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Brexit and emergent politics: in search of a social psychology

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Abstract

In this paper we develop a conceptual and methodological approach that psychologists and other social scientists can employ to study emergence. We consider relevant social psychological approaches and conclude that, for the most part, social psychology has tended to focus on processes of normalisation following disruptions, rather than examining emergence in itself. An exception to this is G.H. Mead, whose work we draw on to theorise emergence with a focus on contemporary 'affective politics'. In the second part of the paper, we use focus group data on the EU referendum in the UK to empirically illustrate our theoretical points. We discuss in particular three axes for exploring the emergent politics of Brexit: political values, political authority, and the authority of affect. We conclude our discussion by reflecting on some of the theoretical and political implications of our analysis.

Introduction: an emerging social psychology for an emergent politics

This special issue asks: what conceptual and methodological tools can social psychologists employ or develop to better understand the emerging political realities associated with Brexit? This focus on emergence implies that the ordered universe of the political status quo has been disrupted and that something new is at play in the passage of politics. Several analysts, for example, have framed this change in terms of a manifold of implications associated with the disruption of the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism (Davies, 2016; Streeck, 2017). Illustrative examples of this disruption, across Europe and the West more generally, are a growing sense of political disenchantment alongside a crisis of legitimacy of institutions of governance (such as the European Union but also national governance institutions); the rise of populism from both the left (e.g. Syriza in Greece) and the right (e.g. National Front in France) of the political spectrum, which has unsettled the consensual technocratic politics under neoliberalism; the rise of authoritarianism and nationalism which further challenge the hegemony of the liberal consensus (e.g. Donald Trump's 'America First' policy). Existing analytical tools in social psychology and the social sciences (such as the distinction between the political left and right), appear insufficient to explain these emerging political formations. In this paper, we aim to approach both Brexit and a social psychology of Brexit as emergent forms. We begin the paper with some theoretical suggestions about how a future social psychology might better engage with questions of emergence with a focus on contemporary 'affective politics'. In the second part of the paper, we draw upon focus group data on the EU referendum in the UK to illustrate political values, sources of authority and affective forms of communication are shaping the emergent politics of Brexit.

Despite being a major theme across the sciences, emergence itself has not been a central concept in social psychological theory (Holland, 1999; Lawler, Thye & Yoon, 2015). This is surprising given how important the concept was within the social psychology of one of the discipline's founders, G.H. Mead. Mead (1932/1980, p.23) defined emergence as 'the occurrence of something which is more than the processes that have led up to it and which by its change, continuance or disappearance, adds to later passages a content they would not otherwise have possessed'. The new identities of Remainer and Leaver, for example, added to the 'later passages' that comprised the UK 2017 general election a 'new content they would not otherwise have possessed'. In this case, the Remain vote saw Kensington fall to Labour and the Leave vote saw Stoke on Trent South turn Conservative. Both were unprecedented and unanticipated swings, symptomatic of a transformed political landscape (Evans, 2018). But how are we to think about the new 'occurrence of something'? Approaches influenced by Mead, such as social constructionism and the theory of social representations hold promise in this regard, since both deal with the ways in which lived reality is shaped and reproduced by ever-changing knowledge practices. As briefly discussed below, however, neither grapples with emergence *as such*.

Moscovici's (2000) social representations theory deals with the knowledge processes through which new and initially strange social objects acquire sufficient familiarity to find a place within the common-sense of a given community. Before a new disease, an emergent political practice or a novel technology (see Sammut, Andreouli, Gaskell & Valsiner, 2015) can be thought about and communicated about, a community must first have developed suitable ways of representing these novelties. Hence unfamiliar things are 'objectified' into more familiar forms and 'anchored' within concepts that are already securely established. For example, the word 'Brexit' anchors the idea of Britain leaving the EU in the easily graspable figure of an exit (e.g. a car-park exit). The focus, therefore, is on the system of social representations through which a community understands, interacts with, and constructs its world. Emergence *as such* is relevant within Moscovici's theory only insofar as social representations can make its incomprehensible novelty disappear. Following Durkheim (1982), Moscovici (2000) understands sociality itself as something made possible by social representations, since the social is identified with the capacity to construct and communicate on the basis of a representational field that provides common reference points for group members.

