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'Making Our Country Great Again': The Politics of Subjectivity in an Age of National-Populism

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Abstract
How could we understand the emotive power of national-populist discourses, indeed the calls to 'make our country great again'? This paper directly tackles the recent Brexit discourse, within the broader context of rising national-populist sentiments. I offer a novel way of reading national-populism and the politics of subjectivity as I put forth a Lacanian-psychoanalytical framework, namely the void at the heart of national-populism narratives and thus their ability to produce and hail national-populist subjectivities, particularly through 'fantasy', 'jouissance' and the promise to recapture loss. I suggest that national-populism discourses appeal emotively and thus interpellate, at least partially, their subjects by offering unity and a 'fullness to come', the promise of filling the void, the promise of full jouissance. Since such national closure and unity are unattainable national-populism discourses must appeal to lost golden eras of greatness and by rendering the Other the cause of their failure.

Keywords Nationalism · Populism · Brexit · Desire · Fantasy · The Other

1 Introduction

The puzzle of this paper was already emerging in the days and weeks before the 2016 EU Referendum in the UK, pointing to an inverse correlation between 'expert advice' arguing against Brexit, on the one hand, and a strengthening of the Leave campaign, on the other hand. Consider, for instance, the warnings by Mark Carney, the Governor of the Bank of England, who stated that 'A vote to leave the European Union could have material economic effects' and might spark a recession [1]. The IMF chief, Christine Lagarde, also stated that leaving the EU would result in dire economic times for both the UK and the EU. The outcome, she said, would be somewhere between 'pretty bad to very, very bad' [2], with the UK Institute for

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Fiscal Studies predicting a 2-year austerity ensuing a Brexit [3]. In fact, all major business and corporations, like Microsoft and HP, as well as key global actors, such as President Obama and the G7, advocated for the UK to remain in the EU. Very few 'expert advice' made the case for leave such as the Economist for Brexit [4], whereas the clear majority opposed Brexit, mostly on economic grounds. In short and given the success of the Leave campaign in the referendum, the outcome seems clear: the more economic and 'rational' advice received against leaving the EU the stronger the Leave campaign became.

The puzzle gets further complicated with the permutations of the Brexit discourse in British society and political discourse over the last 3 years, and whilst taking into account the election of Donald Trump in November 2016 and the rise of national-populist sentiments across Europe. Particularly is the call to reject 'expert advice' and 'listen to our gut feeling', thus invoking a sense of anti-intellectualism. We could clearly see this in various news items in newspapers and on the television whereby British citizens who support Brexit rejected the rational-choice and evidence-based arguments against Brexit, often simply saying: 'I understand this very well but that's how I feel', therefore exhibiting a typical disavowal [5, p. 859].[1] The continuous appeal, even if diminished by now, of the Brexit discourse seems, therefore, to be of an affective nature, enabled by a new politics of feeling and belonging [7, 8].

This paper thus asks: How could we account for the appeal of the Leave campaign, their ability to galvanize public opinion despite such strong and nearly unanimous economic analyses arguing against Brexit? What is it in national-populist narratives that render them so effective and affective?

Nationalism and populism, particularly right-wing national-populism, are by now key phenomena under study and recent years have seen an increase of new approaches and theorisations [9–20]. The scholarship has traditionally ranged from 'demand' arguments focusing on economic crises that lead to right-wing national-populism to 'supply' theories focusing on the style and rhetoric of national-populism [21–23], and/or defining populism as a 'thin ideology' [21, 24, 25]. In political theory, debates often focus on the ambiguity of 'The People' and its complex relationship with democracy [26–28] and the potential threat national-populism poses to constitutional democracy [29–31]. With respect to Brexit, various studies have focused on the effects of globalisation and the 'left-behind' argument [32, 33], whereas others have critiqued this pointing to the racialisation in the Brexit appeal [34]. Nonetheless, and despite the rich scholarship on populism, nationalism and Brexit, very few studies have focused on the affective and structural dimension of national-populist discourses.[2]

This paper argues that the economy or rational cost–benefit calculations did not play an important part in the debate leading to the referendum (and indeed afterwards). Rather, it has been the Brexit discourse which invoked a return to greatness, to a lost national-civilizational 'golden era' of British power whilst blaming immigration and the EU for standing in the way. This paper, therefore, argues for an

[1] See the recent psychoanalytic interrogation of Trump's appeal in Andreescu [6].

[2] Exceptions include [7, 8, 32, 35].

analysis of national-populism at the formal-structural level, aiming to critically interrogate the role of 'feeling' and the affective aspect of the Brexit discourse. To do so, the paper puts forth a psychoanalytical framework for the analysis of the Brexit discourse drawing on my psychoanalytical theorisation of nationalism [36–39] as well on recent psychoanalytic interventions on Brexit and national-populism [7, 32, 35]. More specifically, the paper suggests the following three interdependent apparatuses at play in national-populism narratives and in the Brexit narrative which lead to an effective and affective interpellation: fantasy, jouissance and loss (and the role desire plays in all three). Fantasy entails the Brexit narrative of promising closure and the fulfilment of the national-populist vision, but at the same time rendering a certain subject/object the cause of the Brexit failure [8]. The Brexit fantasy, as I previously argued [7], is a failure-based utopia that is able to produce and keep the national-populist subjectivity at bay, suspended between the futurity of closure [40, 41] and that which is in its way, the immigrant and the EU. Jouissance (enjoyment) is key to understand the operations of fantasy and interpellation as it entails the affective power of populist-nationalism. Jouissance is thus the 'powerful, bodily enjoyment that drives human desire' [42, p. 47]. To draw on Žižek, jouissance means the Freudian 'beyond the pleasure principle', namely the pleasure in pain [43]. The paradox is that jouissance (enjoyment) is impossible to fully obtain or preserve. It is the thing that we can merely feel temporarily and perhaps sigh: 'yes, that's it'. But at the same time, and perhaps because of its impossibility, we cannot let go of the desire to try to obtain full jouissance: to recapture loss. We are talking here, therefore, about bodily enjoyment that are 'always-already lost' [44, p. 261, 45]. This leads me to loss, namely the gap in the structure of national-populism discourse. The promise of fantasy and the recapturing of the lost enjoyment requires a narrative of loss, of fall and the promise to recapture it, to recoup jouissance. Loss, therefore, operates in the national-populist discourse retroactively, that is, produced through the fantasmatic promise to recapture enjoyment and close the ontological (in)existence of the national-populist subject [39, 46]. But once produced through the fantasmatic narrative, it is assigned the cause of desire and the aim of the national-populist fantasmatic narrative. This therefore means that loss and indeed all three apparatuses are built on failure and a tautological logic which, I argue, empowered the Brexit discourse and allowed it to produce and hail the national-populist subjectivity. This process of interpellation, therefore, is able to take place precisely because of the emptiness of the master signifier, the people/nation/we/sovereignty [47].

