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Nation and National Identity as a Boundary: English, British and the European Union[1]

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Fredrik Barth's (1969) essay on 'ethnic groups and boundaries' has been taken to signal a marked and more or less permanent shift in the sociology or anthropology of ethnicity. This has been to question the conceptualisation of ethnic groups as fixed – or corporate – entities, whose distinctiveness can be described by a complex of cultural difference. The shift is towards a 'transactional' model of ethnicity based on the use of 'names' (for peoples) and the transaction across boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. Richard Jenkins (2008) has summarized the argument:

> … Barth's critique of the traditional model … starts from the definition of the situation held by social actors … and the focus of attention becomes the maintenance of ethnic boundaries in the interaction between 'us and them' that takes place across the boundary … (2008: 19).

Ethnic 'groups' are to be found in the naming or classifications that people make between themselves and others, and the deployment of these named boundaries in all manner of social actions. Now this says next to nothing about the distinctiveness of ethnicity as the boundary marker. The distinctiveness of ethnicity could be argued to be its association with ancestry, or ideas of shared destiny, and ideas of superiority and inferiority which so often mark inter-ethnic relations. People make, for example, *status* distinctions between themselves and others and certainly act in order to preserve the status boundaries. Jenkins (2008: 43) makes a similar point when he raises the question of what might be the difference between types of identity – regional, communal, ethnic. His answer is that difference lies in the consequences of each 'in terms of rights and responsibilities, or access to social and economic resources, or social recognition' (2008: 43). If then the model of 'identity' and 'boundary transactions' can be applied to a wide range of forms of social identification (albeit with different social consequences) then what can we say about the us-them marker which conceptually has been so close to ethnicity – the nation?

Given that we have a general model – of identities and boundary transactions – then there is nothing in principle to prevent the model being applied to a wide range of non-ethnic identities. Certainly this seems to be the view taken by Brubaker *et al.* (2004): 'Although Barth formulated his argument with respect to ethnicity, it applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to race and nation as well' (2004: 32). This is a consequence of the shift from 'objectivism' (i.e. the defining of nation, race, ethnic group by their objective characteristics) to an emphasis on subjective identifications (i.e. the actor's understanding of her/his affiliation, alignment, 'membership'). But Jenkins is absolutely right to point out that the 'social consequences' of identities differ according to their context in a system of obligations and resources. This is compellingly so in the case of the nation. We know that there are nations without states, self-proclaimed nations which seek statehood; and that there are multi-national states, and states with a dominant 'civic' identity. The 'fit' between nation and state takes many forms and each case has its specific history which tells the story of nationhood and becoming a state. But in the contemporary world at least, the central characteristics of nationhood and national identity are to be found in their intimate connection – actual or aspiring or past – with statehood.

And this is not something which is wholly dependent on the actor's definition of the situation. Given that our nationality connects us to a state and citizenship, it is no minor thing to claim to be French or to be German or to be Taiwanese. Identities of this kind connect to very important historical and political institutions and the national or nationalist ideas associated with these histories. Not only is this objectively true – the connections between nations, states, and citizenship have formal and legal foundations – but its significance is also recognised by actors. When people talk about 'their country', they explicitly or tacitly recognise that the nation-state is the most important social container in which they are implicated. In multi-national states they may refer to the 'sub-state' nation.

In the second half of the paper we shall be examining the views of and dispositions towards the nation expressed by non-elite interviewees in a study of 'class resentment and national identity' carried out between 2004 and 2009 (Mann and Fenton, 2017). We have returned to this data partly because it offers a good source of material on peoples' comments on British membership of the European Union (EU), some several years before the 2016 referendum on British membership; and partly because when people talk about the EU and related topics, they reveal significant aspects of their view of the nation as boundary. We have argued elsewhere that the views expressed by (some of the) interviewees in our study constitute a kind of 'resentful nationalism', typically among people who feel that their voice has not been heard and their interests ignored (Fenton 2012). We re-visit some of that material especially in the light of the 2016 EU referendum

in the UK. This is a crucial topic for two particular reasons. First the question of sovereignty (and the EU) became a key issue in the referendum debates, the very issue which Wellings (2010) identified as an important element of an 'English nationalism'. Secondly the kinds of statements made by our interviewees on the 'EU question' conveyed national and sometimes resentful messages about 'Brussels' and 'control', a central theme of the referendum campaigns. The expressed views of our interviewees on 'our country' and the 'European Union' – as well as a range of closely related questions including immigration, history and the Second World War, globalization – form a kind of 'popular orientation to the nation' and even in some cases a 'popular nationalism'. In the EU referendum campaign, political leaders – and especially the Leave campaigns – sought to connect with the public's views of the nation and the EU (Shipman, 2017: 414 ff.). What became crucial was the 'resonance' between campaign messages and a range of popular attitudes, particularly about immigration and sovereignty (control).

In what follows we will begin by taking account of the debates about elite and non-elite nationhood or nationalism. This is not a rehearsal of 'theories of nationalism' or of the debates about 'everyday nationalism' but an attempt to direct our attention to some key points which bear upon our principal arguments and analysis in this paper. We then look at some further examples of how the nation enters everyday life and everyday conversation, drawing in particular on Gullestad's (1997) account of boundaries, everyday life and Norwegian national identity. Following this, we provide our empirical analysis of the interview data.

