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Racial Nationalisms: Brexit, Borders and Little Englander Contradictions

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ABSTRACT: This Introduction first proposes a definitional map applicable to the racial nationalisms currently ascendant in Britain (and Western Europe, more broadly). The paper then outlines the respective contributions to the Special Issue – with an emphasis on the politics of bordering that organises today so much of nationalism’s claim on the state. The second half of the paper thereupon establishes a wider conjunctural context within which such analyses can be most productively read. Drawing on Stuart Hall’s formative analysis, we argue that it is an understanding of the distinctly *contradictory* drives intrinsic to recent capitalism that is required. Through mapping the uneasy nation/market bind constitutive of the ‘Little Englander’ political subjectivity that Thatcherism forged, this section focuses on the ‘disjuncture’ that has emerged in the intervening period, a disjuncture that has seen the various nationalist drives in the body politic obtain today a more pronounced political autonomy. The paper ends with some reflections on the ‘postcolonial melancholia’ that constitutes a uniquely catalysing nationalist force in British politics, a force that capitalises on this above disjuncture in a particularly morbid and hubristic manner.

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I. Introduction

Uncertainty continues to prevail since the decision by the British electorate to change the United Kingdom's relationship to Europe. Of course, so very much has been said about 'Brexit' that it remains a thankless task to confidently isolate any key prevailing impressions. The high unprecedented turn to an inward nationalism – anxious, defensive and resentful – can certainly be attributed to a range of prevailing circumstances. For instance, much analysis has foregrounded the era-defining economic restructuring – as recession, austerity and marketization – by which the 20th Century social mobility contract has ground to a juddering halt. A contiguous commentary has focused on the increased melancholic revanchism that arises when Europe has ceased to enjoy the global economic privileges and pre-eminence that it has erstwhile been accustomed to (Mbembe, 2018a: 1). Even more prominent has been the often apologist claims that the nationalist turn is a 'backlash' by silent majorities against the perceived advance of socially liberal norms and demographic reconstitution. Elsewhere, a more generative commentary has foregrounded the destabilizing effects of shifts in our media culture – digital and online affordances that result in a technologically mediated collapse in the legitimacy of elites and state institutions. These mooted themes, in traversing economics, cultural backlash and media structures, preclude in turn a well-harmonized analysis vis-à-vis the resurgence of nationalism.ⁱ

There does however seem to be one emergent consensus that has taken shape across these disparate accounts: namely, it is increasingly clear that whatever the underlying factors, the European Union (EU) referendum was primarily framed in the popular imagination by the overdetermined issue of immigration and wider cognate anxieties regarding race and ethnic difference.ⁱⁱ Most overtly, this included the toxic fault-line that EU free movement came to represent in the public debate: both as an internal expanse where Eastern and Southern Europeans are alleged to be enjoying excessive access to Britain's economic and social goods, but also as a conduit for dark-skinned refugees to march across uninhibited to the sweet fields of England. And though less decisive to the public discourse, other similarly charged themes that gained prominence as the referendum campaigning intensified included: the disingenuous hectoring about the prospect of Turkey (read Muslims) acceding to the EU, various coded remarks about the Roma (but also Romanians, who were often publically read through the 'Roma frame' [Fox *et al.* 2012]), and even the many strained if ill-informed comments about the tyranny of anti-racist political correctness that ECHRⁱⁱⁱ technocrats were said to be upholding (Chowdhury and Shiner, *forthcoming*). Seen accordingly in its entirety, Brexit signaled one significant instantiation of a successful new nationalist political programme that hinges substantially on the ostensible problems of immigration, multiculturalism, and ethnic diversity more broadly. Indeed, whilst this new nationalist orientation is not without alternatives – as evidenced by some of the resurgent autonomous left organizing that has underpinned the more progressive aspects of Labour's rehabilitation of a social democracy-cum-urban liberalism pivot – it remains a

truism to note that the idea of nation has emphatically recovered its political confidence.

But what specifically renders this recourse to nation, nationalism? Whilst cognizant of definitional work's multiple hazards, we tentatively note that today's nationalism might be best understood as the set of discourses by which primary culpability for significant sociopolitical problems, whether real or imagined, is attributed to various ethno-racial communities who are understood as not belonging (Valluvan, 2019: 36). Any such definition will seem counter-intuitive when read against the more established literature on the subject. After all, nation itself can certainly be understood as so much more, relating to various fundamental conceptions (even if misplaced in our opinion) of community, collective culture, historical time, and also wider demarcations of what political sovereignty amounts to in modernity. We do not deny this. Western nationalism however, as a specific political temperament, trades on a simpler principle – a principle that turns, in the first instance, on the exclusionary politics of Othering.

It might admittedly seem too obvious, too tautological, to say here that the nation is committed to a series of exclusionary distinctions. For instance, the notion of an exclusionary reality is readily apparent in the nation-state imagination's own very proud assertion of its 'irremediable particularity' (Anderson, 1983: 5). This is, in other words, an assertion that is intrinsically exclusionary: put simply, to be something *particular* is to preclude the possibility of being something else. Similarly, the nation-state remains necessarily exclusionary in its very mechanical configuration: the provisioning of passports, voting privileges, welfare rights and so forth does of course exclude those not of that nation-state. (For instance, if one is going to one university, it is likely the case that one is not of a different university; the same prosaic observation might be said of the nation-state.) In turn, in this precise sense of the nation-state's very configuration and claim to being, it might seem all too circular to assert a definitional emphasis on exclusion.