The paper has two main parts. The first part critically reviews some major approaches and theorisations of populism, and its relationship to nationalism and democracy. In this part I will show the need to theorise national-populism together and at the structural-ontological level, whilst accounting for its emotive aspect. The second part delineates the Lacanian-psychoanalytical architecture, whilst applying it to the Brexit discourse. This part is divided into three main themes that I unpack in the Brexit discourse focusing on the months leading to referendum vote in June 2016 (with only a couple of references to the Brexit discourse afterwards). This part will explain the Lacanian lack at the objective and subjective levels, the power of fantasy, the jouissance that animates fantasy and the desire to recoup loss, all of which have been clearly present in the Brexit discourse. As I explain in this part, the

Lacanian theorisation of subjectivity and objectivity will help us explain how interpellation operates in the Brexit discourse and in national-populist discourses, more broadly.

2 Part I: Populism, Nationalism and Democracy—A Critical Survey of the Literature and Towards a Lacanian Reading of National-Populism

Recent decades have seen a paradigmatic shift in the study of populism and its relationship with nationalism and democracy. As Cas Mudde explains [21], the tradition in the post-WWII era was to render populism, particularly right-wing (extreme) national-populism, alien to Western democracies, suggesting, nonetheless, that a small percentage of such tendencies still existed in Western societies. This is often referred to as the 'normal pathology thesis', pointing to the conditions giving rise to national-populism on the right. As Mudde explains, such explanations focused on the 'demand' aspect of national-populism, whereas recent interventions have sought to challenge the 'normal pathology thesis', shifting the focus towards the 'supply' side explanations [21]. These more recent approaches focus on the style and rhetoric of national-populism, reading it as a 'thin ideology', that is, as a discrete ideology but one that is 'unable to stand alone as a practical political ideology: it lacks the capacity to put forward a wide-ranging and coherent programme for the solution to crucial political questions' [24, p. 95].

Focusing on the 'supply-side' of populism, Moffitt has demonstrated how the idea of crisis is intertwined with the rise of populism, particularly the more authoritarian version advocating the need for strong leadership [22, 23]. Moffitt argues that crises are not external stimuli causing the rise of populist leaders and parties, but a performative aspect of populists' rhetoric and style, as they 'actively participate in the 'spectacularization of failure' that underlies crisis, allowing them to pit 'the people' against a dangerous other' [22, p. 190, 23].

In the more political theory orientated scholarship, Canovan's work is key to understand the complexity and ambiguity of populism and its 'nodal point', 'The People' concept [26, 27]. To Canovan, 'The People' is not alien to the idea and ideals of democracy, it is not a pathological perversion. Rather, she argues, populism refers to the 'redemptive side' of democracy 'accompanying [it] like a shadow' [26, p. 16]. Moreover, in her historical account of 'The People' concept, Canovan demonstrates the openness and ambiguity of the concept, as 'The People' may refer to 'people as sovereign', 'people as nation' and the idea of the 'common people' vs. the elite [27, 28].

To Urbinaty [29–31], drawing on Canovan's readings as well as taking a more critical view towards populism vis-à-vis democracy, populism is 'parasitical on (because internal to) *representative* democracy, which is its true and radical target' [29, p. 137]. Reflecting on changes in democratic governance as well as generalising from 'historical experience', Urbinati argues that populism does not enrich democracy [cf. 48] and can be defined as a movement that seeks to control the state and change its institutional character such that the elements and institutions

of constitutional democracy are eroded or even destroyed, including individual and minority rights, checks and balances and with these the changing nature of the media and the traditional party system.

Following the Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump in 2016, and whilst drawing on Ernesto Laclau's theorisation of populism and the 'people', recent interventions suggest a clear distinction between populism and nationalism. As De Cleen and Stavrakakis [49] argue, existing studies often take a Eurocentric approach to the study of populism and thus read it as part of nationalism, reducing it to extreme right-wing and racist movements/parties. This reductionism of populism to nationalism leads, they argue, to the neglect of populist movements in Latin America that diverge from the typical European experience of xenophobic national-populism, and separating the two may have normative benefits by identifying populist politics as a vehicle to strengthen democracy rather than diminish it (cf. [10]). Moreover, they argue, reading populism through the nationalism/nationalistic fervour lens is also partially due to the nation-state framework, thus falling into the trap of 'methodological nationalism' and missing the chance to analyse contemporary populist movements that are trans-national or even global in nature [49].

As such, these recent discourse analytical interventions offer an abstraction of populism and nationalism thus theorising both at the formal-structural level. The two are separate discourses each with its own 'nodal point', the Lacanian *point de capiton*, that arrest the flow of articulation, albeit only partially, in their respective discourses. Populism operates on a vertical axis (up/down) juxtaposing 'the people' with 'the elite' such that populist politics 'claim to represent "the people" against an "elite" that frustrates their legitimate demands, and presents these demands as expressions of the will of "the people" [50, p. 110]. In populist discourses 'the people' is the master signifier that bring various and even desperate groups together vis-à-vis the elite. This is the Laclauian chain of equivalence, namely the reduction of a given political setting to two major subject positions [51, p. 53–55, 113–118]. Conversely, nationalism operates on a horizontal axis, between 'us and them', with the 'nation' as its 'nodal point'. To De Cleen and Stavrakakis the discursive structure of nationalism refers to a 'limited and sovereign community that exists through time and is tied to a certain space, and that is constructed through an in/out opposition between the nation and its out-groups' [50, p. 308].

This paper draws on De Cleen and Stavrakakis' aim to theorise populism/nationalism at the formal-structural level and on the psychoanalytical underpinning of their discourse-orientated approach. Nonetheless, and as Brubaker recently argued, the distinction populism and nationalism does not seem to hold neither historically, nor in our contemporary political field [10]. More importantly, it seeks to offer a formal-structural account of the two phenomena whilst in effect offering a rather reductionist and essentialist definition of both populism and nationalism. As Canovan [27, 28] already demonstrated, 'The People' is an ambiguous concept that may have various significations and as such, indeed as a master signifier, appeal in various contexts across time and space. We should also bear in mind that 'The People' operates on both the vertical and horizontal levels, and historically was invoked to both refer to the demos as the source of democratic legitimacy and as the majority 'under-dog' exploited by the minority elite and having no political voice. According

to the Abbe Sieyes, a key figure in the French Revolution, the people and the nation is the same, that is, the clear majority who are in effect those who already run the every-day business of the nation but have no political voice as they are ruled by a small privileged elite [28, 37, 52].