Elite and non-elite views of the nation

The view that elites – of various kinds – have played a key part in promoting national and nationalist ideas, parties and movements, is well established (for a critique see Whitmeyer 2002). And the fact that these ideas and movements must appeal to *someone* – that is, a general public or a section of it - is unremarkable; otherwise elite nationalists would be talking among themselves. This means that there is always a question of 'resonance' between the promoters of a message and the intended audience (Bonikowski 2017). Most typically the nation by its very nature is a broad and inclusive appeal. In practice the appeal may be directed to a particular class or classes, or at least there are classes where the national message finds a ready home. The emphasis on everyday nationalism or everyday conceptions of nationhood constitutes an attempt to highlight the popular or ordinary views of the nation, in contrast to the focus on elite promoters of national and nationalist messages. Although the literature on elite and ordinary views of the nation prompted a debate about the proper approach (see the Fox, Miller-Idriss 2008 and Smith 2008 exchanges), there is, in our view, no necessary antagonism between the approaches

advocated. The advocates of the everyday nationhood approach are making an entirely proper plea for an understanding of the sentiments, attitudes and views of the world of those to whom national or nationalist messages may be directed. The critics are making the case that if the everyday approach neglects historical and causal models in the rise and fall of nationalisms, then it risks becoming trivial.

But there is nothing essential in these kinds of oppositions, or indeed in several other oppositions that appeared in the Fox, Miller-Idriss and Smith debate. Clearly a focus on elites needs to extend to those with whom the message is intended to resonate; clearly the 'everyday' non-elite model must be made to fit the broader models of historical explanation. And, as Smith has argued, we should be examining not only elite and non-elite nationalism but the relationship between them. Smith has suggested that an apparent divide between the two approaches risks neglecting 'interaction between elites and "the people", or among groups of non-elites, and between them and the elites' (2008: 565). As early as 2002, Whitmeyer was making the case that élite models of the origins of nationalism are never sufficient, and he did this by demonstrating two simple points: one, that elite promoters of a nationalist message may fail because they are not taken up by the class or classes of 'ordinary people' to whom they are directed; two, that national and nationalist ideas may themselves have a primary origin among non-elites. In his words, 'my approach here is to question the thesis that elites create popular nationalism by presenting a large number of negative cases, cases in which some elites advocate a nationalism that fails to become popular' (Whitmeyer, 2002: 325).

If all of this makes the case for taking seriously non-elite views of the nation, there remain some critical comments that should be noted. Smith, for example, is right to suggest that the phrase 'ordinary people' – or indeed everyday nationalism – introduces a concept which is insufficiently specified. The non-elites cannot be summarised by the word 'ordinary people'; we know very well that their views vary, for example, by class, region and age; there seems little doubt that a mode of nationalism expressed in the 'Leave' vote in the United Kingdom EU referendum of 2016 was closely related to age groups of voters. It is also possible – as Smith argues – that a concentration on the everyday is to take a non-historical view; a simple fascination with how people talk about the nation. But again, this is by no means a necessary failing: clearly some parts of what people say about the nation are themselves historical statements with references – not always fully coherent – to, for example, 'past glories' of Britain which have been lost and should be retrieved. It is entirely possible to make the connections between a historical account of the nation and nationalism, and the accounts which people give when they talk about their country. The stories that people tell and the images on which they draw reveal their own biographical histories and memories. In the United Kingdom people in their seventies

remember the immediate post-war period, Suez and winds of change in Africa; rather younger people will remember the Vietnam War, Enoch Powell, Mrs. Thatcher, The Falklands War, the poll tax, Blair and the Iraq War, and now the EU referendum. This is without considering what they have learned from books, films or schooling – like being shown maps of the world with British Empire areas coloured in red. Older peoples' memories of the Second World War and the decade after it may have given (some of) them a view of Britain which augmented their sceptical view of the EU (Osborne 2017, Wintour 2018).

There remains one other issue which ought to be clarified. The title of the paper by Fox-Miller is 'Everyday Nationhood'. It is *not*, we should be clear 'Everyday Nationalism'. Researchers who have spent time looking at grounded views of the nation in the statements of their research subjects, know very well that not all talk about the nation amounts to nationalism. For one thing people often talk (in conversational interviews) in contradictory ways and in ways which are not easy to classify or categorise. Much of what they say scarcely amounts to an orderly, elaborated and distinct nationalist view of the world. But their talk does nonetheless have important implications for how they understand the nation as well as giving clues to when and how their views of the world could be converted into something close to nationalism. To be sure, as people talk about 'this country' or 'our country' they are recognising the important extent to which their lives are grounded in a nation-state. And this partly explains why they become elated or angry about their nation; they know that the way that 'the country goes' bears down on their lives. We can see what people say as containing fragments – of ideas, attitudes, or national history. They may speak of Britain 'standing alone', or of people who 'work hard and deserve what they get' or of 'our country going soft or becoming a soft touch'. These are the very fragments which political leaders, scrupulously or not, may recognise and deploy in their own statements.

The 'nation' in the actor's social imagination

Barth clearly conceived of social action at the boundaries between ethnic categories or groups as including face-to-face interactions, where people both deploy categories of 'us and them' and reinforce them through differential behaviour, for example in the extending of hospitality and social exchanges. It may be thought that the nation represents a 'step-up' in the *abstractness* of the social category. Of course, in international exchanges and politics, this is the case; the 'other' is another nation-state. There are however several important contexts where the national boundary plays a key part in face-to-face social behaviour and in the self-other imagination of social actors.

