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Post-Industrial Industrial *Gemeinschaft*: Northern Brexit and the Future Possible

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Abstract

The high vote for Brexit in England's former industrial areas is often, reflecting historic class-based stereotypes, presented as a result of the incapacity of the working class to act in its own interests. Based on ethnographic research in a former milling town and a former mining town in northern England, this article articulates a logic for Brexit that cross-cuts ideological divisions within the working class. We highlight the affective afterlives of industry and, drawing on the classical sociology of Ferdinand Tönnies, argue that places such as these are characterised by a post-industrial industrial *gemeinschaft* whose centrepiece is industrial work, and which is reinforced in the very absence of that industrial work. In turn, we argue, the popularity of Brexit relates significantly to that political project's potential, whether real or illusory, to offer a future of work, and industrial work in particular.

Keywords

Affect, Brexit, British working class, class-based stereotypes, futures, *gemeinschaft,* milling, mining, post-industrialism, Red wall, work

Introduction

In the 2016 United Kingdom (UK) European Union (EU) membership referendum the UK electorate decided narrowly to leave the EU. Voting for Brexit, as departure came to be called, was comparatively high in England's post-industrial areas and, thereby amongst their predominantly working-class electorates. Furthermore, in an historically unprecedented event, and in what came to be known as the Right's penetrating of the 'Red Wall' several such electorates voted in 2019 to elect a Conservative government controlled, by and large by pro-Leave (the EU) forces. These events reflect, in part, a well-documented growing neo-nationalist sentiment amongst the post-industrial working class (Kalb 2011).

However, in the heat of the referendum, the Brexit vote had an explicitly class antagonistic dimension. Working-class informants in our field sites, the town of Lyng Valley[1] in West Yorkshire and the town of Ashington in Northumberland, articulated an uncomfortable awareness of the stigmatising of their Brexit sentiments in class-based terms. They reflected, for example, ideas about working-class racism and xenophobia. Such stigmatisation was often countered with reference to an alternative and apparently deeper-seated logic for the working-

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[1] 'Lyng Valley' is a pseudonym used due to the small size of settlements in the area and identifiability of their residents.

class Brexit vote. Brexit was, significantly, about the issue of work, and the possibility of industrial work in particular.

Based on anthropological fieldwork in now post-milling Lyng Valley (where Goodwin-Hawkins has researched since 2011) and now post-mining Ashington (where Dawson has researched periodically since 1985), this article seeks to articulate this logic. Drawing significantly on affect theory and on the seminal work of Ferdinand Tönnies, whose concern with feelings and sentiments in many ways prefigures the affect theorists, we posit the idea of 'post-industrial industrial *gemeinschaft'*. In essence, we demonstrate how affective and other traces of industry outlive industry itself. In turn, Lyng Valley and Ashington, and other places of their ilk, incorporate groups of people based on mutual bonds and *feelings* of togetherness that were engendered by industry and industrial work and that are reinforced rather than dissipated by the contemporary absences of industry and industrial work.

Furthermore, and following Tönnies, we go on to argue that the mutual bonds and feelings that are the essence of *gemeinschaft* can only be sustained if their very sustenance is felt to be a specific goal of the group. Crucially, we argue, Brexit was a crucial moment in which those bonds between, and feelings amongst, the post-industrial working class were celebrated and experienced as actualised in a goal-orientated political project. Brexit was conceptualised, rightly or wrongly, as promising work and the possibility of an industrial future. To adopt the discourse of the affect theorists upon whose work this article partly rests, Brexit was seen to present a 'future possible' in which reality might be able to realign with people's 'affective urges' (Berlant 2007: 278-9) that were, of course, borne of the kinds of industry that Brexit seemed to promise a return to.

Industry and the making of men and women: sociality, culture and affect

The story of the industrial revolution is now well rehearsed. Developments in mechanised fibre spinning and textile weaving initially drove Britain's industrialisation. The tip from early motive technologies powered by water to engines fuelled by coal intensified the extractive industries. In turn, growing production, especially in the hitherto marginal North of England, swelled surrounding settlements, with the rise of significant manufacturing conurbations often associated with a single dominant industry (such as Manchester and textiles, or Sheffield and steel).

These emerging industrial centres were filled with a new kind of labouring population – the working class. And, 'industrial revolution' came then to be conceptualised as a social, as much as productive process (Williams 1983). Capturing and directing this social process in interested ways became important. Notably, for example, the experience of industrial work was twined with an emerging national consciousness (Gellner 1964). Likewise, it was twinned with the interests of capital. As head of employer relations at Ford, the Reverend Samuel Marquis remarked, albeit many years later, 'the impression has somehow got around that Henry Ford is in the automobile business…cars…are a by-product of his real business, which is the *making of men*' (as cited in Grandin, 2009: 34). Also, of course, it was twinned with reactive forms of political consciousness (Thompson 1968) as, to use Marx's terminology, workers transitioned unevenly from a *klasse an sich* to a *klasse fur sich*.