Perhaps the problem lies in De Cleen and Stavrakakis' attempt, to salvage populism from the horrors of nationalism and legitimate the radical-democratic left of populist movements, especially in Latin and Central America, as well as recently in Europe [49]. Whilst partially drawing on Laclau's discourse analytical theorisation as well as Stavrakakis' previous theorisations of nationalism and affect [46, 51, 53–56], I find De Cleen and Stavrakakis' approach problematic because firstly, the affective dimension, indeed the jouissance which is key to interpellation (in Lacanian psychoanalysis) is missing, and merely hinted at in their recent analyses of populism and nationalism. Laclau's later writings about 'radical investment' as well as Stavrakakis' own work on nationalism and its affective and fantasmatic operations seem absent [46, 55–57]. Secondly and whilst the sliding relationship of signifier and signified are key to understanding the Lacanian theory of discourse, I would still argue against the conflation of the formal-ontological with the specific-ontic; between the structure of discourse and the cultural materials a discourse invokes. The point is not that the two are mutually exclusive as such, but that we should not use the cultural-ontic which we may favour normatively in order to create some form of theoretical separation at the ontological level, that is, between nationalism and populism. Consequently, as Žižek [58, pp. 280–284] argued, we cannot differentiate normatively so easily between nationalism and populism as the latter can be as dangerous and exclusive, indeed oppressive as the former [see also Kaltwasser's critique of Laclau and Mouffe's work [59]. Moreover, deploying a logic of equivalence is not unique to a populist vertical schema, as populism can easily endorse an 'us vs. them' approach even if the us-them moves across and beyond national borders.

Returning to the scholarship on Brexit, Browning's [32] recent linking of ontological in/security, particularly as developed in international relations theory and critical security studies [35, 60–64], with a Lacanian-inspired framework is key to this paper. Browning maintains that the Brexit discourse was able to appeal to many in British society due to the fantasmatic nature of the Brexit promise, already operating on a fertile ground of discontent, grievance and a sense of being 'left behind'. The Brexit discourse thus pulled people in by promising a return to a 'lost home',[3] an impossible promise which has by now created a heightened sense of anxiety and ontological insecurity [see also 12, 13, 35, 60–62, 64]. Indeed, Browning argues that given that Brexit has yet to be delivered, many Brexiteers are now further entrenched in their position, feeling their vote and win in the referendum had been stolen from them and that the political establishment had betrayed them, the 'common people'.

This paper draws on Browning's reading of Brexit as fantasy and its emotive aspect by arousing nostalgia and the promise of home. Nonetheless, and drawing on my earlier analysis of the Brexit vote and the power of nationalism [7, 38, 39], I argue that we need to further unpack the relationship between populism and

[3] For recent analyses of 'home' from an ontological security perspective see Mitzen [65]; Steele [66]; Manners [64].

nationalism, both formally-structurally and in the specific case of Brexit. The existing pre-referendum ontological insecurities that Browning [32] refers to are also somewhat problematic, firstly because, as he identifies, they reproduce a racialised reading of Brexit (and national-populism) as if the Brexit vote was won by economically deprived white working class [34]. Secondly and whilst one could deploy the concept of ontological in/security through a Lacanian lens [35, 60–62], the idea that existing pre-referendum ontological insecurities and a sense of 'strangers in our own home', both articulated in the Brexit discourse as Browning argues, is somewhat antithetical to the Lacanian notion of fantasy [39, 67, 68]. This is because it is fantasy that produces the sense of loss and the impossible promise to refill that loss, fix enjoyment and a sense of identitarian closure. In other words, fantasy is not simply a narrative that seeks to address existing insecurities. Rather, it produces them whilst trying to offer the utopian solution in which insecurity is resolved whilst making sure it can never be delivered [67–69]. Finally, it is not clear from Browning's analysis what exactly the Brexit fantasy promised that was able to appeal and indeed interpellate so many in British society. The answer to this lies in the affective power of national-populism and its promise of closure, something that is missing from Browning's account and others who point to the performative aspect of populism but neglect the persistent power of nationalism in contemporary societies [39].

3 Part II: Interpellating Britain—The Lacanian-Psychoanalytical Architecture and the Void of National-Populism

This part unpacks the operations of fantasy, jouissance and loss (including desire) in the Brexit discourse and how taken together they lead to an affective and effective interpellation. This means to psychoanalytically interrogate the *form and power* of the Brexit discourse and of national-populism, more generally [7, 37–39, 46, 47, 56]. The three apparatuses will be analytically explicated and applied to the Brexit discourse as I focus on three main themes in the Brexit campaign discourse, speeches by members of parliament, the Prime Minister and other Brexit supporters. The following is therefore structured according to three main themes: the first theme, Brexit Means Brexit, demonstrates how the emptiness of the Brexit discourse, that is, the Lacanian void at the heart of the subject and object of national-populism, enables affective hailing. The tautological logic of the Brexit discourse and statements such as Brexit means Brexit, should not simply be dismissed as irrational, but precisely because of their circular logic they offer a powerful sense of national-populist jouissance embroiled with affective belonging to an empty signifier. The second theme, Taking back Control/Breaking Point, demonstrates the operations of the Brexit fantasy as offering both the utopian future of closure and the obstacle to obtaining such closure. In this part I will show how disavowal was crucial in the particular case of Brexit, namely how the two campaigns supporting Brexit, the official Vote Leave and unofficial Leave.EU [70, 71], offered a way for people to disavow their racial worldview and their xenophobic sentiments [32]. The third theme, Standing on our own two Feet, entails the national-civilizational aspect of the Brexit discourse, in which

desire and loss play an important role, namely by invoking an imagined grandiose past, that of Empire colonialism and world dominance. The past in this theme is articulated as a way to celebrate national grandeur and of Britain's ability to stand alone and succeed.