Our contention is however less concerned with the nation in itself. It is instead the specifics of nationalism, as a distinct political mentality, that is our priority here. Nationalism, to our mind, exceeds a simple descriptive characterization of the nation-state's territorialized institutionalization. Namely, the distinctiveness of contemporary nationalism as a political logic is that it marks a process through which a self-appointed normative majority attributes its putative socioeconomic, cultural and security concerns to the excessive presence and allowance made to those understood as outsiders. Nationalism concerns, in other words, those moments where political discourse reserves an outsized place for the problems putatively posed by those who do not belong. It is herein less an affirmative politics of strong belonging and more a negational politics of aversion and disavowal (Gilroy, 1987: 49-50; Hall, 1992: 188; Yuval-Davis, 2006: 204). Needless to say, those who comprise the relevant field of Othered non-belonging include the variously racialised ethnic minorities but also select foreign peoples and/or international forces, some of which intertwine with and reinforce the pathologies attributed to those internal, generally non-white groups (Brubaker 2017).^{iv}

The anxieties attributed today to such iconic figures of non-belonging assume many guises. These are, for instance, the myriad and at times contradictory anxieties written upon the figure of the migrant – as labour migrant, as welfare tourist, as culturally adversarial refugee, and, albeit less frequently, as crass foreign capitalists. Such assorted anxieties are not however operating in a discursive vacuum neatly contained to figure of the imminent migrant arrival. Instead, the hostility that meets the migrant lies, in part, in its palimpsest quality – where the pathologisation of immigration is written upon the well-rehearsed scripts by which the nation’s already existing internal Others have been characterized (Gilroy, 1987). As far as Britain is concerned, these include the anxieties attributed to the black city and its criminal propensities and, of course, the increasingly trenchant anxieties tied to the Muslim – as culturally regressive, misogynist, violent, proselytizing, and, perhaps most invidiously, as fecund, protean and ungrateful (Hage, 2017).

It is uncontroversial to note that the electoral map is being emphatically remade by the advances of these above political assertions, assertions that demand less equivocating responses to the threats these multiple but often overlapping outsiders represent. Relatedly, nationalist solutions increasingly obtain a panacean value in the popular imagination, suggesting that various challenges characteristic of the present will dissipate through both reducing the presence of such significant Others as well as formally circumscribing their scope for disruption. And importantly, these anxieties that cluster around such a multiplying cast of nationalist disavowal also convert into forceful political demands upon the state. It is namely via specific state contexts that these fears manifest, organize and propagate – wherein public institutions become the site at which these fears become a repressive reality. Put differently, such nationalist assertions are not only discursive ‘distortions’ of the political but they are also active claims upon state practice. Indeed, as put in the memorable words of Hannah Arendt (1951: 275), nationalism might be best seen as the terms by which the ‘the nation conquers the state’.

Today’s bending of the British state towards more avowedly nationalist imperatives is increasingly undeniable. Consider here, alongside the summary end to EU free movement that Brexit most starkly represents, the much discussed ‘hostile environment’ and its policy aim to make immanent the ‘illegalization’ (de Genova, 2002) of denizens deemed expendable/undesirable. Consider too the wider attempts to further render welfare access contingent to immigration status, the stripping of student visas of the right to work, the entrenchment of prohibitive salary thresholds as regards work-permits, as well as the gutting of family reunification protections. Parallel to this move to ‘erect the barricades’ (Malik, 2018) vis-à-vis immigration, which remains the archetypically populist instruction of our era, we also see in Britain a complementary recourse to integrationist measures – already rehearsed during Blairism via the turn towards ‘community cohesion’ policies but further entrenched in the notorious Casey Review of 2016 and the wider machinations of contemporary Tory-led governments. This is a resurgent integration conceit (Back et al. 2002; Kundnani, 2007; McGhee, 2008) that trades on an

unequivocally nationalist premise – presuming that the coherence and integrity of the nation, in its distinctly majoritarian sense, is being imperiled by the excess presence of ‘alien’ cultures (not least, Muslims) incompatible with the national polity – alien cultures that are in need of remedial redress and/or active proscription.

A proper social science reckoning with contemporary nationalism requires in turn a conjoined emphasis, one that is able to unpack the prominence of various racialised Others in underpinning the renewed appeal of the nation’s political mandate but also tracking how this translates into assorted institutional practices as guided by nationalism. This is not to exhaust the centrality of racialised outsiders to nationalist projects in the West, but it simply reconfirms the importance of race (and as the far as the UK is concerned, imperialism) to any credible account of that very project.