Broadly 'constructionist' approaches like ethnomethodology, conversation analysis and discursive psychology radicalise this insight and examine in microscopic detail the ways in which reality is ongoingly constructed in and by discursive communication (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Instead of social representations, the emphasis is upon the strategic application of a construction from an 'interpretive repertoire' of existing alternatives. Here again, emergence as such appears only to disappear, serving to 'repair' and reproduce the normal exchanges of the social order. No one expresses this tendency more clearly than ethnomethodologist Harold Garfinkel (1988, p. 103). Sociology's 'fundamental phenomenon' he states, is how members of society must swiftly return momentary ruptures to normality, this being their fundamental task 'everywhere, always, only, exactly and entirely… with no time out, and no possibility of evasion, hiding out, passing, postponement, or buyouts'. Hence, despite the promise of his famous 'breach' experiments, their function is precisely not to explore emergence but to serve as a pretext for the incessant practical achievement and reproduction of normal structural arrangements (Stenner & Moreno, 2013). From this perspective, if sociality is to exist, emergence must disappear.

In sum, important though this emphasis on reality construction is, when social reality is grasped as social construction and social representation, a) emergence can be denied its reality (because the emphasis is on familiar representations and repertoires) and b) sociality is grasped predominantly in terms of a normative system of social interaction and exchange enabled by shared representations, discursive constructions or sequential structures of conversation. In short, these theoretical frameworks contrast emergence with sociality: to preserve the social conventions that support a community, emergence must be overcome. Raymond Williams' (1977, p.128) criticises a similar tendency which he associates with moves to separate the social from the personal: if 'the social is the fixed and explicit – the known relationships, institutions, formations, positions – all that… seems to escape from [it] is grasped and defined as the personal: this, here, now, alive, active, "subjective"'. In exactly this way the 'emergent' is denied any sociality and is made subservient to 'the ruling definition of the social' (Williams, 1977, p.128). And yet, for Williams, there is an 'embryonic phase' before things become 'fully articulate and define exchange', and this emergent thinking and feeling 'is indeed social and material' (Williams, 1977, p.131).

G.H. Mead is of interest because, like Williams, he did not contrast sociality with emergence, but showed their connection, thus affirming emergence as a fundamental feature of reality:

> The social nature of the present arises out of its emergence. I am referring to the process of adjustment that emergence involves…   The world has become a different world because of

the advent, but to identify sociality with this result is to identify it with system merely. It is rather the stage betwixt and between the old system and the new that I am referring to. If emergence is a feature of reality this phase of adjustment, which comes between the ordered universe before the emergent event has arisen and that after it has come to terms with the newcomer, must be a feature also of reality (Mead, 1932/1980, p.47).

Although this is not the place for an extensive theoretical discussion, Mead here implies two distinguishable types of sociality. Stenner (2017) calls the first 'sociality as system'. This is the more familiar type that is implicit within social representations and constructionist theory: to be social is to be reciprocally influenced by comparable others who are co-present within a network or system. This sociality is enabled by, and identified with, the circulation of constructions and representations that are already formed. 'Sociality as passage' by contrast, implies transformation within the passage of time and is not about formed wholes but processes in formation. To be in passage 'betwixt and between' what was established (call it system a) and what is not yet established (call it system b) is to occupy an indeterminate space and time in which one can be both a and b (strictly speaking, the paradox is doubled since one is also neither a nor b). This liminal space-time is inherently ambiguous, vague and paradoxical since the form or order supplied by a and b is absent or suspended. There is the potential for new representations and constructions, but that potential is precisely not yet actual. But for Mead this embryonic phase of emergence is not only real and social: he identifies sociality with the 'process of adjustment' that this emergent situation necessarily entails. For Mead, the human self is 'social' in precisely this way: not just because it is influenced by its contemporaries, but, more primordially, because it exists only in a perpetual passage 'betwixt and between' ego and alter. The human self emerges, in short, through taking the perspective of the other to itself, and it is this mutual implication that allows the complex coordination of the shared activities of human societies. It is from this perspective that an apparently static social system can show up as a complex of processes-in-formation that have achieved a degree of formed stability.

Sociality of passage, in sum, is an emergent sociality associated with a liminal phase 'betwixt and between' two ordered universes. By its emergent nature it cannot be grasped by existing knowledge representations, but operates in a distinctively affective register and, as it were, gives rise to new representations (Stenner, 2017). In this respect it can be directly compared with Raymond Williams' (1977, p. 131) concept of 'structures of feeling', i.e. 'a kind of feeling and thinking which is indeed social and material, but each in an embryonic phase before it can become fully articulate and define exchange'. The structures of feeling that comprise passage are comparatively lacking in order, and escape explicit representation, but are no less real for that.