4 Brexit Means Brexit: Lack and Void in the Subject/Object of National-Populism

This part puts forth a Lacanian psychoanalytical reading, thus theorising the effective and affective power of national-populist discourses and the need to interrogate processes of interpellation [46, 58, 72–74, pp. 78–79]. Our starting point is the Lacanian split subject, but as we shall see the split resides at both the subjective and objective levels. To Lacan, drawing on Freud's theorisation of the splitting of the ego as a defence mechanism (*Spaltung*), the subject is split, it is a barred subject ($). As Fink [75, p. 45] argues this is a split '… between consciousness and unconsciousness, between an ineluctably false sense of self and the automatic functioning of language (the signifying chain) in the unconsciousness' (see also [76]). The Lacanian subject's ontological status is one of void/lack, that is, a lack of totality and sound sense of identity at the level of the individual, which therefore leads to a continuous search of filling this void, of overcoming the impossibility of identity [57, pp. 13–47, see also 77, pp. 334–337, 35, 60–62, 78]. The subject is in search of an objective edifice to identify with and thus close the subjective lack and satisfy their desire. But the objective field is also lacking thus reintroducing the split at the subjective level. As Stavrakakais [57, p. 41] puts it:

> If I need to identify with something it is not only because I don't have a full identity in the first place, but also because all my attempts to acquire it by identifying with a supposedly full Other are failing.

We could say, therefore, that the social order, customs, rules and norms—the Lacanian Symbolic Order—offers both an edifice with which the subject may wish to identify, but at the same time it can never offer the full closure, the sense of fullness and security [38, 68, 69]. The Lacanian reading of the split subject is also key to our reading of what Freud [79] defines as Group Psychology, and national-populism in our case. This is because we are not talking here about the mere application of psychoanalysis to the collective/group level. Rather, it is the confluence and the void of both the subject and the object, their ontological lack, which therefore renders political battles for meaning (and hegemony) an endless venture [53, 57, pp. 40–54].

The impossible yet desired sense to fill the gap at both levels, therefore, is what matters since it means that it is the emptiness of the master signifier that creates the subjective–objective relations. In other words, it is the split that constitutes the subject as an anxious subject continuously trying and failing at overcoming the split [80]. The Lacanian lack or split, therefore,

> … is not simply a property of the subject. It makes up its very being, its relationship to itself, to others, and to the world. This lack, in other words, is the condition of the sovereignty of the Lacanian subject [81, p. 659].

This suggests reading subjectivity as a paradoxical driving force in socio-political terms [77, 78], and especially in our reading of national-populism and national identity. This is because the subject's ontological lack means that no fixed predicate can be attributed to national identities and indeed to the idea of the nation/state [39]. Rather, the process is one of continuous identification. But it is precisely because of this impossibility of identity that the quest for recovering the lost sense of being in the world gives rise to subjectivities. In other words, the ontological lack both suggests no fixed identity and an endless struggle to cover the subject's lack: It is that which '… defines the subject as such' [76, p. 179]. Moreover, and as I explain below the Lacanian concept of fantasy, this void gives rise to our desire to cover this lack, to find the impossible identity, of both our subjectivity and the objective lack [57, pp. 40–54, 82].

From a Lacanian perspective, therefore, we cannot talk about subjects or identities as '…seat[s] that can hold any essential identity' [77, p. 334]. There is no self or identity in the essentialist sense when we discuss national identities, which in an age of fear and ontological insecurity account for the fantasmatic promise of stability nationalism and religion offer [60]. Rather, what we do have is the endless attempt to eradicate the lack and impossibility of identity, of a clear seat or ego. As Stavrakakis [57, p. 29] clearly explains: 'What we have then… is not identities but identification, a series of failed identifications or rather a play between identification and its failure, a deeply political play.' Both notions here, that is of 'failure' and the 'political', are crucial to reading national-populism psychoanalytically and I will turn to them now through the operations of interpellation in the Brexit narrative.

Interpellation as the production and hailing of subjectivities, the national-populist subjectivity, is able to take place precisely because of the emptiness of the master signifier, the people/nation/we/sovereignty. The void of objectivity and subjectivity is what renders the national-populism edifice so appealing as it offers a chain of signification without ever really arresting the flow of articulations. This is how we should read Thresa May's famous statement in her bid to become Prime Minister in July 2016, a statement she repeated many times after: 'Brexit means Brexit and we are going to make a success of it'. We should read this not so much as a speech act, as Adler-Nissan [83] recently argues, but as a tautological statement that according to Hegelian logic of tautology is 'far from clarifying things, [it] tautology gives birth to the specter of some imponderable depth which escapes words; far from being an index of perfection, it hints at an obscene contingent underside' [5, p. 370). The gap in the structure of Brexit, of British sovereignty, success and stand in the world is exactly its emptiness thus enabling interpellation.

This is similar to the ways in which the USA (and the UK) deployed the threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) in the weeks and months leading to the 2003 Invasion of Iraq. As Oren and Solomon [84, p. 316] argue, the ways in which Iraq came to be securitised as an existential threat was due the performative repetitions of WMD such that '[t]he ritualistic choral chanting of this phrase by the

administration, the media, and the public constructed… a heightened generalised sense of danger even as many of the chanters did not necessarily support the invasion of Iraq.'

This tautological phrase, Brexit means Brexit, that was later repeated numerous times in the media, by politicians and in political discourse in general, also entailed a sense of collective jouissance, fuelling a fantasmatic vision of future British greatness. This jouissance directly links to the desire to cover the lack of the national-populist edifice, namely the void at the heart of the UK as a nation/state and what it means to be British. And is not this the case of yet another of May's famous statement, on one of the UK warships on her way to Bahrain in early December 2016, proclaiming that a future Brexit deal is and will be British, again without any content, no predicates but an empty articulation of 'we-ness'. As she puts it:

> People talk about the sort of Brexit that there is going to be – is it hard or soft, is it grey or white. Actually we want a red, white and blue Brexit: that is the right Brexit for the UK, the right deal for the UK' [85].

The interpellation that is at work again prescribes to the logic of tautological repetitions that seeks to cover the national-populist void with empty gestures that enable a sense of collective jouissance, as if the reference to the colours of the British flag, which in effect may be the colours of other countries like France or Russia, encapsulate the fantasy of Brexit, of a utopian future of greatness. It would be tempting to consider the British flag, or indeed any national flag, as ontic, as a specific symbol that clearly encapsulates the meaning of the national edifice. In the British case one could point to the history of Britain (i.e. the Royal proclamation of the union of Great Britain and Ireland) and the three national flags all interwoven into the Union Jack. Nonetheless, national flags, despite their perceived specificity, are able to operate and interpellate precisely because of their structural emptiness across different groups and no doubt over time. The British flag does not entail any specific vision as to the UK-EU relationship and it can be deployed to both justify Brexit and oppose it.

