the research questions, data was collected in two parts. The first phase of the research involved the participant observation of 38 Scottish stand-up comedy shows at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival 2017. The second phase consisted of six interviews with Scottish stand-up comedians. The extensive fieldnotes and semi-structured interview data were interrogated using a qualitative thematic analysis. The thesis employed an interpretivist approach, drawing on discourse analysis and performance theory to reveal how Scottish identities are both theatrically performed through the staging of the comic 'I' (Colleary, 2015), and performatively produced – in the Butler (2002) sense of *doing* identity.

8.1 Summary of Methodology and Literature Review

The introduction outlines the rationale for this study. It proposes that despite stand-up comedy's invaluable significance as an artform that interacts with, and re-negotiates, identities, stand-up performances have been under-theorised in the social sciences, particularly in the

context of Scotland. With the resurgence of nationalist sentiment around the world, it is hard to deny the relevance and significance of identity as a political concept. Scottish society offers a particularly compelling context in this regard because of its status as a stateless nation. The constitutional and political changes it has faced since devolution have opened a space for an introspective (re-)evaluation of what it means to be Scottish, and a normative reflection of what it *should* mean. Stand-up comedy's aesthetic and political affordances make it a conducive artform to explore such ideas. In the run-up to Indyref, Scottish comedy functioned as a forum for a collective re-imagining of the nation. In the years that followed, identity politics was re-animated over Brexit, and as this study shows, Scottish comedians have continued to explore the social meanings and shared values that shape their identity.

The Methodological approach chapter starts by defining interpretivism as the epistemological foundation of the study. The interpretivist paradigm sees the social world as contextual (concerned with situated meaning), subject-centred (concerned with intentionality), and interactional (concerned with discursive and symbolic shared meanings). This makes it a particularly fitting epistemological framing for stand-up comedy, an artform that is ephemeral, and contingent on audience interaction and a well-developed comic persona. This interpretivist epistemological starting point is followed by the outline of a more concrete theoretical framework. The methodology is guided by both discourse analysis (drawing on poststructuralist and critical approaches) and performance theory (drawing on Schechner (2000, 2003) and Butler (1997, 2002), among others). It sees identity as a performative and discursive construction, and stand-up comedy as a situated interaction that is mediated by the comic frame.

The data collection methods reflect the methodological paradigm of the research: the affect that comedy has is decisively different when mediated by a television screen, so it was deemed important to capture the performances through participant observation. After all, live stand-up is contingent on the unique interaction between the audience and the performer. At the same time, as the interpretivist framework above suggests, this study places an emphasises on the intentionality of the performers. Diverging from Barthes (1972), one could say that the author (or comic) is (not entirely) dead – even if they occasionally 'die' on stage. Interviews were conducted to provide an understanding of the comedian's own perspectives on their identity and their comedy. Guided by a discursive and performative approach, the data was interrogated using a thematic analysis, with the assistance of the Atlas.ti coding software.

Following from the methodology, Chapters 3 and 4 presented an extensive review of the literature. In Chapter 3, humour and the related concepts of laughter and comedy are analysed. Starting with definitions, the chapter proposes that comedy is a genre that employs humour, and humour in turn is that which 'attempts to produce laughter' (Billig, 2005, p.179). Yet, this general description of humour is based on a modern understanding of the concept. The literature review thus looks back to the philosophical writings of ancient Greece to establish how early scholars understood the notion of laughter. It is here that we see the beginnings of a 'superiority theory' of humour since laughter is interpreted by Plato and Aristotle as a form of ridicule and insolence. However, the exact function of laughter was, even in antiquity, highly dependent on social context. It is in antiquity too that we find the dichotomy between the genres of comedy and tragedy, and their associations with the body and mind. In the contemporary world of stand-up comedy, the divide between intellectual and base humour can be seen as a continuation of the hierarchy of reason over bodily pleasure that Plato so strongly asserted.