II. Bordering, exclusion and nationalist statecraft

This Special Issue will accordingly navigate today’s reconsolidated nationalism by addressing its affinity to multiple racialised narratives and attendant state practices. Unsurprisingly, a recurring emphasis of many of the articles centers on the dehumanization of the refugee and therein the constitutive fortification and violences that flow from this dehumanization. This emphasis is a deliberate one, ably attending to a theme that has become the centerpiece of much contemporary analysis of racial nationalisms: i.e. the border and bordering. Whilst much early 21st Century writing in Europe situated the toxic racial politics of nation within the policy mantras of integration/community cohesion agendas, there has been a concerted turn in recent research towards the hard materiality of borders (Anderson, 2013; El-Enany, 2019; Yuval-Davis et al. 2018). Luke de Noronha’s contribution to this Special Issue acts in turn as a particularly generative distillation of this emergent writing on the border – noting how it is through border practices that race-meaning often gets made and assigned, leading to the codified stratification of human worth and disposability as well as rendering those who obtain less-than-citizen status vulnerable to different forms of economic exploitation (Bhattacharyya, 2018). Building implicitly upon Back and Sinha’s (2018: 138) reading of how fragmented citizenship status and practices of migrant vilification intersect to constitute ‘new hierarchies of belonging’, de Noronha brings into sharp relief the centrality of border practices to today’s social and political constitution. He also gives unique attention to how the ‘race-making’ done through bordering has found particularly sharp expression through the multiplying deportation regimes common to modern statecraft. Distinctive about de Noronha’s contribution here is the attentiveness to the intimately told human tragedies that accrue through the otherwise impersonal materiality of border-practice. Drawing upon a rich vein of ethnographic writing, de Noronha allows the narratives of two black men (Jason and Ricardo) deported to Jamaica to take centre-stage, finding in their pained recollections of a life denied the unique mechanisms by which bordering and racialization intertwine – a logic that, in the instances of Jason and Ricardo, reaches for racialised conceptions of criminality and expendability in refusing people the only place they’ve known, since childhood, to be home (London).

The violence of bordering that de Noronha foregrounds is not however to be situated only at the level of the state. As has been widely commented upon with heightened alarm, the racialised logics demanding the consolidation of the nation (Jones et al. 2017) does also sublimate into a pointed form of civic violence. Put differently, the increasingly militant assertions of national ruination that a treacherously 'liberal' ruling class is said to be presiding over gradually emboldens an appetite for vigilante fascism. As Hannah Jones argues in this Special Issue, the murder of the pro-Remain MP Jo Cox by a far-right sympathizer was a particularly stark moment that signals the intensified violence that this nationalist threshold threatens. Jones accordingly employs a highly textured reading of how the lethal violence exercised by members of the public is not only sourced in existing dominant discursive frameworks, but equally, the violence itself becomes denied, reframed and/or seen as exceptional aberrations, not warranting any meaningful political reflection.^v In other words, this case also illustrates the way in which the security state works through racialized conceptions of who constitutes a threat: i.e. the 'Muslim male' as a distinctly 'cultural' problem versus Jo Cox's murderer as the proverbial 'lone wolf' with a history of mental health troubles.

However, as opposed to it being merely an indication of racial nationalism's incendiary horizons, Jones also focuses on the grassroots resistance that finds expression in the wake of such moments. It is evident that such threshold moments can act as a galvanizing node around which a popular dissent can congeal; but, as Jones again notes, the possibilities of popular resistance that emerged in the aftermath of the murder of Jo Cox are not without their own contradictions. Jones demonstrates how the resistance that might be construed as 'mainstream' often tends towards highly patriarchal renditions of opposition circumscribed by liberal propriety – yielding, in turn, ineffectual and at times complicit forms of resistance. For instance, as Jones asks, is it sufficient or even practicable to simply assert a populist rhetoric of commonality against a perceived politics of 'hate' and 'division'? Does the more politically durable move lie instead in a more confrontational politics, nurturing much more avowedly radical alternatives regarding the conceptions of belonging and primordial origins that are otherwise the preserve of the nation-myth that the far right deploys so effectively?

Madeline-Sophie Abbas's article explores a similar tension in how the popular challenge to anti-refugee politics often calls upon a language of liberal humanism and yet it is that self-same language which subsequently becomes prominent in discrediting the desirability of refugees – e.g. prospective refugees as the bearers of illiberal cultures and pathology. Abbas develops here an arresting notion of the 'concentrationary gothic'; a concept which helps explore how the barbarisms as ascribed to the specter of the Muslim – scripts that reach deep into the colonial archive of Orientalist 'demonology' (Said, 1978: 26) – stunt and undo any initial compulsion towards 'compassion'. Malcolm James's paper extends and situates these contradictions within the more visceral frontline that the Mediterranean today represents. The so-called 'refugee crisis', more properly understood as the human crisis produced by state-enforced borders (Trilling,

2019), has become perhaps the starkest expression of contemporary nationalism's human detritus. A callous matrix of cruelty has been erected across the Mediterranean – wherein camps, border patrols, traffickers, and vigilante nativist mobs at sea and on land, all interweave to realize a thick web of dehumanization geared towards repelling the refugees fleeing war, environmental degradation and/or abject poverty. These are namely the multiple mechanisms constitutive of a 'Fortress Europe' that render real the 'death-worlds' (Mbembe, 2003) in which people are left to die and/or endure a perpetual wretchedness. James, drawing poetically upon his own experience volunteering at one of the epicenters of this human crisis (the Greek island of Chios), patiently tracks the projections of this cruelty. James does not however leave the reader only with this dense miasma of cruelty, insisting upon the alternative structures of care that also emerged in the midst of the crisis – improvised circuits of care that tie together refugees' resourceful efforts to assist each other, local residents' makeshift attempts to provision everyday support and solidarity, as well as the concerned volunteers from across the world that descended upon these frontline Greek locations. It is accordingly these interweaving webs of 'care and cruelty' that James places at the heart of the reconsolidated racial nationalisms that the European continent is once again contending with. James warns against only seeing in the present an unassailable sea of cruelty, implicitly arguing that to render cruelty the sole object of analysis is to render it sublime – a sublimity that invites, in time, a resigned quietism.