Minorities by national origin

In all immigrant-receiving countries we can find first-generation populations whose country-of-origin identity has the potential to be a social marker. Classic community studies in American sociology, like Herbert Gans' *Urban Villagers* (1962) told the story of immigrants whose country of origin formed a basis of residential and community social life, influenced by shared language. The identities given by the 'host' community may not match their own classifications; thus in the United Kingdom, immigrants in the 1950s who thought of themselves as Trinidadian, Barbadian, or Jamaican, were often referred to as West Indian or simply (in the language of the time) 'coloured' (i.e. a 'racialized boundary', Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992). In his account of Hungarian minorities in Romania, Fox has shown how national origin can, for some individuals, be hidden or non-salient, especially if the person speaks fluent and unaccented Romanian (Fox 2008: 540). For others with marked accents or language difference, foreign nationality prompts a national orientation among the immigrants themselves, and in the native population who by marking the immigrants as 'foreign' mark themselves as the 'people of this country'. Insofar as *national* boundaries are maintained in the interaction between 'us and them', then there is also the question of how the boundary persists for descendants of migrants. Second and third generation immigrants may have the feeling that they are not classed as full members of the nation, despite being native-born and adopting the national identity (Jacobson 1997). In some European countries, native-born descendants of immigrants will continue to be categorized, both officially and in the popular imagination, as 'immigrants' and 'foreigners' rather than as, for example, 'Swedish' or 'Swiss'.

Sub-state nations

National identity has the potential to become a marker in social interaction in all multi-national states, where sub-state national identities (Catalan in Spain, Welsh in the United Kingdom) are socially visible through accent, language, and patterns of settlement. The English are, for example, the largest national origin minority in Scotland and are socially recognised by accent. Relations between 'native' Scottish and in-migrant English can hardly fail to be influenced by the overall position of England as the dominant political and economic power in the United Kingdom (see McIntosh, Sim and Robertson 2004).

But even in those social contexts where foreign nationals, or sub-state national identities, have the potential for prompting national significance in social cognition and social exchanges, it is very frequently the *'majoritarian' definition of the national boundary* which acts as a catalyst in these cases. At the local level we would see face to face interaction of foreign nationals and the national majority; but there is a near-constant majoritarian

imagining of the presence of immigrants. Both sovereignty (take back control) and immigration (control our borders) loomed large in the EU referendum debates. In the case of sub-state nationhood, the dominant state (Britain-England) is a more or less constant point of reference.

Taken for granted nationhood; majoritarian nationhood

Many researchers have described a taken-for-granted assumption of national belonging (Edensor 2006, Bonikowski 2013, Gullestad 1997). This is not a case of national identity being prompted by difference – as in the two examples above – but by 'sameness', a tacit recognition by the people of a country of 'being in the same boat'. In the literature we can find a number of themes and theses which seek to make some explanation of this tacit national identity. There are some daily, or at least frequent, reminders of nationhood which can be seen in the banal symbols and images of everyday life – in the UK, the monarch's image on coins, the flags flying from public buildings, and even the weather forecast with its repeated drawing of the boundaries of the nation-state. Smith (1991) has emphasized the historic story of the nation, the reminders of this history in public festivals and commemorations, and the grounding of the national story in familiar landscapes. In the imagination of a nation's people, these reminders reinforce what Bonikowski (2013) has called 'the taken for granted assumption that the nation state is a natural and primary object of loyalty and identification, as well as a fundamental building block of the modern institutional order' (2013: 4).

Other ways of analysing this taken for granted nationhood follow a similar model. One is by locating a sense of national attachment in the activities, rituals, and repetitions of everyday life; this we shall see above all in Gullestad's account of the national boundary in Norway. We should also acknowledge that in some real *material* ways – and not just symbolic – people *are* in the 'same boat'. They know for example that they are legally bound by the state's tax measures and that political interventions in rates of taxation affect them; people in Britain know that the success and failure of British industries, commerce and banking have a direct impact on their lives. Of course peoples' responses to these changes in the national political economy are not the same – but they are about the same set of problems. And they sense that the way these questions are handled are fateful for them.

Norway, everyday practices, and boundaries: Marianne Gullestad

The Norwegian anthropologist Marianne Gullestad has drawn on the concepts of boundaries, everyday life, and 'plausibility structures' in her account of Norwegian

national identity. In *Passion for Boundaries* (1997) Gullestad argues that Norwegians' sense of nationhood is reinforced by the way symbols and practices associated with the nation are embedded in family and community life. And because children often take a central place in national celebrations and national imagery, she argues that Norway sees its nationalism as innocent and peaceful.

> For most people in Norway, national symbols, such as the flag and the national anthem, carry only positive popular connotations.... the Norwegian flag is associated with peace. (People recall) how they learned about the German capitulation (8 May 1945) through the sudden appearance of Norwegian flags, virtually everywhere. This is something they will never forget (1997: 24).