The search for essential definitions of humour was discussed next, with an analysis of relief, superiority, and incongruity theories and their derivatives. It concludes that universalist approaches to humour are bound to offer only an incomplete picture, as not all instances of laughter are a psychological release of tension, or a form ridicule, or even the result of perceived incongruity. Rather, humour can best be understood as a 'family' encompassing various phenomena which share a likeness but are not exactly the same – just as in Wittgenstein's (2007) language games theory. Since essentialising any definition of humour is futile, the review proceeds by asking what humour does. The disciplinary and rebellious functions of humour and laughter are analysed, as well as the aesthetic view of humour. Here, the dichotomy between aesthetics and the political is investigated, both in relation to art more generally (drawing on Rancière and affect theory) and then humour (drawing on Holm). This was followed by a description of the structural elements that characterise comedy, and more specifically, British and Scottish stand-up comedy.

Chapter 4 critically analyses the literature on identity, starting with the essence of the self, but noting yet again that essentialist approaches fall short. In our current understanding of identity, one's sense of self and one's social identities tend to overlap, as both connote the idea of sameness across time and space, as well as a persistent sharing of essential characteristics (Erikson, 1994 [1959], p. 109). However, the review of the literature shows that despite our essentialist sense of self and identity, our personal and social identities are in fact much more

fragmented and socially constructed. It is the performative act of doing identity that becomes relevant in this framework. Some distinction and overlap is found between theatrical performance (drawing on Schechner) and performativity (drawing on Austin and Butler). The reiterated, banal performances of nationalism in everyday life help to sustain the idea of the national (imagined) community (Billig, 1995, Anderson, 2006). Our narratives of personal and collective life are performances, whether these are staged or not (Langellier and Peterson, 2004); and in the context of stand-up comedy such stories still require a degree of 'authenticity' (Brodie, 2014, Colleary, 2015).

The question of authenticity is at the heart of scholarly debate on Scottishness. The literature review shows that the three main representations of Scottish identity (Tartanry, Kailyard and Clydesider) have all been critiqued in some way for not presenting an accurate picture of Scottish life (McCrone, 2001a, Murray, Farley and Stoneman, 2009, Zumkhawala-Cook, 2009), though all remain influential points of reference. The sociological research on Scottish identity looks at the boundaries of Scottishness, highlighting the importance of markers like birthplace and accent – though the salience of these various markers is understood to be context dependant.

Another important avenue of research is the construction of Scottish national identity by the elites, whether through the romanticised notion of heritage promoted by the tourism industry (McDonald, 2002, Bhandari, 2012), or the politicised discourse of nationalism furthered by the SNP (Leith, 2008, Leith and Sim, 2020). Leith and Soule (2011) offer a compelling contribution to the latter as they highlight the divergence between the SNP's civic and progressive nationalist discourse, and the more exclusionary view of Scottish identity held by the masses. Others take a materialist approach and argue the masses are driven by economic discontent rather than cultural ideas of the nation (McLeish and Brown, 2012, Mann and Fenton, 2017b). Indeed, the notion that Scotland is (or wants to be) egalitarian appears to be central to political nationalism in Scotland (Maclaren, 1976, Law and Mooney, 2006, Morton, 2011).

8.2 Summary of Findings

So how does Scottish stand-up comedy (re-)produce representations of Scottish identities? The findings in this study suggest that a postcolonial narrative of the nation remains dominant in popular understandings of Scottish identity, particularly by Glaswegian comedians, though not

exclusively. The myth of egalitarianism plays a central role in this regard; it encompasses the following key assumptions: 1) Scottish identity is intimately linked to *working class identity*. As we see in the performances, comedians who are higher up the socio-economic ladder will often emphasise their working-class credentials, and middle-class Scots are implicitly seen as Anglicised; 2) Scottish identity is *inclusive of minorities*. While there is an acknowledgement of Scotland's racist past and its role in the Empire, the performers emphasise Scotland's progressive present and or/future. 3) Scotland is *politically left-wing*. Conservative values seem to run counter to the essentially socialist political identity of Scotland. The assumption made by the performers is that Conservatives in Scotland are the anomaly, while in England, they are the rule. 4) These points are justified with historical narratives, such as Scotland's ethnically diverse origins, and its high levels of emigration; as well as contemporary post-, or neo-colonial narratives, such as Scotland's subjugation to a politics it does not want, and subjection to insidious power structures that celebrate (Southern) English culture and overlook or marginalise Scotland.