These respective articles help us think herein about how a confident anti-nationalist politics would first have to mobilize against the distinct racial work the national border currently does. It is at the border where the most rabid racial formulations of a nationalist politics are most emphatically invested; and it is accordingly at the border that such politics can be most meaningfully challenged. Such interventions become particularly salutary when recognizing that the concerted anti-immigrant and neo-imperial^{vi} politics of borders is hardly a unique preserve of the right, whether extreme or mainstream (Mondon and Winter, 2017). It is apparent that many on the left too have become reattached to the border as a political horizon, whereby, through conviction and/or opportunism, they see in politics of immigration and community a possibility for populist appeal. This renewed left nationalism was endorsed in particularly slapdash terms in Angela Nagle's (2019) now well-flogged 'The Left Case for Borders' as well as in the proliferation across Europe of 'new' left parties that press anti-immigration positions.^{vii} But it is also apparent in the frustrating indecision of the current Labour leadership who, though issuing some not insubstantial critiques of detention and deportation, still seem resolutely wedded to a reassertion of border control as well as frequently rehabilitating those nationalist mantras that work through a white working-class mythology.

Indeed, a particularly awkward fact about the current political repertoire is that a newly confident nationalist politics is able to present itself as the voice of the dispossessed, the working class, the welfare state, and other cognate left-of-centre 20th century emphases. This is a form of nationalist positioning that presses a pronounced sense of class injury and various putatively 'anti-establishment' allusions. There is, of course, a perennially frustrating disconnect

here – where the nationalist claim to anti-market and/or anti-establishment solidarity is contradicted by its more immediate harangues against other marginalized working-class communities (existing minorities) and outsiders (migrants and refugees), rendering their presence undesirable whilst also undercutting any even residual notion of a decidedly global anti-capitalist identification. It is against this context that Ben Pitcher sets out in this Special Issue a series of original inquiries. Does a sustained challenge against nationalist discourses also have to consequently interrogate it as a matter of ‘form’; wherein, it becomes necessary to ask how contemporary nationalism has become contoured by an anti-establishment populism and what kind of complication does this pose to the task of resistance and critique? Put differently, does a straightforward assertion of anti-racism without robustly contesting the anti-establishment paraphernalia that couches populist demagoguery simply lend further credibility to the nationalist conceit? Similarly, as follows the necessarily introspective turn in contemporary left theory (Fassin 2019; Mouffe, 2018), Pitcher sensitively asks whether the anti-racist left requires its own competing populist discourse or is populism, by the very nature of its underlying premises, the preserve of normative nativism?

Pitcher helps in turn press this Special Issue towards the contradictory tensions that suffuse both the assertions of but also challenges to nationalism’s heightened appeal. It is also here that this Special Issue’s final article presses a series of generative questions. Richard Bramwell and James Butterworth’s contribution reminds us, in contrast to the nativist circumscribing of what national belonging entails, that research needs to stay alive to the many intuitively cosmopolitan renditions of belonging that also vie for prominence. The authors give extended attention here to how young urban minorities, through the *practices* that underpin popular cultural expression such as grime and hip-hop, ably claim the nation in an unapologetic and irreverent manner. Developing an original sense of the ‘translocality’ that suffuses black-led urban cultural expression, Bramwell and Butterworth foreground how an alternative conception of English belonging becomes rooted across those cities characterized by multiculturalism. They consequently ask whether this rhizomatic cultural geography that stitches together cities as scattered across England can represent a productive counterpoint to how the nation might be popularly engaged; this being an engagement that is thoroughly indifferent to the ‘pastoral’ visioning of English idylls and white homogeneity and sets instead a decidedly diverse and decidedly disheveled aesthetic of the city as the focal point of belonging.

These questions that Bramwell and Butterworth revive are certainly not new. The decorated tradition of British Cultural Studies that they build upon has consistently flagged the political promise of those urban cultures as developed in the crucible of diasporic culture hostile to the illusory clarity and comforts of communitarian belonging. Put differently, the multiethnic urban margins have often acted as the vanguard for alternative templates of an ‘unkempt and unruly’ (Gilroy, 2004: x) multicultural belonging. The reach of such politics is however frequently frustrated by various structural demarcations – contending with state criminalization of the cultural practices associated with blackness; the inevitable

limits of 'youth' cultural orientations and subcultural isolation; as well as the wider forms of commercialized cooption that might defuse the otherwise subversive strain intrinsic to such cultural expression. These are questions that left cultural theory has always had to contend with and they remain tensions that Bramwell and Butterworth write through with a considered balance: wherein, to insist upon alternative horizons, as sourced in the minor keys of today, always remains, however thankless, a fundamental task for critical analysis that is also affirmative.