The flag does not just appear on national days, or at football matches, but also in the routine lives of families:

> Many private houses in Norway have their own flagpoles. The flag is hoisted not only on official days, but also for family and neighbourhood celebrations, such as birthdays or life cycle rituals such as baptisms, confirmations, weddings and burials. (1997: 24)

Because the flag and nationhood are grounded in everyday life, daily social exchanges have the effect of reinforcing the sense of national belonging; they provide the 'plausibility structures of nationhood', repeated in conversations and mutual experiences:

> Everyday life practices constitute part of what might be termed the 'plausibility structures' of contemporary national identity, in the sense that such experiences provide part of the experiential grounding of, as well as metaphoric resources for, what Benedict Anderson has termed the 'imagining of national communities'. (1997: 21)

Gullestad also claims that the idea of 'boundaries' has a general meaning and applicability in Norwegian life, such that the idea of the nation is grounded in an idea of inside and outside, within the boundaries of Norwegian life, and beyond it. Within Norwegian social life, certain things are highly valued: children and the family, the outdoor life, equality, and social justice among them. For many these values were threatened by joining the EU and would bring Norway 'down to their level' (1997: 26):

> In debates about the EU, national 'independence' is particularly central. What is at stake for opponents of the EU is national independence, closely related to the

notion of national self-determination. The Norwegian expression is *sjølråderetten*, 'the right to decide one's own'. This notion invokes self-government, independence, sovereignty, the right to manage available resources within a specific geographic area (1997: 26).

Norway faced the question of entering the EU in 1994, when the option to stay outside won with 52% of the vote. Gullestad drew on the debates about the EU to explain Norwegian national attitudes, and as a case study of the relationship between a national narrative and aspects of everyday life among Norwegian people. That is to say themes of the national story resonate with people in Norway *because they fit plausibly with the way they live*. Sturdy independence, enjoyment of a sometimes tough outdoor life, a strong sense of equality, and broadly accepted positive valuing of the welfare state, are simultaneously *national* themes and dimensions of the *everyday* business of family life, work and leisure. Edensor has made a similar argument where he suggests that 'small everyday arrangements merge the local with the national' through repetition and familiarity. People are, he argues, in effect saying 'this is how things are... this is how we do things' (Edensor, 2006: 529). What he calls these 'embodied habits' have the effect of constituting 'national worlds of meaning and action' including those routines which are connected to state regulation. These regularities in 'our' way of doing things are the very ones we become aware of when we travel to another country or observe different routines among foreign nationals in 'our own' country. In the next section of our paper we look at how people, from discursive interviews, talk about everyday life, their expectations, their material concerns – and the EU – as modes of revealing expressions of nationhood.

Popular views of nation and Europe in England

We now turn to the corpus of approximately 140 qualitative interviews conducted between 2004 and 2009 in four research sites in the south of England (for further details of the methods, sample and data see Mann and Fenton 2017). The data, thus, was collected a decade ago; but includes topics and themes on Europe and the EU. The comments of our respondents do reflect older political topics prominent at the time of interview – the Iraq war, Prime Minister Blair, and the Euro Currency - but we also see striking continuities between our respondent attitudes and current political views towards the EU. Since these interviews were completed, we have seen in the United Kingdom, the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum, the electoral successes of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) between 2014 and 2016, as well as the 2016 referendum on membership of the EU. These political events have occasioned a politicisation of English identity (Wyn Jones et al. 2012, Henderson et al 2017) and even, some argue, a kind of English nationalism (O'Toole 2016). Our qualitative data reveals that popular views of

nation and the EU have been long established in everyday views of the world. The leave campaigns for the referendum on the EU, in 2016, successfully connected to these popular understandings and achieved a notable resonance with them.

We try to organise the empirical material in a particular way, beginning with some explicit examples of national boundary drawing, before considering the deployment of boundaries with reference to everyday, political and historical contexts and themes. Our interest is in the way actors themselves make discursive connections between nation and different everyday situations, and how references to everyday situations intersect with historical and political ideas of the nation, and in their views of the EU.

Drawing boundaries and distinguishing nations

It is not surprising that people's talk about the nation should entail the invocation of boundaries between them and us, given their significance for the construction of social identities (Jenkins 2008: 54-56). Close attention, however, reveals that people draw national boundaries in highly varied ways. In some instances, the invocation of boundaries is quite explicitly in relation to other named countries –France or Germany are common in our own case, for example. These references to other countries are sometimes part of a conversation about defining 'the English/British' or 'England/Britain'; in other cases, people's will refer to other nations (French or German) in opposition to 'we' or 'us'. These are both ways in which national boundary drawing most closely resembles boundary drawing between ethnic groups. But when interviewees speak about France and Germany, for example, they also make distinctions between English/England, Britain/British and Europe and the EU. The extracts below – firstly an interview with Margaret and Nigel, a married couple, and then with Dan and Nick - illustrate the significance of the European context for English and British national distinction:

> **B43: Margaret (Female, 50-59, Primary School Teacher) and Nigel (Male, 50-59, Social Services Officer)**
> *Interviewer: You think that's just something that's different about Britain?*
> Margaret: I think that's definitely something that's different about Britain. We are quite insular and people are quite narrow in their views as well. Which I don't think is a particularly good thing!
> Nigel: Ye I don't think we've got that kind of European feeling. You get some countries whether on this or that side of the border, Belgium or Holland or Germany or whatever, there does seem to be this mixing in which I don't think we do to the same extent.

B3: Dan (Male, 25-29, Graduate Engineer)

I don't think we should join the Euro. We should not rush into anything because Britain is so different to Europe. We're unique, not just some part of Europe.

B35 Nick (Male, 70-79, Retired Factory Production Manager)

It won't surprise you to know that I'm not very keen on Europe (laughs). I've got a daughter-in-law who's German. My son married and he's out there. No I suppose I'm one of the old ones. We've got that strip of land er water between us and that's served us well for years and years. I know it wouldn't stop another war or anything like that but it still gives us that break, I just wish they had never dug that blasted tunnel.