The findings point to the persistence of a duality in the 'Scottish psyche' (the so-called Caledonian Antisyzygy), whereby pride and shame, beauty and bleakness, highlands and lowlands, colonised and coloniser co-exist. Such dualities are said to be the result of Scotland's postcolonial mentality: a stateless, and therefore 'impotent' nation (Nairn, 1997, 2003), that defines itself in opposition to England while at the same time being interpellated into Britishness. Taking Bhabha's concept of mimicry, we can understand Anglicisation as a form of mimicry that reveals the power relations at play in British society. Conversely, we can view Scotland as inherently hybrid since any appeal to the essence of the nation relies on myth. Mimicry can reveal the contingent and fluid nature of identity. Merely by embracing their markers of Scottishness (e.g., having a strong Scottish accent or wearing a kilt), the minority Scots in the data are, either deliberately or implicitly, unsettling essentialised notions of (white) Scottishness. However, they also encounter misrecognition and must work harder to establish their claim to identity. Many do this by emphasising their local (usually Glaswegian) identity. Their experience of locality (evidenced by their accent, shared values, and knowledge of local places) can be interpreted as a marker of insider status.

Though misrecognition and experiences of racism are discussed by minority Scots, these are not used as justification for, or evidence of, an ethno-centric nationalism. Rather, both minority and majority subjects emphasise the openness and inclusivity, as well as the left-leaning and

progressive politics, of Scotland's civic nationalism. Even where ancestry, cultural tradition and historical origins are referenced, they are not presented as exclusive markers. Rather, they merely strengthen a claim to identity that, for some, would be accepted on the basis of accent and/or birthplace anyway. This suggests that the opposition between civic (elite) and mass (cultural) constructions of identity are not as divergent as is sometimes claimed.

The study also identified links between masculinity and national identity. This is unsurprising, since Scottishness is presented through a masculine lens in all three main referential discourses (Tartanry, Kailyard, Clydesider). The stereotypes of violence, substance abuse, and sectarianism have characterised Scottish masculinity in the Clydesider tradition. *Trainspotting*, though set in Edinburgh, offers a recognisable image of Clydesider masculinity, and is referenced extensively in the data. For the Edinburgh-based performers, it is used to re-assert the capital's grittier side. For Glaswegian comedians, *Trainspotting* does represent the reality of Scotland, but one that is located in the West coast, not in Edinburgh. In some ways, we see a re-enforcement of the hypermasculine Scottish stereotype, which in the literature, is associated with Scotland's condition as a stateless nation. Yet, the changing constitutional make-up of Scotland has, according to some scholars, resulted in a 'queering' of masculinity (Turner, 2017). The data in this study seems to support this, as alongside references to stereotypical masculinities, we also find a re-negotiation of male identity. Much like the discourse of race, some performers break with the past and advocate for gender equality and a more progressive idea of masculinity for the future.

The second research question interrogates the political dimension of comedy. Does Scottish political comedy function as a political resource? The analysis of the data found that although the performers tend to downplay the impact of their comedy, they acknowledge its political potential, namely the capacity to educate, change minds, create a sense of community and common purpose, and offer cathartic release. Following from this, the thesis sought to identify the political elements that can be found in Scottish stand-up comedy. The study found that the Fringe festival itself can be understood as political. It is a carnivalesque festival that disrupts ordinary social order and provides a creative open space with the potential to generate political effects. However, the Fringe's liberating potential is curtailed by its neo-liberal economic structure. There is clear antagonism between those who profit from the festival (producers/promoters) and those who accrue debt (most performers), and as the interviewees

point out, the cost of performing and the informal gatekeepers of the Fringe have led to the under-representation of Scottish comedians.

This study also examined the comedy shows to identify their political elements. Following Holm (2017), it was argued that a distinction can be made between the political content and the political aesthetics of stand-up, and it is only by looking at the latter that we can identify its effects. Notably, some political comedy simply reinforces/conforms to hegemonic norms. In other examples, comedy that would not ordinarily be considered political can have political effects. The study highlighted two main kinds of political effects: refamiliarisation (making the strange seem familiar) and defamiliarisation (problematising the taken-for-granted). The former includes elements of the comedy performances that foster community, call for change, or make utopian ideals seem possible. The illusion of intimacy fostered by Singh Kohli's family photographs, or the direct calls for a more socialist and egalitarian politics made by McTavish are both examples of this.