The social impacts of industry were pervasive, myriad and importantly nuanced according to particular forms of production. Notably, a kind of industrial determinism engendered forms of

local identity and personhood (Edwards 2012, Muehlebach 2017) by which, for example, the people of Stoke-on-Trent described themselves as 'people of the clay' (Hart 1987) and those in South Yorkshire felt that 'coal is our life' (Dennis, Henriques & Slaughter 1956).

The often very different ways in which production was organised – including specific forms of production process, occupational hierarchy, system of occupational mobility and, above all, division of labour – was pivotal in this respect. In Lyng Valley, the textile industry encompassed both weaving and the manufacture of ready-made clothing in 'sewing shops'. Occupational hierarchies within and between the weaving sheds and sewing shops were carefully reckoned: weavers were at the bottom, and 'sewers' the next step up, themselves graded between 'section workers', who sewed just part of a garment (like a pocket or a cuff), and the more skilled 'makers through', who could complete an entire garment. Work was thus individuated and remunerated on a piece rate basis. Typists, who were always women, were a step up again, while engineering and electrical provided more prestigious forms of male employment. Though a worker might regularly change employer, it was rare to change occupation, and certainly not to cross hierarchical boundaries; a weaver, for example, would not re-train as a secretary, nor a sewer decamp to the weaving sheds. Indeed, young people came to be pointed towards their future places in the industry through a secondary school streaming system which explicitly separated the 'lower class' (future weavers) from the 'middle' (future secretaries or engineers) from the 'upper' (future managers and professionals).

As in most mining areas, in Ashington, mining was largely a domain of male employment, with the work underground carried out by small masculine teams. Each team had a stable membership, representing all the specialist roles needed for extractive work at the coal face. Roles were usually assigned on a new recruit's first entry to employment, based on his education, connections, and sometimes even inheritance, and, as in the textile industry, mobility between occupations was rare. In workaday practice, each team was assigned to a particular part of the mine, the men working at close quarters together, and in potentially dangerous conditions that demanded cooperation. When work was scarce, teams competed for access to the mine in the 'caval' lottery, meaning that team members also experienced times of plenty and times of hardship together – conditions which extended to their families. Indeed, despite the male dominance in employment, mining shaped women's lives almost as closely as it did men's. When the British coal industry was nationalised in 1946, the collective bargaining power of the National Union of Mineworkers brought significant wage rises that effectively ended economic pluriactivity in Ashington; men moved out of additional employment into full-time mine work, and women left the waged economy for full-time domestic labour.

These different forms of production echoed through into forms of sociality and culture that were, apparently secondarily removed from the workplace. For example, as we have demonstrated elsewhere, the individualised and collective forms of production in milling and mining respectively resulted in broader cultures of individualism and solidarism that frame even attitudes towards care (Goodwin-Hawkins and Dawson 2018) and dying (Dawson 2018a; Dawson and Goodwin-Hawkins 2018). In the case of milling there was a greater emphasis on individual responsibility, and in mining the provision of mutual aid. Later in the article we go on to show how this contrast has manifested ideologically too.

Culturally, production affected, amongst other things, language. The dialect spoken in Ashington is often referred to as 'The Pitmatic'. This reflects the way in which terminology deriving from the mines provides a reservoir of descriptive terms for use in everyday life. For

example, to emotionally wound is often described as to 'hedgehog'. Reflecting the prickly animal of the same name, a hedgehog is the bundle of wires that forms when a steel winding cable frays, such that it can rip one's body (and heart) apart when travelling at speed. More remarkably, the deafening sound of the mills engendered the practice of 'mee-mawing', a form of exaggerated speech and facial movement that facilitated easier lip-reading. Indeed, informants in Lyng Valley claim to be able to spot former weavers by the way they talk. And, lip reading endures as a skill, with the effects of industrial noise leaving many former weavers with hearing difficulties that have worsened with age.

Aware of these kinds of slippages that take place between production and culture, Antonio Gramsci (1997: 302, our emphasis) remarked that industry could be described as 'a specific mode of living and of *thinking and feeling life*.' Famously, E.P Thomson took Gramsci's insight forward, exploring the relationship between industry and feelings of temporality (1967). He documented how, for example, the clocks and bells of the factory were instruments that marked an insidious shift in daily life from the rhythms of seasonal agriculture to the measured time discipline of industry. Such affects, as they tend to be called these days, can be more positive in nature too. As, for example, Andrea Muehlebach (2017: 98) observes, the massing of workers on factory shop floors and in densely crowded towns created the conditions for collectively held values and feelings of communality.