In these examples, the nation is distinguished by the drawing of a boundary with other nations and Europe, and by a relatively strong rejection of a European identity. There are references to English 'insularity' and narrow-ness compared to the perceived similarities between 'Belgium, Holland or Germany or whatever', whereby 'we' do not 'mix' to the same extent. These boundaries are not only imagined; they are materialised, and naturalised, through reference to Britain as an 'island', and to the physical border of the English channel – boundaries which, according to Nick, are also disrupted by the material connections with mainland Europe ('I wish they'd never dug that blasted tunnel'). These sorts of distinctions between England and other nations, or between England and Europe, that we draw attention to here, are also evident in several of the extracts below in which respondents express an anxiety about the loss of national distinctiveness.

Identity loss and boundary drawing

The asserting of national boundaries against 'other' entities operating at a supra-national scale ('I am British…certainly not European') points to a wider question concerning the consequences of globalisation for national identity. There has, of course, been much commentary about a so-called 'identity crisis', or insecurity over identity loss, as liberal democratic states become ever more inter-dependent within a global economic system. The following interviewees refer to explicitly to the loss of a distinct identity and the importance of national distinctions.

B46: Kate (Female, 40-49, Manager of Charitable Organisation)

I always thought this idea of not having our own money and our own identity that would implode eventually because we can't cope. Those little details are so important if you go abroad. It's just so much more interesting, different money and different culture and different methods. Now we're flattening everything out. It's being eroded.

We're being asked to see ourselves as European. To see yourself melded with that huge variety of people and things and attitudes. So I think being British helps. We were always terribly proud as children you know we went abroad a lot of the time, Dad loved France, spoke it brilliantly. You always went there for holidays and it was quite rare in those days. If you saw another British car you used to hoot and wave. If you met another British family on the camp site. There was something about how we all come from the same place.

W45: Jane (Female, 30-39, Police officer)

I don't think we should have a big Euro country. England is just fine as it is. I don't see why we have to join another country. We we're fine by ourselves throughout history and we are to this day now. We got enough people, not non-British. I don't see why to say yes I want to. It would be really weird. Having loads of different nationalities here. It would start to break down what it means to be English.

B41: Vicky (Female, 25-29, Accountant)

Interviewer: Okay, do you see yourself as English, British or what?
Definitely not European, I know that! I'm definitely not European. I consider myself British more than anything else. Certainly British. Not English, I think British. Certainly not European.
Interviewer: So you mentioned European quite strongly. So why not European?
I don't know. It's just with work and what have you, and you've got everything's turning international. Everything's being standardised throughout the world. It's nice to turn round and say 'well you know, I'm British, this is where I was born and I'm proud of it'. But in things like the single European monetary thing, that's quite a hot topic. I'm quite aware with what's going on with that. And I'm like 'no, I'm not having it'.

W31: Sue (Female, 50-59, Health Visitor)

I don't really know how I feel about Europe. I just wish that we weren't all becoming sort of lumped together as one Europe. I think it's a shame, I expect we'll lose our currency and I think that's a shame because it's part of our individuality

W42: Brian (Male, 50-59 Motor Mechanic)

It's a good up to a point. It's a good to get all in one community. It helps everybody out. You can travel around easier. But we spread this EU too far out now I mean. It's got so big. I can't see it's going out to Turkey and places like that. I got nothing against them but it's spreading too far. We got our own community. We're spreading a bit too far that everybody's jumping on the bandwagon.

With each respondent above, we see scepticism towards Europe and the EU. In such cases the idea of Europe as a political project: 'Being asked to be European', 'the Big Euro country', 'the single European monetary thing') are perceived as a threat to national identity ('it would start to break down what it means to be English'). At the same time, it is noticeable the extent to which our interviewees switch between English, British and Britain when expressing anxieties about the loss of distinctiveness in boundaries. In three of the cases currency, the pound, 'having your own money' get explicit mention as markers of national distinctiveness. Thus we see concerns about the diluting of national boundaries within a wider global environment ('we're flattening everything', 'everything's being standardised', 'everything's turning international'). For Kate at least, concern about the dilution of boundaries is not, on the face of it, inconsistent with his experience and valuing of other European cultures and languages. At several points, respondents view this wider context in relation to actual transnational experiences, for example, reflections on experiences abroad, returning from holidaying in Europe especially: returning through customs, or on the ferry home, or camping in Europe with other Brits.

Contexts of national boundary drawing: everyday, historical, political

As we argued earlier in the paper, people's views and attitudes towards nation and country commonly rest on an intersection of everyday, historical and political themes. In the first case here, we see how June makes a connection between nation and different everyday contexts and experiences:

> **B21: June (Female, 70-79, Retired Clerical Worker)**
> England should be governed by the English, basically. We don't want all this interference from Europe. Don't want it, don't need it. We've been a country governing ourselves for so long. We know exactly what we were doing without having outside interference. We just don't need it! The common market has taken away our privileges. In one fell swoop. I go to the pensioners club down the road, Thursday afternoons. There is one in the community hall every Thursday afternoon for pensioners. A few years back we used to get a regular attendance roughly of about 65 people. Now we're lucky if we're getting 25 lately. And the majority of that is because this mini-bus, they haven't got drivers, so it's off the road. And that is very sad. It really is.