On the other hand, the study found examples of defamiliarisation with all of the minority Scots, as they tended to address the incongruity of their accent and appearance. It is argued here that performing as an Asian Scot, or Black Scot is already a political act because it problematises the presumption of whiteness in the construction of Scottishness. Yet, it was surprising to find that some white performers also used defamiliarisation, this time to challenge presumptions of class: a thick Glaswegian accent can stand out, exposing the Englishness/middle-classness of the Fringe; conversely, an Edinburgh accent on stage in Glasgow is likely to be met with assumptions of poshness, as one interviewee recalled.

8.3 Theoretical Contribution

Nationalism studies has long been concerned with two central question: when did nations emerge, and how did they come to be. For ethno-symbolists, nation-like groups emerged before the modern era and evolved organically with markers such as language, custom, and descent. For modernists, nations are a top-down invention, instrumental to the elite project of modernity. This thesis takes a constructivist approach that moves away from such dichotomies, and from the concern with the origins of nations. Rather, it asks how the nation is interpreted and produced in interaction. Scottish nationalism is understood to be a fragmented and hybrid discourse, which is reproduced and reinvented through conscious, as well as embodied, practices. Historical narratives and pre-modern cultural symbols do form part of contemporary

Scottish national identity – as ethno-symbolists observe. Yet, the data also show that Scottish comedians tend toward a civic understanding nationhood and belonging. This is not an entirely new finding - other scholars have pointed to the fusion of the ethnic and civic in Scottish nationalism (Leith, 2008, 2012, Paul, 2020). However, previous literature has tended to emphasise the role of elites in this framing.

This raises the question of whether the stand-up comedian is part of the masses, or whether their ability to 'manipulate and influence' (Quirk, 2015) grants them the status of elite. Though a case could be made for the latter, this thesis suggests, in agreement with Friedman (2014a), that stand-up comedians are not equal in the game of distinction. The power struggles at the Edinburgh Fringe illustrate this point, as many Scottish comedians are critical of the neoliberal and English-centric structure of the festival. Moreover, unlike other mediated performances, the stand-up comedy show is a 'genre of intimacy' (Brodie, 2014), where community is created. The response from the audience happens in real time; it is a conversation rather than a monologue. Scottish stand-up comedy therefore offers not an exclusive top-down perspective of the nation, but a popular understanding of it.

The themes that emerge from the Scottish stand-up performances (e.g., inferiority complex, myth of egalitarianism, crisis of masculinity) are shown to be linked to a postcolonial discourse. They impact not only the cultural identity of Scotland, but also its political status, since many see the United Kingdom through the lens of neo-colonial relations with Westminster. This thesis therefore makes a contribution to social science research on Scottish nationalism, where postcolonial theory has been under-utilised. Regardless of the material reality of Scotland's role in the Empire, contemporary constructions of Scottish national identity operate within a postcolonial framework, and this warrants further analysis.

The present thesis also contributes to the theoretical field of comedy studies by expanding the concept of the political in stand-up comedy. Here too we have tended to find a dichotomy, whereby comedy is either a subversive or a disciplinary tool. The notion of political comedy moreover, was narrowly defined in much of the literature. By expanding the concept of the political, this thesis highlights how the comedy space (in this case, the Edinburgh Fringe) is composed of antagonistic relations and discursive struggles. By looking at stand-up comedy through the lens of performative theory, we can better understand the construction of identity. For minority Scots in particular, the stage becomes inherently political as they must negotiate misrecognition. The aesthetics of humour become important, since it is the affective

relationship between audience and comedian that makes for an 'authentic', and therefore successful, comedy performance. Stand-up comedy holds significance for social researchers because of its political potential; it can create community and exclusion, and it can re-familiarise and de-familiarise discourses.

8.4 Implications of the Study

It is argued here that identity is always in flux though not always in ways we are conscious of. The findings in this study suggest, however, that Scots are actually re-negotiating what it means to be Scottish. The performers not only engage with, but also repurpose, traditional notions of Scottishness for a reimagined Scotland. Scottish stand-up emerges here as a forum where such ideas can be developed in conjunction with the audience. As such, comedy is both a thermometer that tells us what the accepted shared values of Scottish society are, and it is a political resource that can refamiliarise us with the potential for change, or defamiliarise us from the naturalised assumptions we hold.