III. Capitalism, 'authoritarian populism' and 'Little Englander' nationalisms

In sum, the above papers all profile a nationalist crisis where the refugee and the migrant become the primary objects of political discourse and the border the primary political solution. It is however the case that today's nationalist positioning, and the racial demons that such positioning turns on, is often subjected to a materialist analysis – one which reads such politics as symptomatic of wider economic stagnation, 'austerity doctrine', and post-industrial abjections more broadly. Whilst this is certainly important, it is also apparent that such epiphenomenal readings often tend towards a flattened reductionism that not only circumvents an analytic feel for contradiction but also disregards the specific question of why precisely does the nation and whiteness become such inviting conduits through which people are meant to make sense of the economic distress they experience. Put bluntly, the outstanding question that remains unanswered here is why is the political solution to capitalist crisis to be found so affirmatively in enhanced state powers vis-à-vis border control.

The place of capitalist developments in calibrating and/or galvanizing nationalism does remain important to any meaningful analysis. Indeed, in seeking to formulate a response to the crises instantiated by the demand for withdrawal from the EU, we convened in 2016 a workshop at the University of Manchester. Our immediate aim was to collect the insights provided by Stuart Hall in his formative analysis of 'authoritarian populism' and its pivotal place in the broader politics of what he famously coined as 'Thatcherism'. The papers in this Special Issue derive from that workshop, but do perhaps, in retrospect, owe more to themes of 'moral panic' and 'folk devils' as foregrounded in *Policing the Crisis*, another enduring text by Hall (1978) and colleagues. We take the liberty, therefore, of reasserting in the remainder of this Introduction the necessity of thinking more directly through capitalism's relationship to the wider politics of nation, race and the migrant outsider. Doing so establishes a wider context within which to situate the respective contributors' engagement of today's racial nationalisms.

Interrogating the relationship between the nationalism and capitalism (Davidson, 2017) is no simple exercise. Our intention therefore is only to sketch, employing a Hallsian temperament, the importance of economic restructuring and class re-composition in accounting for contemporary politics whilst simultaneously refusing to allow such economic readings to take on a misplaced causal pre-eminence nor allowing such economic formulations to be read independently of cultural formations.

As has been widely observed, today's nationalism presses multiple motifs that appeal to a sense of (white) working class and small town dignity that is increasingly presented as imperiled. Such appeals operate quite obviously outside of and/or against a neoliberal premise (Virdee and McGeever, 2018); but, crucially, this is also a nationalism that flows out of the very Thatcherite political pivot that consolidated that self-same neoliberal premise. It is worth remembering that the popular thrust of Thatcherism hinged on a pointed mythologization of aspirational working-class uplift as well as an entrepreneurial petit-bourgeois provincialism (best understood through the iconography of the shopkeeper that Thatcher, through her own biography, ably embodied). We see however that this sociocultural compact that authorized her parallel politics of zealous privatization has obtained today a more pronounced political autonomy. This is an autonomy borne out of marketization's more formal material failures but also because such marketization has become incrementally ensconced within a wider mythology of global supranational politics (including the EU) that often contradicts with the imagery of provincial thrift that Thatcher took care to foreground so steadfastly.

In prizing open this densely knotted contradiction, it is Hall's (2018) writing on the crisis of the 1970s and 1980s that is formative here. Whilst it would be theoretically slapdash to suggest that there are multiple Capitalisms, it can be less controversially mooted that there are always multiple capitalist 'rationalities' (Brown, 2006: 690) – insofar as, there are multiple often competing cultural formations constitutive of the body politic into which capitalism, as respective to its conjunctural exigencies, nestles itself. Hall's prescient remarks in 1979 about the emergent cultural conceits that he surveyed on the eve of Thatcher's first electoral triumph reveal particularly well how any such capitalist leap makes an active but always uncertain claim on the textures of the popular. As he said at the time, 'There is still some debate as to whether [Thatcherism] is likely to be short-lived or long-term, a movement of the surface or something more deeply lodged in the body politic' (Hall, 1979: 14).

The cultural discourse Hall was bringing into view was one where the 'vigorous virtues' as ascribed to the industrious petit-bourgeois shopkeeper ('energetic', 'self-reliant', anti-taxation) was firmly situated within a wider mythopoeia of the English character – as rustic, suburban, homely, respectable, familial and defensively 'robust' (Evans and Taylor, 1996: 226). Equally, in asserting this distinct cultural modeling of the national subject *qua* provincial entrepreneur, a series of 'folk devils' were identified (Hall et al. 1978): a series of dangerous portends and iconic sources of disruption against whom a respectable provincial Englishness (and the wider mandate of a 'sadist state' [Brown, 1988: 3]) was asserted. Key figures that took such enduring shape here was of course the black 'mugger' of the inner city; the culturally adversarial immigrant 'swamping' the realm; and, also, a legion of allegedly deracinated leftist ideologues – both 'metropolitan cultural elites' and pugnacious trade union subversives alike – who offend the English calling and mentality.

Much of this might be already well documented (Featherstone, 2017; James and

Valluvan, 2018), but it is worth reiterating, lest Thatcherism risk being misunderstood as an abstracted exultation of 'homo economicus', lacking in any broader cultural figuration. And crucially, whilst the mobilizing of a particular commonsense – impressionistically sketched here as a Little Englander entrepreneurialism – can certainly license capitalist work (neoliberal marketization), it is also the case that such 'commonsenses' often sit uneasily vis-à-vis the broader capitalist project they have been harnessed to. As once noted by the idiosyncratic John Gray (2010: 19) regarding the always-apparent contradictions between the dreamscapes and market principles respectively constitutive of Thatcherism:

[Thatcher] fully shared Hayek's view that free markets reinforce 'traditional values', which is an inversion of their actual effect. The conservative country of which she dreamed had more in common with Britain in the 1950s, an artefact of Labour collectivism, than it did with the one that emerged from her free-market policies. [For instance], a highly mobile labour market enforces a regime of continuous change. The type of personality that thrives in these conditions is the opposite of the stolid, dutiful bourgeois Thatcher envisioned.