What is striking is how June switches, effortlessly, from 'national politics' to everyday matters – from a self-governing country threatened by interference from Europe, to the future of the local pensioner's club and community hall. This exemplifies the way everyday

matters can resonate with concerns and tensions about national identity. Just as Gullestad (1997) discussed in her account of Norwegian nationalism, people do make connections between the national and everyday. It is not wholly evident why June, in the case above, makes this specific connection between the national and the local; but one could speculate that a perception of local community decline makes June receptive to political statements about the importance of 'governing ourselves'. The following illustrates a similar connection between everyday concerns about money and receiving a pension and the prospect of joining 'the Euro':

`   **W1: Pete (60-69, Male, Retired Farm Worker)**
        Changing the money. That was a complete waste of time wasn't it. Now the pensioner is having the pension book taken away. You go to the post office and put your numbers in the little machine. Well a lot of these older people they don't understand these machines. It's gonna take a long time for them to get used to the machines. What sense is there in going to the post office with your pension book 'bang bang bang' here's your money and say thanks very much and come out.

When given the opportunity to elaborate, we find that people's talk of the nation consists of a series of discursive interplays between the national and personal concerns. With June and Pete above are concerns with local forms of sociability, whether this be the pensioner's club or the post office. In a different example, Will illustrates how a relatively banal story about health and safety at a building site when on holiday can flow from a statement of pride in a nation's history and achievements, and on to dislike for being over-governed:

        W9: Will (Male, 50-59, Engineer)
        I'm very proud of our history and our social achievements. This country was one of the first to make electric power, sewage, general health, roads, heavy engineering. We have quite a strong past. There's lots there to be proud of. I don't like the way we are going towards a nanny state. I don't like being over-governed. I think that is becoming quite noticeable more and more. Typical example: we came back from holiday a couple of weeks ago and we went to Tenerife and they're doing a lot of building work you walk out on to the road and there's a building site and they bring power to the site. So you've got this big mains cable popping up out of the road over the pavement and it's a building site you and no warnings it's not covered in anyway. We landed back at Bristol airport. We came along to a set of stairs off the aircraft and there is this beacon repeating danger stairs careful you know. Well that's a bit over the top. We tend to be like that as a country. You've got your speed cameras. You've now got government legislation to stop you smacking your kids.

It's all a bit silly. This country has been going for a lot longer than 2000 years. Why do we suddenly need people telling us what to do to that level?

It is not just that people's talk of the nation entails a 'switching' between the national and the everyday, but that the everyday grounding of national identity is itself intimately bound up with historical and political themes. In as much as we might wish to emphasise the everyday-ness of national identity, we also have, within the same passages of talk, references to pride in the past and achievements as well as popular ideas of the age and origins of nations ('this country has been going for a lot longer than 2000 years', 'we were fine by ourselves throughout history'). As we illustrate with our final empirical theme below, we also find specific phrases, ideas and lines of argument about the relationship between nation and Europe, which were themselves commonplace in political commentaries both in the referendum campaign for leaving the EU and in the arguments presented by leave voters since. These include the specific phrase of 'taking back control', but also wider references to governing or ruling ourselves, as well as to rights and to standing alone. Again, it is worth reiterating that these interviews were carried out between 2004 and 2009.

Political ideas and popular national talk: self-determination and 'taking back control'

B24: Jack (Male, 25-29, Full time Student)
We must have a referendum. I would come out from a personal point of view. I like the Norwegians. I know it's expensive there but they've retained their identity and they control their borders. They control their fish and you know. We've mortgaged it all haven't we, so I would come out and yes, hold a referendum, and if it means that we stay in, we stay in, so be it, but everybody must act, and as soon as possible, not in 5 years time, that's how we, I see it.

B15: Hannah (Female, 35-39, Unemployed)
I don't want to go into Europe. I don't want to. I want to keep apart from it, I don't think it'll be good for us, I think it will be definitely the wrong way to go and it will end up really bad in the long-term if we do. Our rights will be taken away from us. We will be ruled from Brussels, and they will tell us what we can do and what we can't do and that will be the end of us.

B5: Mark (Male, 45-49, Sales Manager)
I think we should stand alone. We should still stick to our certain thing. We're all nationalities you know. We should keep our identities. We need to keep that and not

be part of one big group. That's what English is, you still want to be within an English group not a European…certainly run from Britain not Europe anyway, not from Belgium, you know

B15: Steve (Male, 50-59, Billposter)
It's getting worse. We're not able to actually rule England. We're becoming a sub-state of the EU. They're actually dictating to us telling us exactly what we can and cannot do. I'm British and I'm proud of it and I want to be British not a sub-state of Europe.

W22: Alan (Male, 70-79, Retired Banker)
I'm very anti-Europe. I think we're English and we don't want to be integrated. We don't want to be ruled from Brussels. I don't want it. Trade with them? Fine. But no, we're not Europeans in that sense. To think that we could have a governing body that could override our Houses of Parliament. That doesn't seem right to me. I think we should be able to rule ourselves.

W37: Annabel (Female, 50-59, Dental Nurse)
I think as a whole we would rather be independent of Europe. In the past we've stood alone and we like to think we can stand on our own two feet.