Despite the wide-reaching relevance of the findings, there are some limitations and delimitations to them. They reflect the specific context of the Edinburgh Fringe in a particular point in time (August 2017). As such, they should not be seen as universal. The live performances are, by their very nature, ephemeral and irreplicable. A Fringe show, as the comedians themselves point out, will differ significantly from a comedy club gig. The study cannot make any claims about Scottish comedy outwith the Fringe, nor can it make any substantial claims about audience reception of the performances, aside from the researcher's own experience as a participant observer. The interpretations presented in this thesis might not match the performers' intentions, or the interpretations of other audience members; indeed, it would be strange if they did entirely match since comedy is an art and not a science. Rather, this thesis points to some of the possibilities that emerge from the data. There is much that is left out for reasons of time and space. The intentions of the comedians are explored through the interviews, but the small sample size means the findings are limited in their generalisability.

The conclusions from this study could be expanded through further research into the audience reception of Scottish comedy. This would be particularly relevant for nationalism scholars who focus on the divergence of elite versus mass perceptions of identity. The prevalence of 'civic' notions of Scottish nationalism in the data leaves open the question of whether Scottish

comedians are in some ways a cultural ‘elite’, with attitudes to identity that differ from the ‘masses’; or if the wider public who attend the performances share these values also.

A further area of inquiry is the performance of stand-up comedy by Scottish diaspora. As one of the interviewees observes, the kind of political commentary found in Scottish comedy abroad is different from that at home. There is also an opportunity here to explore different UK identities through stand-up comedy; for example: How do non-Scottish comedians perform their identities at the Fringe? Where are all the Welsh comedians? Do non-Scottish comedians based in Scotland (many of whom perform at the relatively new Scottish Comedy Festival) also identify with the civic idea of nationalism highlighted here?

This study has also contributed to the (limited) literature on the Edinburgh Fringe Festival – most of which is focused on theatre performance, or the contested urban space of the festival rather than on comedy specifically. One of the problems highlighted by the performers in this study is the cost (both financially and mentally) of performing at the Fringe, and the resulting lack of diversity this brings. There is certainly a gap here for further research into the power relations that sustain the Fringe, and the way that engagement with the festival is shaped by class, race, gender and other marginalised identities.

9 APPENDIX

9.1 Edinburgh Fringe 2017: Shows Attended

1. #AlmostFamous (Kevin McPadden)
2. Aaaaaaargh! How Can I Drive to a Gig With a Jakey on My Bonnet? (Bruce Fummey)
3. Andrew Sim
4. Ashley Storrie: Morning Glory
5. Best of Scottish Comedy (Raymond Mearns, David Kay, Ray Bradshaw, Robin Grainger)
6. Celtic Comedy (John Scott, Jay Lafferty)
7. Chris Henry: Ignorance Is Chris
8. Christopher Macarthur-Boyd: The Boyd With the Thorn in His Side
9. Craig Hill: Someone's Gonna Get Kilt!
10. Daniel Sloss: NOW
11. Donald Alexander and Stuart McPherson
12. Edinburgh Revue's 2017 Stand-Up Show (Gary Little)
13. Equality Street (Kimi Loughton, Christopher K.C.)
14. Fern Brady: Suffer, Fools!
15. Fred MacAulay: IndyFred2
16. Gareth Waugh: Honestly
17. Hardeep Singh Kohli: Alternative, Fact
18. Haver (Megan Shandley, Wis Jantarasorn)
19. I hate myself so people will like me (Hanna Stanbridge)
20. Jay Lafferty: Besom
21. Janey Godley’s podcast live
22. Jamie McDonald
23. Jojo Sutherland and Susan Morrison: Fanny’s Ahoy!
24. Marjolein Robertson: Relations
25. Marc Jennings: Smart Funny
26. Mark Nelson: Irreverence

27. Rachael Jackson: Bunny Boiler
28. Ray Bradshaw: Deaf Comedy Fam
29. Richard Brown: Hold Tightly to the Walls
30. Rik Carranza: I'm a Fan
31. Rosco McClelland: How I Got Over
32. Semi-Pro 4 Life (Andy J Ritchie)
33. Scott Gibson: Like Father, Like Son
34. Scott Agnew: Spunk on Our Lady's Face
35. Struan Logan: Mingalabar
36. Viva La Shambles (Gareth Mutch, Keir McAllister, and Jay Lafferty)
37. Vladimir McTavish: Scotland the State of the Nation
38. Topical Storm (Vladimir McTavish, Keir McAllister, Mark Nelson)