5 Taking Back Control/Breaking Point

The image of society and that of the national-populist edifice, therefore, is always in flux and ambivalent at its core. It is here that fantasy is key to understanding the impossible promise of national-populist unity and, equally important, the affective investment that the national-populist fantasy entails. Fantasy arises out of a need to cover for lack, the hole or gap in one's sense of identity and indeed in the imaginary wholeness of society. Fantasy is thus a support of sorts for the incompleteness of social reality that is more real and less real to that of society, the nation, the state or any form of imagined collectivity, and that precisely because of this must aspire continuously to recapture its being/becoming in the world [39].

Fantasy thus always attempts to frame the ideal society in which we wish to live; it sets the criteria by which the 'good life' can be attained, as it constantly strives to cover the lack, the incompleteness and indeed void of and within society. As such,

fantasy constantly aspires to account for the unpredictability, indeed the contingent nature of social life by providing an ideal and reassuring blueprint for a fixed and structured world, a certain necessary utopia ([57, pp. 99–121], see also [86]), that is, the future promise of fulfilment in which fantasy is realized and enjoyment is attained, although a realization that can never be realised as I explain below. Fantasy, therefore, both renders a narrative of societal completeness and ensures such closure is never reached [38, 87–89, 69, 90]. Fantasies and here the fantasy of national unity embedded in and expressed through statehood, the fantasy of nation/state homogeneity so endemic to modernity/modernism [91, 36, 92–94], '… obfuscates the true horror of a situation: instead of a full rendering of the antagonisms which traverse our society, we indulge in the notion of society as an organic Whole, kept together by forces of solidarity and co-operation' [68, p. 5; see also 68, 95, pp. 47–60].

The national-populist fantasy, moreover, should not be read as reality's antonym. As Žižek [68, p. 57] suggests, '[i]n the opposition between dream and reality, fantasy is on the side of reality…'. Ideas and conceptualisations of an imagined collectivity should not be dismissed as such, as imagined, or merely institutionalised through practices, institutions and/or habits. Rather, the fantasy of national-populist unity is that which constructs and renders reality possible—a reality that is contingent and in which society, the people, the nation, 'we' is anything but a homogeneous symbol [38]. In the Lacanian architecture of the three registers—The Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary [96, 97, pp. 139–163]—fantasy is the narrative that enables us to escape the horror and trauma of the Real, as that which cannot be symbolised, and offers instead a 'smoother' reality [98, pp. 1133–1136]. This is because 'fantasy is basically a scenario filling out the empty space of a fundamental impossibility, a screen masking a void' [82, p. 126, see also 40, pp. 19–20, 41, pp. 33–34, 69]. To Zevnik [95, p. 629], drawing on the Lacanian concept of Che vuoi?, 'fantasy secures and reinsures the subject of the necessity of its mandate' by reassuring us with what the Other wants from us, what is expected from us, or what the Other desires (an ambiguous process that entails its own failure and anxiety as I explain below).

As Arfi [87] and Eberle [88, 89] clearly explain, fantasy both renders the narrative of completeness possible and prevents it from obtaining full closure. It is here that I return to the importance of failure and the political in the analysis of the national-populist fantasy because as we learn from Lacan, fantasies always include their own failure, the explanation why the fantasmatic futurity [40, 41] has not yet been attained. As Glynos and Howarth [99, p. 147] put it:

> Fantasy operates so as to conceal or close off the radical contingency of social relations. It does this through a fantasmatic narrative or logic that promises a fullness-to-come once a named or implied obstacle is overcome ... or which foretells of disaster if the obstacle proves insurmountable.

Failure is therefore at the heart of the national-populist fantasy because it is the lack and void of national subjectivities, and the people concept nationalism always requires [26–28, 37, 100], that propels the fantasy of national unity, which in turn must explain and articulate its own impossibility: its inherent failure. This failure, or obstacle, nonetheless, is what constitutes subjectivity, the national-populist

subjectivity, since it is loss and alienation that make the 'basic condition of the formation of subjectivity and agency' [77, p. 336].

We could approach this duality in the functioning of fantasies by distinguishing between fantasy$_1$ and fantasy$_2$. Fantasy$_1$ is the alleged unifying narrative of the national story, the narrative that captures all potential antagonisms and contradictions and clearly stipulates one's national roots, one's present importance in 'working together' and in setting one's collective destiny. Fantasy$_2$, however, is the obstacle, the Other whose existence and continuous meddling in 'our' affairs is the cause of 'our' inability to fulfil 'our' potential and to be finally a united nation, one people. As Žižek [5, pp. 685–686], see also [68] puts it:

> Fantasy$_1$ and fantasy$_{2\ ...}$ are thus two sides of the same coin. Insofar as a community experiences its reality as regulated and structured by fantasy$_1$, it has to disavow its inherent impossibility, the antagonism at its very heart – and fantasy2 gives body to this disavowal. In short, the success of fantasy$_1$ in maintaining its hold depends on the effectiveness of fantasy$_2$.

Fantasies operate such that they offer '…. a fullness-to-come once a named or implied obstacle is overcome … or which foretells of disaster if the obstacle proves insurmountable [99, p. 147]. The two campaigns advocating Brexit, Vote Leave and Leave.EU, demonstrate the two sides of national-populist fantasies. On the one hand, the promise was one of a bright, hopeful and utopian future. A future of success, greatness, and wealth in which the British people is its main source of legitimacy and its referent-object. At the same time, failing to leave the EU, would result in loss of money, control and descent into undemocratic rule by Brussels and growing immigration. The two aspects of an effective and affective fantasy, fantasy$_1$ as the utopian future and fantasy$_2$ as the obstacle, were present in the months leading to the Brexit vote in June 2016 and ever since, especially during the campaigns for the European parliamentary elections in May 2019.

The key slogan of Vote Leave (2016), the formal campaign to leave the EU, was 'Vote Leave, take back control' [70], clearly sliding between the utopian future outside the EU and the catastrophe which is lurking behind the corner if the UK failed to vote leave during the referendum and deliver on the Brexit vote since. The webpage, Why Vote Leave, on the online website of Vote Leave, gives the viewer two expandable tabs: one in light blue colours entitled 'If we vote to leave the EU', the other in red entitled 'If we vote to stay in the EU' [70]. What would happen…

If we vote to leave the EU,

Click to find out http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/why_vote_leave.html

If we vote to leave the EU

Click to find out

We will be able to save £350 million a week

We can spend our money on our priorities like the NHS, schools, and housing.