Considering the field of politics, in particular, the affective has been largely neglected by the social sciences. This may be attributed to the 'rationalist' conventional wisdom of politics as the sphere where rationality presides over emotionality. This conventional wisdom rests on the Western ideal of reason as opposed to passion (Demertzis, 2014), what in social psychology may be understood in terms of an ideological dilemma (Billig, et al, 1998). Yet, in the context of Brexit, following the disruption of established political certainties (encapsulated in the demise of the 'consensual' politics of the centre) and widespread political discontent, the ideal of the rational citizen (who is geared towards 'third-way' consensual politics) has been shaken. This has opened up space for 'affective politics' which may be more geared towards disruption and change. For example, in his discussion of recent waves of populism, Demertzis (2014) argues that the uncertainties associated with late capitalism have given rise to widespread feelings of powerlessness, creating fertile ground for the rise of populism. Populism channels these feelings into political action on the basis of moral indignation. A similar process can be observed in the debates and campaigning leading up to the UK EU referendum, with the Leave and Remain camps mobilising two opposing visions of the citizen: the 'affective citizen' (who feels left behind and is resentful towards the 'political establishment'), on

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the one hand, and the 'rational citizen' (who supposedly operates on the basis of dispassionate cost/benefit calculations), on the other. It is telling in that regard that affectively-charged immigration-related concerns played a central role in the Leave campaign and vote, whereas a more supposedly factual economy-based argumentation was more important in the Remain campaign and vote (Curtice, 2016; Hobolt, 2016). In this paper, we take the view that affective politics may take progressive and egalitarian forms, or – as we shall see - forms which are more backwards looking and authoritarian. Our aim here, however, is not evaluation, but to observe the emergent and hence liminal bases of these affective developments. In what follows, we use these theoretical ideas to explore the emergent politics of Brexit as they play out in a set of focus groups conducted prior to the EU referendum in the UK.

Present study

In this paper, we draw on an empirical study of the EU referendum, conducted in June 2016 just before the vote took place. The data consist of one pilot interview and nine focus groups conducted with a balanced mix of thirty-nine participants intending to vote Remain, Leave, and a few undecideds, from a range of socio-economic and political backgrounds (see Table 1). The data were collected in various parts of England: in London and the South-East, North and South England (more details about the study methodology can be found in Author references 1 & 2).

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

For the purposes of this paper, we did not conduct a standard thematic or discursive analysis, as is common in qualitative work. In line with our theoretical preoccupations and our focus on emergence, we sought to identify points of un-settlement in the data. We proceeded as follows: We initially read thoroughly all transcripts in order to identify instances in the accounts of participants where the disruption of existing narratives and understandings was evident. Following this preliminary individual open coding of each transcript, we engaged in a first round of collaborative analysis sessions (Cornish, Gillespie & Zittoun, 2014) in order to develop a shared understanding of instances of disruption and emergence in each focus group. In a second stage of collaborative analysis, we brought our notes from all the focus groups together and grouped these points of emergence under three axes where disruption and the emergency of novelty were present: political values, sources of political authority, and affective forms of communication. In line with Mead's process ontology as described above, our focus is on processes: we employ the term axis to indicate an organising principle or nodal point around which familiar settlements can be seen to 'turn' but also, in times of emergence, to unravel and take unexpectedly non-linear twists and turns.

We should note that our analysis is exploratory rather than conclusive, and we do not present an exhaustive overview of our data. In the next section, we use selected extracts to illustrate some features of the politics of Brexit that might be considered emergent along the axes of political values, political authority and forms of communication, which we explore in terms of what we call 'the authority of affect'.

Three axes for exploring the emergent politics of Brexit

(i) Political values

The first axis refers to the ways in which existing ideological themes and values are re-articulated in the Brexit landscape. We focus specifically on cosmopolitanism and its relation to questions of prejudice. Some scholars have argued that the ideological distinction between cosmopolitanism and

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communitarianism is a major new political fault-line in European politics (e.g. Kriesi et al., 2006). Goodwin and Ford (2017) and Hobolt (2016), among others, broadly explain the Brexit vote in terms of a distinction between 'winners' (who voted Remain) and 'losers' (who voted Leave) of globalization. The former are seen as espousing a more cosmopolitan outlook and the latter as espousing a more communitarian outlook. In the following, we employ Mead's process ontology to consider how the coherence of this theme begins to unravel and to form novel and unpredictable ideological constellations. We show these constellations to be characterised by precisely the ambiguous 'betwixt and between' character (of being both 'both/and' and 'neither/nor') highlighted by Mead.