Taken together, the extracts above, contain a number of significant political themes: taking control of immigration and industries; governing ourselves; being ruled from Britain not Brussels; having our rights taken away from us; and becoming, increasingly so, a sub-state of Europe rather than a stand-alone nation. The recurrence of such themes do indicate the particular significance of European integration for political ideas of England and English nationalism (Wellings 2010) and these political concerns do present themselves within popular national talk. These political themes intersect with the marking out of national boundaries between England/Britain - England and Britain are consistently inter-changed - and Europe ('we need to stick to ourselves and not be part of one big group' we're English/we're not Europeans'; 'I'm British and I'm proud of it'). Economic and political integration with Europe is viewed as rather at odds with respondents' own ideas of nationhood, and with dire consequences for what it means to be English and/or British.

Discussion: Public attitudes and the 2016 European Union Referendum

We began the paper by considering how a Barthian approach to ethnicity with its emphasis on boundaries can be applied to nation and national identity. The empirical analysis then tried to show how the boundary concept can be related to popular discourses concerning

the relations between England, Britain, Europe and the EU. Clearly, Europe and membership of the EU are important contexts for the drawing of national boundaries and the actions of some people to preserve these boundaries reveals the significance that people vest in national membership. In some instances, national boundaries are deployed specifically with regard to a 'political Englishness' based on 'the defending of British sovereignty against European Integration' (Wellings, 2016: 370) – or, as some of our interviewees would put it, 'we should rule ourselves rather than be ruled by Brussels'. In other cases, boundary drawing is prompted by an immigrant presence (e.g. from Eastern Europe) and by a perceived decline in national cultural distinctiveness. The prospect of greater European and global integration also prompts popular concerns as to the dilution of national boundaries and the need to reaffirm them.

At the same time, thinking about nation as a boundary marker also involves thinking about the boundary concept in ways different to what Barth had originally proposed in relation to ethnic groups. For sure, national identities – like other ethnic identities – can be a product of social interaction across boundaries, as Barth conceived. We know from the literature on everyday nationhood that peoples sense of nationhood is reinforced through daily social encounters and is framed through people's material experiences of the world around them: these are the 'daily social exchanges' (Gullestad 1997) and the 'small everyday arrangements' (Edensor 2006). National identity, in everyday settings and talk, has mostly been conceptualised as banal and mundane, sometimes indifferent, and the somewhat cool national attitudes which are taken to indicate a highly taken for granted sense of national belonging. However, popular, non-elite, talk of the nation is far from trivial and can contain themes with an historical and political meaning. More often than not, popular national talk is characterised by an easy interplay between *political themes* – self-governing, independence, control over borders; *historical ideas* – nostalgia about empire, industrial prowess or World War Two – and *day-to-day concerns* – holidays, money, pensions or the local club. This, we would suggest, means thinking about nation and boundary as produced in the interaction between elites and non-elites which for the most part would be communicated through media or institutions, as well as arising from interaction in everyday informal settings.

We have argued that there are political themes ('taking control', 'standing alone', 'governing ourselves') which recur in everyday talk about the nation and which have popular appeal, at least in part, because they resonate with everyday concerns. If this is so, then we can also pose the question that knowledge of these popular attitudes may then have been used within the Leave campaign. The victory of the Leave vote was narrow. 48.1% of those who voted favoured 'Remain' and Remain lost by only 1,269,501 votes. If just over 600,000 Leavers had voted Remain, it would have been a tie. A great deal of

effort and debate has gone into trying to explain the result. A few things are clear and more or less undisputed. First of all, young people voted to Remain and this can be taken to mean people under 40 years old, not just the youngest. Simon Kuper (2018) has calculated that, assuming that age-related attitudes to the EU stay the same, age changes (i.e. additions to the young age group, deaths among the old) would mean that Remain would have won in a referendum held in, say, 2020. We also know that it was England where Leave won by the largest margin (53.4% Leave) followed by Wales (52.5% Leave); in Scotland 62% voted Remain, in Northern Ireland 55.8% voted Remain. Those who were not University educated were more likely to vote Leave. But as Danny Dorling (2016) has argued 'the Leave vote has been unfairly blamed on working class voters in the North of England'. Middle class Leave voters in the south of England had much more effect on the result.

Despite the significant support for Remain, we can begin to see how the Leave campaign ended victorious. We know that categories of people expected to vote Leave were more likely to turn out to vote and this may reflect a genuine and strong sense of commitment to Leaving and, by comparison, the weakness of positive enthusiasm for the EU (as against support for broadly cosmopolitan values). The Remain campaign may also have been 'swimming against a tide' as euro-sceptic opinion had been growing over previous decades (Swales 2016) and was deeply set within a certain spectrum of British attitudes. Dominic Cummings, the manager of the official Leave campaign has speculated that three things, the 2008 economic crisis, the austerity programme, and the problems of the euro, also counted against the Remain argument (Cummings 2017). If Cummings (2017), and the Shipman (2017) are to be believed, the Leave campaign (meaning the official Leave campaign) was better organized and more adept at reaching its public, especially through the sophisticated use of digital methods. The Remain campaign had the misfortune of being led by Cameron who was remote, lacked an easy sense of what people were thinking and represented the establishment. Leave voting was, in part, an anti-establishment vote, and Cameron looked, and was, establishment. The 'establishment' focus on the economic risks of leaving the EU largely failed. Swales (2016) concluded 'The Leave campaign resonated more strongly with the public. There was a greater sense of certainty about what impact leaving the EU would have on immigration and independence. People were less persuaded by the Remain campaign's focus on the economic risks' (2016: 2).