We'll be in charge of our own borders

In a world with so many new threats, it's safer to control our own borders and decide for ourselves who can come into this country, not be overruled by EU judges.

We can control immigration

and have a fairer system which welcomes people to the UK based on the skills they have, not the passport they hold.

We'll be free to trade with the whole world

The EU stops us signing our own trade deals with key allies like Australia or New Zealand, and growing economies like India, China or Brazil. We'll be free to seize new opportunities which means more jobs.

We can make our own laws

Our laws should be made by people we can elect and kick out – that's more democratic.

Vote Leave, take back control

The first tab, as above, offers the viewer a utopian future of saving money that goes to the EU and can be spent at home on various public goods like the National Health Services, schools, housing and more. Moreover, the fantasy of British sovereignty, control over borders and spending is represented in an imagery that taps into existing British culture and its symbolic order such as the NHS sign, Britain's island status and geography and of course the British national flag. As such, the online campaign of Vote Leave is able to fantasmatically and emotively play into the national-populist imaginary.

The obstacle, or threat, is encapsulated in this promise and presented in the following tab entitled: If we vote to stay in the EU [70]. If we vote to stay in the EU, the campaign advises us, the EU will enlarge to include Serbia and Turkey, amongst other countries, thus bringing more pressure on the UK in terms of immigration, budget and curtailing UK's ability to legislate its own laws. The obstacle is therefore loss of control, demographic change and loss of Britishness (i.e. loss of Whiteness), and a society descending into chaos.

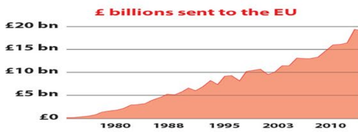
If we vote to stay in the EU,

Click to find out http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/why_vote_leave.html

If we vote to stay in the EU
Click to find out

The EU is expanding

The EU will cost us more and more



The EU already costs us £350 million a week

– enough to build a new NHS hospital every week. We get less than half of this back, and have no say over how it's spent.

Immigration will continue to be out of control

Nearly 2 million people came to the UK from the EU over the last ten years. Imagine what it will be like in future decades when new, poorer countries join.

We'll have to keep bailing out the €

The countries that use the Euro already have a built-in majority, meaning they can always outvote us. You will be paying the bill for the Euro's failure.

The European Court will still be in charge of our laws

It already overrules us on everything from how much tax we pay, to who we can let in and out of the country, and on what terms.

The informal, and often more blunt campaign to leave the EU, LEAVE.EU, offered an even stronger aspect of fantasy$_2$, the obstacle or threat to come if we fail to obtain fantasy$_1$. A good example is the infamous campaign ad sponsored by

LEAVE.EU and the UKIP Party, then led by Nigel Farage, which appeared throughout the country just weeks before the referendum vote. The ad made clear references to the flow of refugees throughout Europe in 2015, mostly from war-torn Syria and Afghanistan, as well as using an imagery that is strikingly similar to Nazi propaganda, thus clearly invoking a racial and xenophobic worldview, warning people against staying in the EU, which will lead to 'swarms of migrants into UK cities and towns' [101].

The relationship between the formal and supposedly more benign and politically correct Vote Leave campaign and the informal campaign led by the UKIP Party and sponsored by Aaron Banks, also points to the disavowal in play in the Brexit narrative. As Wincott [33] and Browning [32] identify, the more racist and blunt Breaking Point poster ad and overall the Leave.EU campaign, which was criticised by Vote Leave, offered many voters a way to whitewash and disavow their racist sentiments. Brexit voters could thus criticise the Leave.EU campaign and its racist tone, whilst at the same time argue for Brexit on presumably neutral and legal-economic grounds, that is, invoking the empty signifier of 'us' and 'our' so as to legitimate a break from the EU in order to control 'our' borders make 'our' own laws and striking deals with 'our' allies.

Nonetheless, the disavowal in the Brexit did not only manifest itself by the rejection of the more overtly racist Brexit message of UKIP and Leave.EU. In fact, the disavowal (*Verleugnung*) operated by clearly and openly discussing Brexit's racist/xenophobic sentiments whilst denying it at the same time. As Žižek [5, p. 859] explains, in disavowal the issue at hand is openly discussed and addressed but 'its symbolic impact is suspended, it is not really integrated into the subject's symbolic universe'. The typical disavowal was therefore along the lines of 'I know very well that Brexit may have racist undertones, but nonetheless I support it because I want control over our borders'. An example of this disavowal was clearly articulated by Julia Hartley-Brewer, a radio presenter and pro-Brexit campaigner, writing in the

Telegraph just a day before the referendum. In it she offers reassurance to prospective leave voters and talks about 'immigration' and 'pressure' on 'our' NHS and public services:

> And perhaps you are afraid of being called a xenophobe or a racist or a Little Englander if you want to vote to control our borders? Well, rest assured that the many millions of people who are voting Leave on 23 June are not nasty, bitter old racists who want to go back to the 1950s. This isn't about closing our borders and turning our backs on the world… There is absolutely nothing racist or xenophobic about being concerned about the pressures on housing, schools, the NHS, our roads, public transport and community cohesion that years of mass uncontrolled immigration has brought [102].

6 Standing on Our Own Two Feet

Fantasies, however, are not merely discursive and objective fillings by which national-populist narratives are fixed and/or hegemonized. Focusing on national fantasies and narratives is not an analysis in the '… field of objective relations' [55, p. 105]. Rather, fantasies are embroiled with jouissance, a libidinal and affective investment entailing bodily enjoyment that produces and interpellates populations [47]. The fantasmatic national-populist narrative always entails a plot in which enjoyment was lost, stolen and destroyed. These are the stories of national and civilizational golden-ages, heroic pasts or major defeats and catastrophes narrating 'our' lost grandeur [46]. The promised jouissance is thus 'always-already lost' [44, p. 261] and is revived in the national utopia by the promise to recapture it, to reinstate it through the establishment of national sovereignty and by controlling (a specific) territory. The national-populist fantasy is thus an impossible-possibility that is nonetheless envisioned and as such is capable to hail populations precisely through its promise and the partial collective enjoyment it offers to its members. As Stavrakakis and Chrysoloras [46, p. 153] put it:

> …the lost golden era of absolute enjoyment and the possibility of a return to this era is a chimera. However, the existence of this fantasy fosters the solidarity of the community, consolidates national identity, and animates national desire.