We draw predominantly on one focus group with four London based, left-leaning, young and middle-class participants (FG3 in Table 1). In line with analyses of vote demographics (e.g. Goodwin & Heath, 2016), all were strong Remain supporters. This is clear from the beginning of the focus group, when the participants described continental Europe as more cosmopolitan and sophisticated than Britain (see also Author reference 3). As put by one of the participants, Amanda:

…to me there is an impression of cool Europe, cool continental Europe, and British to me can sometimes equate to like, I think, maybe back a generation or two, how we might have to sit at a table with proper crockery... and make sure we use our proper things.

When asked about the referendum, participants quickly condemned Leave voters as ignorant, irrational and prejudiced. Jenny frames this in terms of 'Little British patriotism' and racism, from which she distances herself (and most of her network of like-minded friends):

… it's just accentuating that awfulness of the Little Britain attitude that some people often, older generation, have. And it's just you know, I keep - there's not many of my Facebook friends, but some of them from old jobs and whatever, are Vote Leave, and they're just awash with Union Jacks, and I'm just like, oh no, I hate this, I hate this kind of Little British patriotism, it's bordering on racism…

This familiar and recurrent account of Brexit dynamics, in sum, assumes a liberal norm against prejudice (Billig et al., 1988), and anchors a social representation of Leavers as prejudiced whilst Remainers are objectified as rational and tolerant (see also Author reference 1).

In this early part of the discussion, the participants' discourse broadly reproduced this identification of the left with a pro-diversity cosmopolitanism associated with the EU. Interestingly, however, the coherence of this position became troubled when Amanda brought up the notion of 'Lexit', or support for Leave from a left-wing perspective (see also Author reference 2):

I'm quite surprised, because I feel like everyone's focusing on the far-right, UKIP-kind of exiters, but there's definitely, there's got to be a side that's coming from the left, you know?

This started a discussion of the extent to which casting a Remain vote legitimises the political and economic establishment. This perspective served to unravel the assumed connection of anti-prejudice values with EU membership and nationalistic values with the Leave position, because Brexit shows up instead, in the words of Antony, another participant, as a political act *'against big business and big banking and the financial sector'*. With this anchor lifted, participants appeared uncertain as to whether their left and cosmopolitan values of multiculturalism and diversity are supported or undermined by voting Remain (see also Author reference 2). This is more than an 'ideological dilemma' (Billig et al., 1988) between one clear choice and another. Rather, their initially

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well-formed representation has become liminal and dissolved into paradox (Motzkau & Clinch, 2017). The participants found themselves in a 'betwixt and between' predicament where to remain becomes both progressively cosmopolitan and regressively supportive of the neo-liberal establishment, whilst to leave becomes both regressively nationalistic and progressively global. On the basis of a Mead-inspired process ontology this can be described as a 'liminal hotspot' (Greco & Stenner, 2017). Antony expresses the unease of this 'hotspot':

> *[It] makes me feel a little uneasy about the whole thing, because you are essentially voting for status quo, and it does feel like most big business, and certainly the banking sector, want to stay…*

In other work (Author reference 2) we have shown that a narrative of 'cosmopolitan Brexit' also featured in the discourse of Leave supporters where Remain was positioned as elitist and Eurocentric and Brexit as open to the world beyond Europe. The latter is often presented as more authentically cosmopolitan and ethnically inclusive because it values migrants on the basis of their individual merits, rather than their status as Europeans. This has been a key argument of UKIP's Brexit rhetoric (Gibson & Booth, 2018). It was echoed in one of the Leave focus groups (FG6) of our study in which Dan argued:

> *You'll get an unskilled chap working, can walk straight through the door with a European passport, he gets paid £9 an hour. We've got loads of them. We don't need anymore like that. We want people like… the Indians for instance, who make brilliant doctors.*

By advocating a skills-based approach to immigration, Dan appeals to the value of meritocracy that bypasses national and European borders. This valuing of skilled Indian migrants over (white) European migrants turns the tables on the EU-as-cosmopolitan position, which starts to show up instead as prejudicial and potentially racist.