Gray's observation, though operating in a very different context to ours, helps clarify that any such cultural modeling – and its assorted cognitive sensibilities, symbolic affinities, and affective investments – is conjunctural, and is frequently jolted when the broader capitalist contract it is wedded to is itself restructured. In short, what requires acknowledgement here is that whilst appeals to nation can indeed do the bidding of broader capitalist exigencies, the appeal of nation, once re-galvanized, often exceeds, contradicts and/or subverts that initial capitalist programme.

These reflections allow in turn for a more effective transposing of Hall's seminal sense of *conjuncture* to the present's distinctive sense of *disjuncture*. Prevailing sociological analysis often misses the fact that today's nationalism is not simply a diversionary attempt to fill the political void that a capitalist crisis engenders. It is instead a fetid amplification of the nationalism that was already so deeply threaded through the capitalist restructuring as 'sutured' (Hall, 1996: 3) in the late 1970s/early 80s (James, 2018). Put simply, the present reveals only a marked deformation of this already fragile nation/capital alliance. When a faith in capitalist social mobility dissipates so resolutely, what remains of that residual governmental culture is only the rump of provincial nationalism that had dutifully complemented that initial faith in capitalist evangelism but was never simply secondary to it (Toscano, 2017).

This is accordingly a provincial nationalism that has today been made starkly visible on its own terms, intensifying in confidence amid its partial dislodging from the broader capitalist thesis. Put differently, this newly liberated nationalism can still do the bidding of capitalist mantras, but it can also be rallied as a populist critique of capitalism – as anti-establishment, as anti-elite, as anti-globalization, and as nominally pro-welfare. This is however a critique of capitalism that, in the final instance, necessarily favours nationalist nostrums. It

is, in other words, a vernacular critique that attributes to the hordes of migrants and inauthentic insider minorities a variety of pathologies vis-à-vis economic duress – as work-shy, as exploiting welfare state largesse, as further crowding an already distressed labour market, as straining resources, and as impinging upon scarce public and residential space. Relatedly, it also rails against the alleged generosity of development aid and/or against the unfair financial advantages that foreign entities are said to obtain at Britain's expense, not least through EU contributions. In sum, this is a redirected anti-neoliberalism that only admits the nation (and is constitutive appeals and demons) as the valid site of political intervention and redress.

This partial unmooring of nationalism from neoliberal imperatives remains to us an analytic angle that is all too often neglected in contemporary accounts of Brexit and cognate themes. But whilst such an attunement to the disjuncture of nationalism to neoliberal capitalism is important, equally relevant are the contrasting terms by which neoliberalism itself can become consumed by nationalism. Emergent analysis has begun to draw some attention to how the Brexit sponsored nationalisms currently prevalent cut across a decidedly contradictory relationship to capitalism. A contradiction that might be provisionally typified as the aforementioned petit-bourgeois protectionism that foregrounds a politics of provincial insularity, and on the other hand, a corporate multinational capitalism (global neoliberalism) still ostensibly committed to its ideal of borderless trade and access. However, what also remains important for us here is a different dimension – one where neoliberalism exists not only as a principle of global market dynamism but can also wield its own distinct brand of bordered nativism.

It is of course clear today that neoliberal capitalism does hew towards a sustained lobbying for the EU. This is however only one expression of neoliberalism's political vocabulary. There is also another neoliberal rationale that is not straightforwardly anti-nationalism, and, indeed, calls for its own brand of nationalist consolidation. Contrary to the often-Marxist readings of neoliberalism as summarily hostile to the nation, neoliberalism does in fact routinely press a very marked attachment to the politics of bordering and its attendant anti-immigration harangues. This is namely a programme that desires a streamlining of the border and the 'human capital' considerations (Davies, 2017) against which immigration is to be appraised. Made most explicit in Ian Duncan Smith's candid remarks that 'we [have] had a huge number of very low-value...people coming through the EU' (Brinkhurst-Cuff, 2017), neoliberalism does in fact wish to assume very clinical ownership over the border – a border that is made to the measure of the exploitable labour that capital most desires at any select moment. This neoliberal foundation that conceives of the nation as enterprise (Davies, 2014; Mirowski and Plehwe, 2009) – and its population, therein, as a pooling of skill-sets and capitals – ably hitches itself to wider racial regimes by which people are deemed worthwhile, capable, and enterprising. A neoliberal remit does accordingly often court the politics of nation and its constitutive border instruments (e.g. immigration controls, fixed-term work visas, salary-thresholds, work restrictions on student visas, and the hollowing out of family unification protections). To intuitively assume that the neoliberal

and the nationalist are mutually adversarial remains herein a misnomer, and a dangerous one at that.