A good example of this affective call to restore Britain's greatness and reignite a sense of national jouissance can be found in the words of Major-General Tim Cross from the Veterans for Britain campaign, making the case for Brexit in the Telegraph a month before the June referendum:

> As the 21st century unfurls we can and should stand among the front rank of world powers, bowing to no one and displaying confidence in ourselves as a country unique among the brotherhood of nations [103].

Equally key here are the various references to Britain's history as a military and trading power, as the author of this op-ed, Major-General Tim Cross, clearly invoke Britain's military fights against Nazism and against Argentina in 1982. Indeed, the two pictures that illustrate the piece are those of Winston Churchill with his typical victory sign and Margaret Thatcher in her visit to Port Stanley. As such, the piece clearly makes the case for rejecting 'defeatism' and asserting Britain's strength as a unique power that does not require the European project:

> Bloody minded, indeed arrogant, we stood firm under inspirational and visionary leadership that made no apologies for what we stood for and what we were capable of achieving. Today Whitehall is stuffed full of senior politicians, civil servants and advisers who believe that Britain cannot survive unless we bury ourselves inside an amorphous mass of unelected bureaucrats. They have no pride in where we have come from as a nation and no clue as to what we can be in the future…Many of us are not prepared to accept this defeatism… [103].

What therefore seemed to have united the various voices calling to leave the EU—those of Michael Gove, Boris Johnson, Iain Duncan Smith, Liam Fox (all then MPs from the Conservative Party) and Gisela Stuart (Labour MP and Chair of the Vote Leave) was the promise to be great again, independent, democratic and sovereign. As Liam Fox [104] suggested on the Andrew Marr Show on the BBC on 29 May 2016:

> I want to leave the European Union because I want control of our own lawmaking. Sovereignty for me is key. I want control of our own money that we're handing over at the moment to Brussels. And I want control over our own borders.

Returning briefly to lack as constitutive of subjectivity and identification discussed earlier, Solomon's [105, p. 917] analysis of discourse, affect and jouissance is exceptionally useful here as it displays the ambiguous nature of fantasies and the jouissance they entail:

> In pursuing a whole sense of 'self', the subject continually experiences both frustration and satisfaction – satisfaction in identifying itself with those valued signifiers of a culture that confer a sense of being and security (such as 'patriotic', 'freedom', 'justice', 'democracy', etc.) and frustration in never being able to fully identify with the promise of wholeness and stability that such privileged signifiers seem to offer.

The promise of jouissance is thus ambiguous and fantasmatic in the sense that it only offers limited experiences of belonging rendered meaningful through partial-enjoyment. This is vital to understanding the emotive hailing power of national-populist narratives and their promise of closure as they strive to eradicate the gap, the lack in the national-populist subjectivity, by offering partial modes of belonging, of limited identification with the Lacanian *objet petit a* as the object-cause of desire [87, pp. 432–437, 44, pp. 262–263, 58, but see 54, pp. 112–115).

This is how law and society's demands operate. That is, by imposing limitations and prohibitions on the subject's access to full jouissance such that '[O]ne no longer experiences pure desire; instead all cravings and ways of enjoyment are within the limits of society' [78, p. 29]. At the same time, however, it is precisely the impossibility of full jouissance and a satisfaction of desire that produces the barred subject, thus again demonstrating the chimera aspect of fantasy as conditions of possibility for partial enjoyment and the obstacle for why it is only partial [87, 106].

It is here that we see the importance of desire in the Lacanian architecture, and its complex relationship with lack, fantasy and enjoyment. First, as I explained above, desire arises from the basic void at the level of subjectivity, but it arises equally at the level of the objective, such as the lack in the national-populist edifice. In other words, desire is aimed not at satisfaction, say, of some particular need. Indeed, desires and needs are not identical, and this explains the consumerist and over-consumption of the affluent West which does not need things but desires them nonetheless [98, p. 1122].

Desire, therefore, is aimed at recouping that which cannot be symbolised or named, the void/loss. This unnamed thing is the Freudian *Das Ding* and the Lacanian *objet petit a* as the object-cause of desire [82, 69]. As such, desire has no object that 'could satisfy it' and we end-up with an endless movement 'simply for the enjoyment (jouissance) of pursuing it' [106, p. 5, 69, pp. 75–100, 95].

Second is the role fantasy plays as it 'constitutes our desire, provides its coordinates; that is, it literally 'teaches us how to desire' [107, p. 47]. Kapoor [98, 108], for instance, demonstrates the relationship between fantasy and desire in his analyses of development discourse that construes the Third World as poor and 'backward', thus de-historicising imperial legacies and avoiding the more profound problem of inequality. In other words, the fantasy of development '…is the mise-en-scène for desire: it helps make reality smooth, coherent and harmonious, protecting us from trauma or lack…', thus reassuring us in the global north that the reason for 'underdeveloped' states is because of 'rogue civil servants, corrupt leaders, uneducated or irresponsible mothers, 'ethnic' or 'traditional' practices' [98, p. 1134].

Returning to the ways in which fantasy 'teaches us how to desire' [107, p. 47] and the pursuit of enjoyment, the ways national-populist narratives of unity are structured are psychoanalytically telling. They often offer various such moments of partial enjoyment and satisfaction as well as frustrations such as in the event of a crisis, war and/or national celebrations, parades and memorial days. The national edifice is able thus to produce and hail its national subjects through this partial experience of 'we-ness'. But this is limited for any such moment of affective belonging ends with frustration, with a cry that this is not quite it, since enjoyment was experienced but very quickly lost again. Belonging was bodily performed but only to be shortly removed from the libidinal economy [44, p. 262]. As explained above, this is due to the subjectivity's lack as the driving force of identification, but a lack that can never be rendered whole and as such includes the ambiguous or 'amorphous' quality of affect [90, pp. 44–51].

We can see these operations of jouissance, desire and fantasy in various speeches by prominent Brexiteers, again invoking Britain's past as a global military and trading power, its prestige as the oldest democracy, whilst rendering

Brussels and the European project a threat to Britain's freedom, democracy and identity, amongst other things. Lord Nigel Lawson, former chancellor of the Exchequer in Thatcher's government in the 1980s, offered a strong rebuttal of the EU and its curtailing powers over the UK before offering precisely this sense of national-civilizational jouissance, of being proud and 'standing tall':

> Above all, we would become once again a self-governing democracy, with a genuinely global rather than a little European perspective. We would prosper, we would be free, and we would stand tall. That is what this referendum is all about [109].