The examples above illustrate how paradoxes emerged as the familiar connections between cosmopolitanism and Brexit began to unravel. As the value of cosmopolitanism flickered and shifted sides, left liberals found themselves hesitating between supporting and resisting a pro-EU establishment. Furthermore, although in these shifts the value of cosmopolitanism as such remained intact for this group, it seems clear that these values are being 'stretched' in the process. Extending these liberal values in the direction of an apparently 'cosmopolitan Brexit' can stretch the meanings of cosmopolitanism and anti-prejudice so far that they incorporate ideas that can appear antithetical to these very ideals (restricting international political cooperation by leaving the EU, for example). In this context, considerations of political values reveal the emergence of an increasingly fragmented and fluid landscape where any traditional ideological certainty may be seen as unstable.

(ii) Political authority

When habitual modes of political-moral conduct lose their relevance, and we lose sight of the 'sides' we are on and against, the source of the decisions made over our lives gains renewed urgency. In line with this, survey data have been used to suggest that the issue of sovereignty was uppermost on voters' minds when deciding in the referendum (Swales, 2016). Whilst no singular explanation is viable (Clarke & Newman, 2017), the global expansion of populist discourses exists hand-in-hand with these discourses in which sovereignty is positioned in opposition to global (neo)liberalism (Gerbaudo, 2017). This section will illustrate some of these issues with data drawn from across the focus groups. It focuses on data which feature arguments around authority and the symptomatic problems with established authorities.

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Examining the question of political authority, we start by returning to a self-identifying European-British, 'principled cosmopolitan' argument in favour of the status quo:

> *If we were just always making decisions on our own, they might be quite different decisions than if you had another group of countries saying 'What are we thinking about this What about this?' And actually, having those ties actually allows you to maybe make better judgements and getting more opinions, and you're more informed by having different perspectives.* (FG8)

We refer to this as 'principled cosmopolitanism' because the political authority it voices is one that is devolved of individual members and exists in relations between them. As such, it favours a Remain argument not simply due to practical considerations but, over and beyond them, for reasons of principle. The premises of this position remind us of Habermas's (1984) notion of communicative rationality, where the rational debate engaged in by members nurtures decision-making outcomes which transcend the possibilities of individuals. However, in our focus groups this perspective was not an argument distinguishing Remainers from Leavers, but one distinguishing a 'principled cosmopolitan' f(r)action from both Leavers and the rest of those who voted Remain.

Correspondingly, the following counter-stance chimed not only with those wishing to leave the European Union but also with those inclined to vote Remain for pragmatic, economic reasons. '*The British people,'* as a respondent intending to vote Remain expounded, *'are very happy to have markets and have the trade and have all that side of it, but they don't want them [the EU] interfering with the political side as well*' (FG10). Save for the 'principled cosmopolitans' talk introduced above, political authority appeared to be presented as, first, divorced from trade and economics (Author reference 1), and, second, ideally resting outside the EU's interference.

It is the phenomenon of immigration that in the focus groups regularly undermines the EU's political authority. There was no focus group without some substantial discussion of immigration. Also, with the exception of the principled cosmopolitans who entertained the possibility of its benefits, there was no focus group where present practices of immigration were not predominantly construed as a problem. The surprise here is not that those identifying as Leave voters presented immigration as a '*burden*' (FG9), or Britain as *'crowded'* (FG2) or '*swamped*' (FG4), or immigration as putting undue and less and less manageable pressure on services – be them the NHS (FG2) or housing (FG7) or the welfare system (FG5) or schools (FG6) or jobs (FG2). Rather, the surprise is that the perspective whereby Britain is conceived as a finite capacity from which immigrants can only take and, thus, which they can only reduce, was equally the property of the discourse of those intending to vote Remain.

Our argument here concerns not the vexing question of whether such positions can be taken as prejudicial. Of course, as mentioned above, talk about immigrants is occasionally interspersed with disclaimers of racism. Yet, whilst the person of the immigrant can be a locus of ambiguity, the process of immigration hardly ever is. That immigration is widely seen as a problem is not new in British society. It is intimately related to its history of racism and colonialism (e.g., Favell, 2001), and, in line with this, immigration has been the focus of a wealth of social psychological research (Verkuyten, 2018). Again, however, what we witness is less some form of traditional certainty but, in line with Mead's process ontology, the unravelling of these certainties and the emergence of new constellations. That is, what is arguably new in our data is, first, that to be suspicious of immigration is not simply part and parcel of certain political positions, but that it may define acceptable or reasonable political positions as such (much like, some would say paradoxically, anti-racism does). And second, that this newly emerging constant of lay discourse on British politics (i.e., immigration-

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as-a-problem rather than an opportunity) can be understood as symptomatic of the destructive disappearance of established political authorities.