One strong indication of the success of the official Leave campaign in knowing its public, was its focus on 'taking back control', probably the most telling of all the slogans deployed by any of the campaigns. The official Leave campaign team *knew* that this resonated with significant sections of the British public and they knew this through polling data, focus groups and their skilful use of digital resources. This slogan then dovetailed with 'taking

back control of immigration' and taking back our money – our weekly contributions to the EU, famously displayed on the side of the campaign bus. Their emphasis on these ideas almost certainly fed into a web of related themes with long-standing influence in both elite and popular thinking.

One of these was the idea that the United Kingdom (or Britain or England) is perfectly able to 'stand alone' in the world and 'find its own' as it has in the past – a 'popular memory' reference to the Second World War and possibly earlier to industrial and imperial leadership. It might be harder to 'stand-alone' in the present world but a frank belief that the United Kingdom could not do this was open to being portrayed as 'unpatriotic' and lacking faith in your own country. Similarly a cosmopolitan pro-European attitude can be portrayed as unpatriotic. Consider this from Boris Johnson:

> When people say that they feel they have more in common with others in Europe than with people who voted leave I want to say, 'But that is part of the reason why people voted leave.' You don't have to be some tub-thumping nationalist to worry that a transnational sense of allegiance can weaken the ties between us; and you don't have to be an out-and-out nationalist to feel an immense pride in this country and what it can do (cited in Groves 2017).

This brings us back to the question of national identity and to the concerns of our interviewees about a loss of national distinctiveness, about 'standardisation' and a process of 'flattening out' of character and style. These were sometimes linked to the USA and Americanisation, or to globalisation, but also to the EU and being governed by Brussels.

In summary, *specific* attitudes to the EU were guided by more *general*, and probably long-term, postures towards social change. From our interviews we have seen that views of Britain-England and the EU *are set in a context of wider social perceptions of Britain and social change*. We can detect three principal themes in many of these perceptions: decline, standardisation and control.

Decline: The 'resentful nationalist' interviewees saw Britain as having once been great, leading the world in inventions, industry and enterprise, but now marked by de-industrialisation, social decay and lack of civility. People refer to the 'large' things – the loss of great industries and attendant employment. And just as people connect the national question of the EU to local changes, people also speak of national decline and local decline – *the 'small' things as well as the large things*. People speak of national decline in the same breath of talking about incivility. As we observed in an earlier paper, 'One interviewee spoke about 'this country' by simply telling a story of discourtesy in an encounter whilst shopping. Others spoke of scruffiness, indiscipline and ill manners. We may interpret this as meaning that, when people talk about how they relate to 'the country' they actually talk about

how they relate to one another' (Fenton 2008). The EU is one part of a period where Britain is seen to be in decline, beset by political correctness, over-government and social decay. In the words of one of our interviewees (Will): 'I'm very proud of our history and our social achievements…I don't like the way we are going towards a nanny state. I don't like being over-governed'.

Standardisation: Being 'over-governed' meant being subject to many rules and standards. This might be imposed by the national government or by supra-state powers including the EU. Of course, this antipathy towards 'regulation' extends to the theme of 'control' (below). Standardisation means loss of identity both nationally and in local distinctiveness. Some of our interviewees mentioned the Euro in this connection; others spoke more generally about 'standardisation', flattening everything out, or internationalisation. Kate above stated this quite baldly: 'we're flattening everything out. It's being eroded'. Or as Vicky puts it: 'everything's turning international…being standardised throughout the world'.

Control: When our interviewees spoke about the European they often spoke disparagingly about 'being controlled from Brussels'. If, people say, Britain has a proud history, has always 'stood alone', and has been a success by its own efforts, then why should Britain cede control (of its affairs, its borders) to the EU, or more generally other powers like the US, or less precisely 'globalisation'? This is the message of these interviewees, like Jack: 'We must have a referendum. I'd like to be like the Norwegians…they've retained their identity and they control their borders. They control their fish. We've mortgaged it all haven't we..?'.

Writing in *Der Spiegel*, Esch *et al.* (2018) see this sense of 'loss of control' as being 'generalised' - i.e. not just a reaction to the EU - and being at the heart of the new populist anti-democratic sentiments found in Trump's US and through much of Europe.

> 'Take back control' was the slogan with which the Brexit campaign won the referendum. The feeling of living in an era of loss of control may be the common denominator of all European populists. Taking back control is a promise common to them all…This goes together with the wish to throw off the corset which seemingly makes life in the West unfree. All of the laws, rules, regulations and contracts which stipulate to individuals, businesses and whole countries how they are to behave. What they are allowed to say and what not. What they may buy and what not. How things are to be produced and how not. Out of this wish to impose one's own simpler rules on the world strike the new autocrats and authoritarian-minded their spark (2018: 10-18).

These broader, and long-standing, social dispositions about society, government and politics – about decline, regulation, control – form a cognitive backdrop to how people think about the nation, sovereignty and the EU. And the way people form ideas about the

nation which are historical, directly or indirectly political, but also woven into perceptions of everyday life, shows that the nation and its boundaries are important categories for individuals. In the absence of much precise knowledge about the EU - and people in the UK were reported to be the least knowledgeable of all 28 countries (Hix 2015) - it is this sense of nationhood, and the broad social dispositions associated with it, which are likely to have formed people's intentions when they came to vote in the 2016 EU referendum.

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