The impossibility of the national fantasy and the jouissance that keeps the fantasy going, indeed animating it [68, pp. 55–106], is directly linked to lack and the gap in the national existence, but this admission in 'our' lack, or the lack in the national signifying structure, is not recognized in the national edifice, for that would mean anxiety and paralysis. This is where we see again the affective and enjoyment-infused power of the national-populist fantasy, that is, by promising us fantasy_1 in which full unity is obtained, 'the people' are the true rulers and the ontological void is concealed. At the same time, fantasy_2 offers us an explanation for why we are not yet congruent and secured and thus how we slide between covering the lack and the impossibility of materialising fantasy_1.

What the national-populist edifice thus offers is a certain libidinal bribe and trade-off. Through the constitution of the national body and bodies, the national-populist narrative interpellates populations—that is to say the national population introjects the symbolic order through myriad practices and performativities (e.g. national symbols, the flag, national holidays and commemorations)—whereas the lack and inability to fulfil the fantasy and obtain authentic and lasting enjoyment is projected onto the Other [47]. This Other now stands for difference, for our lack, and its existence is both a hindrance and a necessary explanation for why we have not yet managed to secure and obtain our national fantasy [87–89, 99, p. 147, 95]. Why we cannot live freely and are still insecure. This demonstrates how national-populist fantasies both promise us the satisfaction of desire, the obtainment of jouissance, security and fulfilment of our national aspirations, and at the same time making sure this promise is kept at bay, unrealized.

> This way enjoyment is kept at a "healthy" distance, not too far but not too close either; close enough to support the appeal of an object of identification but far enough from letting us entertain the vision of full satisfaction as an imminent possibility, something that would kill desire, induce anxiety and put identification processes in danger [46, p. 152].

It is here that we see the form and power of national-populist and civilizational discourses which invoke the heyday of strength, power and influence in the world and thus romanticise the past. A past, however, which had been lost, indeed stolen by someone, but which can be reclaimed in the nearby future [46]. It is no surprise, therefore, that Brexiteers had invoked Britain's history, its days of Empire and its fight against Nazism and Communism in an attempt to tap into

the country's collective memory and thus appeal to British population through an affective call to rally 'round the flag'. Once we leave the EU, Brexiteers promised, we would be able to 'stand on our own two feet', recover a sense of national pride and obtain a global acknowledgement of Britain's position in the world as a great power. As Julia Hartley-Brewer, a radio presenter and pro-Brexit campaigner, put it just a day before the referendum:

> So trust Britain to be able to stand on its own two feet in the world. Trust the British people to know how best to govern our own country. But most of all, trust yourself to take back control, and vote for Britain to leave the EU [102].

Or, in the words of Iain Duncan Smith (a conservative MP and key figure in the Vote Leave campaign):

> Britain is a phenomenal country, the fifth largest economy in the world, it has stood alone and fought for freedom, it has traded, it has been a global trader, it can yet again be a global trader [110].

7 Conclusions

This paper analysed the Brexit discourse through a Lacanian psychoanalytical framework, focusing on the formal-ontological aspect of the Brexit discourse and national-populism, more broadly. The paper began with a clear puzzle that was evident already in the days and weeks leading to the Referendum in June 2016, namely that economic and cost–benefit calculations did not play a major role. Instead, I argued, three key apparatuses were key to the affective success of the Brexit campaign: fantasy, Jouissance, and loss (including the importance of desire and how taken together they brought about successful interpellation). Fantasy refers to the ways in which the Brexit narrative entailed both the utopian futurity of closure, security and independence whilst blaming the inability to achieve all those because of the EU, Brussels and immigration. Jouissance refers to the partial bodily enjoyment that was invoked time and time again in the lead up to the Brexit referendum (and afterwards). Jouissance entailed the invocation of Britain's glorious past as a global power, militarily and economically, whilst creating chains of signification to Britain's fights against Nazism, communism and the 1982 Falklands War. Brexit enabled a sense of national rejoice, at least for some, whilst emerging more recently in the UK election of 2019 as a promise that has been betrayed by Parliament, and the establishment. Loss directly links to fantasy and jouissance since it is produced through the fantasmatic narrative of Brexit, namely Britain's sense of loss—of power, of influence and of importance—that is then produced as the cause of the Brexit desire to close that gap, to recapture national jouissance.

In short, all three apparatuses—fantasy, jouissance and loss—are intertwined such that at the formal-structural level we could say that the national-populism edifice operates affectively through its promise of wholeness, greatness and the recouping of national grandeur and thus jouissance. The promise of belonging to the people/nation versus those who stole it from us obscures the lack, the unease and indeed

anxiety. Now, because such wholeness, such stasis is unattainable and as the discourse centres around empty tautological chains of signification, the national-populism subjectivity is made and hailed. The desire to attain the Lacanian *objet petit a* is bound to fail but the drive which sits on this endless movement, gets its enjoyment *in perpetuum mobile*.

This further demonstrates the ambiguity of the ‘nation’ and ‘people’ signifiers which, I argue, endow them with such strong affective power, of hailing the national-populist subjectivity by promising closure. It also shows how in such cases we cannot easily sperate between horizontal and vertical demands, between nationalism and populism, respectively. The Brexit discourse clearly articulates the Other as both inside (the immigrant) and outside (the EU ‘super-state’). The source of authority for the Brexit call to ‘stand tall’ and ‘take back control’ had been the people as the common/ordinary people, and the people as the sovereign nation.

We should, moreover, be critical of these calls to regain Britain’s grandeur, to reclaim British sovereignty and to reassert British control (over spending, over borders, over immigration etc.). This is because such calls are not innocent. They always entail an Other, a someone/something to blame for why Britain lost its national enjoyment and power and how once this Other is removed Britain will be great again. This is the typical process of Othering in which a perceived obstacle is identified and named, and which seems to encapsulate all that is wrong in our society [7, 38]. It is the Other that prevents ‘us’ from recouping ‘our’ lost enjoyment and celebrate ‘our’ national grandeur. It is the Other who steals ‘our’ jobs and exploits ‘our’ benefit system. For now, it is Brussels who ‘stole our democracy’ or increased immigration which is ‘… driving our housing policy, NHS demand and school places’. This Othering, however, will not go away now given the UK has yet to leave the EU, entering into an unpredictable ‘transition period’. Since the socio-economic prospects for the UK are far from favourable, it remains to be seen how the Brexit fantasy will unfold and who will the Brexiteers blame?

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