Indeed, as follows an oft-neglected analysis of Hardt and Negri, the migrant might even be read as a figure who *refuses* the capitalist order. This might seem counterintuitive, but it is in the very act of rejecting the capitalist designation of a geographically stratified class role that the migrant becomes a disruptive, even cataclysmic, body. As they put it in their defining *Empire*, 'Mobility and mass worker nomadism [...] always expresses a refusal and a search for liberation: the resistance against the horrible conditions of exploitation and the search for freedom and new conditions of life' (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 212). Put differently, whilst migrants might at times act as the reserve army of labour or a substratum of the proletariat (Miles, 1982) open to heightened forms of exploitation, the migrant does also render volatile the ethnonational territorialisation that global capitalism solicits. That neoliberalism, as a governmental logic, might become re-enchanted by the border and its specific mandates is not herein entirely surprising when contextualized within this broader structural relationship of migration and 'fixity' to capitalism (Mbembe, 2018b). Capitalism has, in other words, always pressed a fixity/fluidity simultaneity – where enhanced mobility for some acts in concert with the attempted immobilizing/thwarting of others (Bhattacharyya, 2018). It is, accordingly, this split that helps further contextualize today's neoliberal fascination with nationalist assertion – an assertion that even threatens at times to override the underlying capitalist thesis.

IV. Conclusion

That the Thatcherism documented in Hall's formative analysis would culminate in the neoliberal 'supernova' (Duman et al. 2018) of Cameron's austerity and marketization blitz was not unexpected. But that the same Thatcherism would culminate, through a different genealogy, in the nationalism of today is also not unexpected. We have asked accordingly that the sociology of nationalism and capitalism alike must stay more alive to how what was once a conjunctural affinity becomes, in time, the disjuncture of tomorrow. Affinities of capital and nation often come undone, gaining new autonomies and making political demands that are not always initially evident when first drafted.

This reading of a capitalist conjuncture's contingencies has tried in turn to draw upon Hall's formative reading of capital and culture as perennially entangling and disentangling. One catalyzing cultural logic that was however relatively muted in Hall's analysis is what Gilroy (2004) has named more recently as the distortions that arise via a wider longing for imperial time – a 'melancholia' that has taken on a more turbulent charge in the intervening political period. There is, in other words, a more psychoanalytic dimension that obtains when explicating any such nationalist rationality as articulated in its distinctly British mode. There is, after all, a thoroughly awkward embrace of past imperial hymns that renders Britain's political logics vis-à-vis the nation and sovereignty sufficiently unique in form (Ashe, 2016; El-Enany, 2018). Put differently, and borrowing opportunistically from Gramsci's (1930: 33) memorable phrasing, it

is possible to distill here those distinctly ‘morbid symptoms’ that arise in the ‘interregnum’ period that characterizes Britain’s contemporary political culture: a period bookended by a remembered imperial supremacy on the one hand, and, on the other, a future order, exacerbated by climate breakdown perhaps, where British capitalism is reconciled to a more humble self-narration befitting of its ‘provincial’ place in the world.

There is, for instance, a recurring threat by arch-Brexiteers to oversee a bonfire of any existing regulatory and fiscal check on capitalist evangelism – including the evisceration of workers’ rights, environmental and consumer regulations, as well as other redistributive and equality encumbrances. Even the much-discussed possibility of defaulting to WTO settings could be construed as a partial expression of this aspiration (Luyendijk, 2017). The underlying intimation is that a ‘Britannia’ thus ‘unchained’ (Kwarteng *et al.* 2012) stands to recover a leading market position in the global economy. This will certainly seem to most foreign observers a comical delusion – a notion of restored British glory in an era, not least, of ‘Chinese globalization’ (Shilliam, 2018: 175) being a particularly quixotic proposition. But it is the specific psychoanalysis of this hubris that remains for us politically consequential. What Gilroy (2004) calls melancholia trades on a hazily glimpsed and distinctly prettified sense of the putative moral clarity, public stability and global supremacy that colonial pre-war whiteness invokes – experiencing that past as prematurely lost and precipitating only abject decline and dysfunction. Melancholy is herein bleak and ‘pathological’ (98), prone to sublimating into a brinkmanship commanding political decisions so markedly anachronistic vis-à-vis the present circumstances and possibilities with which the state refuses to reconcile itself. And though this melancholia is usually couched within a broader conservative and/or a vernacular left temperament, it is increasingly evident that such melancholia can also claim for itself a more niche neoliberal register.

However, as Gilroy also helped clarify, the playing out of an imperial delusion and misremembered time of social and moral coherence should not be seen *only* as a parlous political brinkmanship (though much of Brexit is certainly that [O’Toole, 2018]). Whilst any such capitalist sovereignty as presided over by the nation-state of ‘Rule Britannia’ vintage (Dorling and Tomlinson, 2019) cannot be resurrected, what this imperial hubris can certainly do is further glory in the revanchist politics of racial Othering that the politics of nation solicits: further anti-immigration harangues; further engage in high-profile demonstrations of bordering (via ‘Go Home’ vans, the deportation of black ‘criminals’, and the ‘citizenship deprivation’ of pariah Muslims [Kapoor, 2019]); further engage in foolhardy neo-imperial wars and/or postures; and further circumscribe welfare-state entitlements along implicit invocations of authentically white working-class ‘deservingness’ (Shilliam, 2018; see also Bhabra, 2017; Narayan, 2017). This ‘postcolonial melancholia’ is herein not one that is oriented only towards implosion; it is also a melancholia that surveys the flesh and blood objects worthy of sharp rebuke (be it the EU and its constitutive migrants, but also, and more enduringly, the various iconic Others already in the nation’s midst). The fact that the one abiding ‘red line’ that Brexit proponents of all vintages (including its neoliberal cheerleaders) will not compromise on is the end to ‘free

movement’ – construed materially as immigration within the EU but also acting as a proxy expression of anti-immigrant sentiment more broadly – remains for us a particularly illustrative indication of this redirected melancholic populism.