In this sense, immigration is not presented simply as a problem in and of itself, but as an indicator of Britain's powerlessness. It is taken as a symptom of Britain being actively held back by various sources of political authority. Immigration and the figure of the immigrant thus serve as symptom and symbol of a lack of British power perceived to be caused by the web of EU states, institutions, laws, etc., which actively hold Britain back in incapacitating and perhaps even debilitating ways. Britain was regularly described in the focus groups as '*controlled*' (FG7), '*dominated*' and '*dictated*' (FG5) by the EU, and one participant indignantly pointed to a seemingly absurd and outrageous state of affairs, asking: '*Why can't we write our own laws?*' (FG4). Hence, the immigration-as-a-problem constant is coterminous with the equally constant delegitimization of the political authority of the European Union.

At the same time though, crucially, what Britain stands for and where exactly a repatriation would locate authority prove to be intricate questions when examining the focus group data. As partly touched on above in the first axis, the common ideologies (left and right), the media and political institutions (prime minister, government, monarch) traditionally taken to represent Britain or Britain's interests are extremely rarely identified within the data as potential sources of political authority. The 'establishment' is unequivocally referred to as having let Britain and the British public down. The last axis below examines one possible replacement for the failed and destructive 'establishment' forms of (both European and British) authority.

(iii) The authority of affect

The third axis distinguishes a rational communicative ideal oriented to consensus with an oppositional style of argument that is passionately delivered and unashamedly affective and affecting. Faced with a void of political authority, this affective dimension can be considered a new and rather paradoxical source for the authorization of political action. Because this third axis has since become a widespread concern (Mishra, 2017; Milburn & Conrad, 2016), we will focus on a particular example in which affect takes a quite hostile and exclusionary form. However, we do not imply that the affective dimension in politics is always 'authoritarian'. Neither do we accept the fundamental split between reason and affect discussed in the introduction. Rather, our point is that affectivity acquires new salience when the established positions and representations associated with 'sociality as system' no longer hold. Here we give just one example from one focus group in Kent with mixed Remain and Leave participants (FG4 in Table 1). The axis is neatly illustrated by the positions taken respectively by Julie, a Remain supporter arguing for stability, and Nicole, a Leave supporter urging change.

Julie's 'status quo' position is essentially that it makes sense to stay in the EU unless there are strong arguments to the contrary. Since she can find no such arguments, stability is desired. She is not uncritical of the UK's involvement in the EU but takes the stance of 'better the devil you know'. Her argument aims towards a consensus that is tightly related to the specific interests of people like her (concretely including the others in the focus group), characterised as *'doing well'*: *'we've all got nice houses, we've all got a nice life, we go to work... all of us sat round this table have known nothing but being in the EU'*. The interviewer sums up the point of Julie's intervention neatly: *'so the argument for going out has got to be pretty strong'*. Julie explicitly orients to the judgement of experts, and specifically to expertise relevant to the authority of economics. She is most convinced by the judgement of *'Carney, the Bank of England man'* because he is perceived as a politically neutral expert *('a number cruncher'*), and he '*has said we should stay in'*. Julie's position, in short, is one of

rationally calculated collective self-interest: what, according to the best available evidence, will make people like us better off? (see also Author reference 1)

Nicole, by contrast, is in favour of radical change. Whilst her position might also be characterised as self-interested (she states we should be *'helping ourselves'* rather than putting our own survival at risk by subsidising others), it is voiced with such passion that Richard accuses her of *'shouting over everyone'*. Her contributions are laced with the affectivity of a sense of outrage, expressing righteous anger at having been cheated, manipulated and betrayed (although none of these things apply to her personally, but have a vaguely general quality). These feelings extend to the opportunity provided by the referendum itself, which many perceive to have been promised only because Remain-oriented politicians like David Cameron were confident of victory: '*I feel a little bit like just throwing my toys out the pram, because I'm just so annoyed with politicians. I think, 'do you think we're stupid?'*'

The 'we' implied in the previous extract is not the concrete 'us' evoked by Julie, but a non-specific ingroup that is polarized against a 'them' perceived to be dangerous or hostile. Nicole is at pains to present a picture in which experts, politicians, the EU and immigrants conspire to damage 'us' Brits. Nicole's contributions are not about seeking or discussing evidence which might support or refute this picture, but about presenting and indeed performing her position in as powerful a manner as possible, deploying any claims that might enhance that presentation. The empirical details and facts matter less than the importance and indeed urgency of expressing and sharing this picture. For example, she invokes the purely hypothetical authority of a business-minded expert, but the words she imagines them speaking are dramatic and extreme. Any sensible business-minded person, she suggests, would look at the situation and conclude: *'wait a minute, stop all this, cut all ties and we will look at it and start again'*.