9.2 Ethical Approval

Subject: Re: Ethical approval for PhD research
Date: Friday, 14 July 2017 at 08:23:26 British Summer Time
From: MCS Ethics
To: Carolina Silveira

Dear Ms Silveira,

Many thanks for the application.
I am pleased to say that your project has been approved, please use the following unique project PIN number (Pin Number MCS-PGR-Pol-Silv-18-07-17) on all participant paperwork.

Good luck with your very interesting project.

on behalf of the committee

Dr Christopher O'Donnell,
Chair of the MCS Ethics Committee
School of Media, Culture and Society
University of West of Scotland,
Paisley Campus,
High Street,
Paisley.
PA1 2BE
Tel: +44(0) 141 848 3798

9.3 Participant Information Sheet

Laughing at politics and politics of laughter

Project Number: MCS-PGR-Pol-Silv-18-07-17

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of this study?
This study will investigate the the interplay between humour and politics in Scotland.

The purpose is to provide a better understanding of how ways of thinking about national identity and politics are constituted, reinforced, or challenged through comedy.

Why have I been chosen?
You are being asked to participate as you are a distinguished professional in the field of

comedy. The UK has seen significant social and political change in recent years and there has been substantial discussion about these developments through comedy. This study would like to collect your views on the political and social role of comedy, with a focus on the concept of national identity.

Do I have to take part?
It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time up to completion and submission of the consent form to the researcher, without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?
This is a piece of qualitative research which will be completed by November 2019. A small number of professionals in the field of comedy will be invited to participate in a one to one semi-structured interview which will last about 1 hour and will be audio recorded. Semi-structured means that you will be asked open questions about your thoughts, feelings and experiences concerning the topic of comedy, politics and Scottish identity. The interview will take place in a suitable and mutually agreed place.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
The interviews will impact on your time, and no payment will be made for your involvement in the study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
The research will add to the currently limited literature regarding the political role of comedy and the representation of Scottish identity.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?
All your personal data will be confidential and will be kept separately from your interview responses. Data handling will be in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

If you ask to remain anonymous, you will be able to choose a pseudonym which will be used in place of your name. Any details which could potentially identify you will be removed or changed. Only the researcher and academic supervisor will have access to the audio recording, transcript of your interview and your consent form.

This study also gives you the option to allow your responses to be attributed to you. This can be beneficial for you as a participant if you wish your views on the topic to be known. It can also be beneficial to the researcher since your position as a distinguished professional in the field makes the data more valuable and relevant. However, please keep in mind that you are free to change your mind and request anonymity even after the study has began. If you provide consent for your interview responses to be attributed to you, then your identity will be disclosed in reports and publications arising from this study.

What will happen to the results of the research study?
The information (which we consider data) will be written up as academic and public discussion

work and may be presented at academic conferences and other public events, and submitted to peer review journals and other publications, such as media outlets.

Who has reviewed the study?
MCS Ethics Committee

If you require any further information please contact:

Personal details withheld.

Thank you for taking part in this study

9.4 Consent Form

Title of Project: *Laughing at Politics and the Politics of Laughter*

Project Number: MCS-PGR-Pol-Silv-18-07-17

Please initial box:

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study with the relevant information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. ☐
3. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐
4. Please indicate, by ticking ONE of the boxes below, whether you are willing to be identified, and whether we may quote your words directly, in reports and publications arising from this research:
   i. I may be **identified** in reports made available outside the research teams and in publications. ☐
   ii. I may not be identified in reports made available outside the research team nor in any publications. My words may be quoted provided that they are **anonymised**. ☐
   iii. I may not be identified in reports made available outside the research team nor in any publications. My words may not be quoted. ☐

Your signature will certify that you have voluntarily decided to take part in this research study having read and understood the information in the sheet for participants. It will also certify that you have had adequate opportunity to discuss the study with the researcher and that all questions have been answered to your satisfaction.

Signature of Participant:

Date:

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