The melancholic adds in turn a unique affective field – operating through the textures of loss, mourning, solace and also hubris – to the broader nationalist energies as released through the conjunctural unwinding that this paper has hinted at. In other words, the second half of this Introduction has attempted to understand how the nationalisms consolidated by the Brexit impasse cut across a decidedly contradictory relationship to capitalism – a contradiction that induces a whole variety of nationalist expressions, be it neoliberal, anti-neoliberal, or post-neoliberal. And, as Virdee and McGeever (2018) intimate, it is this very contradiction – or, properly put, a failure to read this contradiction – that has yielded such floundering analysis amongst a left intelligentsia of what the current political upheaval represents. Unable to read across the competing capitalist projects, so-called ‘Lexiters’^{viii} have read the not insignificant working-class Leave vote^{ix} as well as the multinational and establishment (e.g. CBI) affinity to the EU and free-movement as a signal indication of today’s nationalism constituting a valid (even if partly misdirected) anti-capitalist politics. Conversely, those leftists who intuitively oppose nationalism have understandably seen the provincial middle-class backing of Brexit, and Tory support more broadly, as undermining any ascription to it of an anti-capitalist yearning. But such critics have also at times failed to see that petit bourgeois and aspirational working-class investment in the textures and promises of nationalist reconsolidation is not in itself a capitalist politics (as in, furthering the baseline imperatives of accumulation and rent-seeking). We have argued that this is instead best read as a morality and political sensibility sourced in a particular era of capitalism – namely, ‘Little Englander’ Thatcherism – that is now operating, to some significant degree, outside of a neatly contained capitalist drive.

The relevance of this analysis is two-fold. It first gestures at the particular historical context within which the distinctiveness of contemporary nationalism was seeded. Secondly, it frames the explicitly capitalist conditions within which this nationalism was nursed, but it also names the terms by which this nationalism becomes partially dislodged from that initial affinity to capitalism. The concluding intention of any such analysis, though only outlined in rather impressionistic terms as befitting an introductory statement, is to simply guard against certain recurring tendencies of a left analytic temperament. Whilst the worst of bad Marxism still sees the nation as hosting a popular vernacular as well as providing the figurations of collectivity through which anti-capitalist politics can be pursued; the best of prevailing Marxist orthodoxies have a complacent tendency to see nationalism as surfacing only in the interests of crisis resolution, diversion and ‘false consciousness’. Either way, we have used the closing stretch of this Introduction to note that today’s nationalism operates with an autonomy and confidence that, whilst possible to situate within capitalism, cannot be made to bend towards either capitalist or anti-capitalist programmes (when seen as coherent and discrete positions). Put bluntly, nation is not available for conversion, left wing or otherwise.

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ⁱ See Leddy-Owen (2019) and Norris and Inglehart (2019) for overviews of these causal theses currently prevalent.

ⁱⁱ See Gupta and Virdee's (2018) 'European crises: contemporary nationalisms and the language of 'race'' for a crisp account of this centrality of race to today's nationalisms.

ⁱⁱⁱ In populist discussion of the EU, the much-maligned European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) is mistakenly conflated with the EU, when in fact the ECHR predates the formalisation of EU authority and will remain active even upon any possible EU exit – unless formally annulled in a separate capacity.

^{iv} For instance, the febrile escalation of anti-EU campaigning in the run-up to the referendum drew pointed attention to how the refugees gathering across Europe threatened to replenish the already excessive minority groups within the UK – with whom the hordes at the gates share a ostensible commonality, via Islam, skin colour, or country of origin. This was made most notoriously visible in the 'Breaking Point' posted fronted by Nigel Farage.

^v Joshua Clover (2017) recently captured this tendency towards willful ahistoricism with an easy aphoristic elegance: as he put it, in the media sphere of hot-take shock at every far-right gain or action, 'the world begins anew each day'.

^{vi} Insofar as, the contemporary practices of deportation and deprivation are concerned.

^{vii} See here the Sahra Wagenknecht-led 'Aufstehen' initiative in Germany as well as the positions taken of late by France's Jean-Luc Mélenchon (Adler, 2019). But of particularly ominous relevance here is the recent electoral victory in Denmark of Mette Frederiksen's Social Democrats; Frederiksen has overseen an aggressive acquiescence of the Social Democrats to the principles of hard-bordering and integrationist militancy as previously pressed by the populist Danish People's Party (Henley, 2019).

^{viii} See two recent interviews with Gilroy where he contends that the 'Lexiter' position is a 'replaying' (Gilroy et al. 2019: 183) of the Bennite tendency ('the Benn school of English socialism') of yesteryear, a tendency that, 'whatever [its] other qualities', constituted a key target for Gilroy (2019) in his landmark *There Aint No Black in the Union Jack*: 'I wanted people to

identify and enter the uncomfortable space where Bennism and Powellism could be shown to be adjacent.'

^{ix} The precise class composition of the referendum vote, despite the simplifications of tabloid punditry, remains hotly contested. For an instructive reading, see Dorling et al. (2016) and Sayer (2017).