There are several examples of the relative unimportance of factual detail in Nicole's talk. First, she complains that the EU pays businesses to move out of the UK and into other European countries 'to boost their economies'. *'They'*, she asserts, *'take our money and then they paid Ford to move their plant to another European country'*. However, when Julie requests factual details ('*OK, like who? What country?*'), Nicole has no answer. To give another example, when Nicole states that *'We had a lot of, was it Romanians that moved into [town name]?'*, Julie corrects her with *'Kosovans'*, but for Nicole the factual details are not the point: '*I don't even want to go to, like, Bulgaria or anywhere like that'*. The secondary value of factual details is further expressed in the following extract (emphasis added):

> *And when we say, when our prime minister is actually… Or someone like that, Europe MPs, someone says this to them, they say, 'Oh but we can't do anything because all our laws are governed by Europe'. And **whether that's true or not**, it makes you think, well I don't want to be part of Europe.*

Throughout her discourse, evidential claims are self-generated in this fashion in order to perform an emotive vision disconnected from any world beyond it. Mere factual details pale into irrelevance in the face of the picture of a nation betrayed by its corrupt politicians to a duplicitous EU bent on ruining its economy and overwhelming it with immigrants. For Nicole, Europeans lack the morals of England. Europe is characterised by poverty and lack of education and is '*a bit scary… These sorts of places, they don't think like us'*. In particular, she has in mind the Eastern Europeans that have recently moved to her town, making it *'disgusting'*. They have a *'different culture'*, a culture she sums up in the story of '*a girl that got her face cut off'* in a local nightclub. She warms passionately to the theme that to stop the influx of Eastern Europeans outright we must force our own

underclass to do the jobs the immigrants would otherwise take: '*we say our people won't go to work, but make them. Cut the benefits, make them'*.

Our point is not that Julie and Nicole illustrate different positions on Brexit. More fundamentally, they illustrate two very different styles of argument, thought and feeling, associated, as noted above, with very different modes of sociality and political engagement. Again, our intent is to observe rather than judge the emergence of this affective dimension, and we stress that we do not limit it to this particular example. These styles might in principle be found on both sides of the Brexit divide. The first is coolly rational in its self-interest, specific in its focus, open to expertise, and oriented towards consensus based on representations of agreed facts and shared purposes. The second is impassioned and general in its focus, oriented towards presenting a conflictual and polarised picture in which deception and hostility are assumed, and full of big plans which promise dramatic solutions to problems that remain unspecified in their detail. Affectivity, long considered questionable within the political sphere of liberal democracies, becomes in this account a legitimate ground from which to speak as a political subject. Building on Mead's 'sociality as passage', we suggest that there is a link between the emergence of what we have called 'the authority of affect' and a situation in which the taken-for-granteds of a social system unravel.

Discussion

This paper aimed to approach both Brexit and a social psychology of Brexit as emergent by taking account of the 'betwixt and between'-ness of both the social process and the tools for its analysis. First, we offered a critique of the dominant emphasis within social psychology on 'sociality as system'. Using a Meadian framework, this critique enabled us to articulate a notion of emergence as a process of transformation with its own ambivalent and affectively laden mode of sociality. Second, this 'process ontology' allowed us to embrace complexity, open-endedness and ambivalence, but it also enabled us to identify 'cracks' or points of emergence where established processes begin to unravel, opening new liminal voids and paradoxes. Third, we have pointed to a new significance acquired by affect as these processes de-stabilize familiar settlements. In these ways, we have aimed to do justice not just to the magnitude of 'Brexit's' significance (as part of longer-term liminal transformations associated with the crisis of neo-liberalism), but also to its transformational possibilities, including the capacity to transform social psychology through the novelty it encounters: a novelty that would escape efforts to assimilate the phenomenon to an already familiar arsenal of concepts and tools. This is not to deny the ways in which Brexit may also resemble some familiar social issues and illustrate some familiar social psychological processes. Demographic variables, differences in social values and attitudes towards immigration partially predict Brexit positions (e.g. Curtice, 2016; Meleady et al., 2017). Without denying the continuing relevance of these variables and inter-group processes, we urge attention to the (sometimes radical) changes to social issues, political practices and forms of political subjectivity that have been brought into play with the advent of Brexit.

We conclude this discussion with a consideration of some of the political implications of our analysis. In the first axis above, we considered how political values unravel in an increasingly fragmented landscape where traditional ideological certainties are dissolving. In the example of our left-leaning focus group, we illustrated that the political left loses its status as an ideological anchor. In the face of uncertainty towards supporting, on the one hand, a cosmopolitan EU establishment (against the nationalism of Brexit) or, on the other, critiquing a neoliberal status quo (against the EU establishment), participants appeared uncertain as to what constitutes progressive political action. Given the entrenched dualism of the current political landscape (e.g. pro/anti EU; Remain/Leave), there is not much room left for developing alternative political voices that cut across these dualisms, and that could challenge, for example, both the EU establishment and the narrow nationalism of

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Brexit (see also Author reference 2). In this context where producing new progressive political visions appears difficult, existing progressive values lose their clout and can be appropriated for regressive purposes, such as calls against freedom of movement in Europe in the name of a 'worldly' cosmopolitanism.

The uncertainties associated with such disruption were equally manifested in the axis of political authority. Unexpectedly, the referendum vote involved a debate on what political institutions are authorized to make decisions over the lives of British citizens. With the problematic process of immigration as its symptom or symbol, traditional forms of political authority (be them either the European Union or the British establishment) were presented as failed and even destructive. A void in the place of traditional forms of authority has started to emerge – bringing with itself a need for novel sources of authority on which new political visions may be grounded.

Through the vehicle of the referendum itself, this new source of authority has been associated in much affectively charged discourse with nothing less than the 'will of the people' against 'the establishment'. What was notable and novel both about Brexit, and about Trump's election and initial presidency, was the extent to which the latter style of argumentation prevailed and achieved a certain dominance. Indeed, this style of communication was arguably both encouraged and modelled, not just by the tabloid press, but by the three principle political architects of the Leave campaign: Boris Johnson, Nigel Farage, and Michael Gove. Each has spoken in the name of a 'common sense' that they take to have been denied by a ruling cosmopolitan elite pursuing its own interest: Johnson repeatedly emphasised the foolishness, wastefulness and incompetence of the EU; Farage criticised elite values and emphasised the dangers of immigration; and Gove denounced experts. Together, these three 'trickster' figures played a significant role in precipitating Britain's current liminal experience of teetering 'betwixt and between' a Britain that was and a Britain now in process of emergence.

In this context, psychology and the social sciences have a duty to try to understand the role of affect in emergent politics. Affect has traditionally been sought to be kept away from politics, partly because of the rationalist bias of European philosophy and partly because of the remarkable and destructive success of totalitarian forms of government that, during the course of the twentieth century, made cynical use of it. To be emotional was therefore taken to be simply irrational: in grips either of madness or political extremities. What the events of the past years have shown, however, is that such censoring of affect and emotion from the side of the social sciences will make us blind to current political realities. Theoretically, scholarship deconstructing the reason-emotion divide requires a re-engagement with forms of affectivity in their constituting (rather than opposing) thought. Politically, affect cannot be simply censored or dismissed any more: it is with us to contend with. Hope cannot any more simply lie with countering what is irrational with a narrow, shallow and technocratic 'reason'; but it may indeed lie instead with reconstituting the reasonable with recourse to growing (instead of narrowing) circles of empathic identification and solidarity.

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Focus group/interview	No of participants	Gender	Age	Location	Political party support	Voting intention
1 (Pilot interview)	1	Male	20	London	Conservative	Leave
2	4	Mixed (Male and Female)	50-60	Cumbria	Liberal Democrat	Remain
3	4	Mixed (Male and Female)	30-40	London	Green / Labour	Remain
4	6	Mixed (Male and Female)	30-45	Kent	Conservative	Mixed (Remain Leave and Undecided)
5	2	Female	40-60	London	Conservative	Remain
6	4	Mixed (Male and Female)	40-50	Hertfordshire	UKIP	Leave
7	3	Mixed (Male and Female)	30-40	Hertfordshire	Labour	Leave
8	3	Female	30-40	London	Labour	Remain
9	6	Male	30-55	London	Conservative /Labour	Mixed (Remain Leave and Undecided)
10	6	Mixed (Male and Female)	40-70	Hampshire	Conservative	Mixed (Remain Leave and Undecided)