Industrial afterlives

If the impacts of industrial production sedimented within sociality, culture and affect we are bound to ask to what extent was this sedimentation disrupted by post-industrialism?

Britain's de-industrialisation had earlier roots, especially in the textile industry, but was largely assured in the years between the 1973 oil crisis and the end of the Miners' Strike in 1985, against a political shift from Keynesianism to the neoliberal forms of state economic management notoriously associated with Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government. At that point rapid privatisation and blunt economics hastened industry from its Northern heartlands as cheaper offshore labour costs and the increasing mobility of capital enabled production to be relocated abroad. Consequently, labouring lives were transformed, with a lucky few in Lyng Valley and Ashington relocating to the service sector and, in the case of Ashington, to its small light industrial sector too. More faced unemployment. And, like many other places in the north, Lyng Valley and Ashington also began to empty as laid-off workers left in search of opportunities elsewhere.

All too often, and especially within our own discipline of anthropology, post-industrialisation is represented as entailing the 'loss' of community (Degnan 2012; Charles and Davies 2015; Pahl 2015). This is hardly surprising. The communities in question were, after all, produced in significant ways by industrialisation in the first place. And, more often than not, our informants themselves tell us that community has been lost (Dawson 2010). Camilla Lewis develops an interesting critique of this commonplace position (2016). Based on research in post-industrial Manchester (not far from Lyng Valley) she observes an oxymoronic quality within senses of community lost. On one hand working-class long-term residents complain incessantly about the loss of social ties in a formerly labouring neighbourhood now increasingly occupied by a new generation and new incomers. However, whilst taking residents' complaints seriously, yet not at face value, Lewis asserts that complaining to each other about the lack of community vis-à-vis the past constitutes, is in fact the work of making community in the present.

The above anthropological orthodoxy and its critique both share, in fact a perspective, that loss of industry entails loss of community, albeit in Lewis' case to be replaced by another kind of community based upon senses of the very absence of a particular type of community itself. However, both fail to account for the especially affective presences of industry even in post-industrial times. These presences, or afterlives as they might more aptly be called continue to permeate everyday life from the most overt levels of society through to the intimacies of bodily experience. Notably, for example, while milling and mining only exist in the past tense, both Lyng Valley and Ashington continue to identify as single-industry towns: 'trouseropolis', and 'the biggest mining village in the world' respectively. And at another end of the scale, like in other former industrial contexts, lung diseases are commonplace and evident in the shortness of breath, wheezing and hacking coughs of so many, especially older local people. Doctors can diagnose diseases such as pneumoconiosis or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Yet, there is no way of knowing with certainty whether their cause was smoking, a practice that has been comparatively common amongst industrial working-class people, or the industrial smoke and particulate that formerly fogged places like Lyng Valley and Ashington. Even when people do not know whether it is the case, their experiences are felt and understood as outcomes of past industry's continued lingering presences. Furthermore, we observe the affective presences of industry in post-industrial times are at play in the framing of social lives. We demonstrate the point by ethnographic vignette.

Stan the Man

When 82-year old chorister Stan Cowton stood for one last time to sing Vera Lynn's wartime classic 'We'll meet again' at the Ellington Miners' Welfare Darby and Joan Club on the outskirts of Ashington his labouring life was behind him, and his wife and most of his mining 'marras' already dead. The song, sung in the sparrow-like warble that was all that remained of Stan's still legendary ability to 'raise the rafters', was to mark Stan's farewell from the club. After a serious heart attack had left him with a long convalescence and chronic difficulties with breathlessness, mobility and continence, the social services staff who organised the club activities had decided that he could not come back. The club, they insisted, was for the 'active elderly' only, and Stan's care requirements were now beyond their responsibility – and remuneration.

What the social services staff had not reckoned on was how the other club-goers would react to news of Stan's exclusion. His convalescence had already left a conspicuous space at the dominoes table – a space soon spun into talk in reminiscences of Stan's physical feats of labour at Ellington Colliery where he worked as a 'stone man', an especially tough and revered occupation that involved cutting through rock to get to the coal that ordinary hewers would then mine. These labouring legends of 'Stan the Man' were linked to reports of how he was getting on at home; the widows of some of his old marras regularly visited him with bottles of sugary Lucozade 'to build up his strength', and returned to the club with stories of how he was still tending his famously prize-winning leeks. After Stan had returned to the club to a hero's welcome – and requests for a song – his fellow club-goers were not about to let him go again. They were dedicated to helping him 'get out and about' despite his infirmities, and such was their opposition to the organisers' decree that they organised an on-stage performance – to simultaneously delight Stan and snub the organisers – in which a troupe of older women danced the can-can, every kick of their legs revealing the strategically and showily placed incontinence pads that bulged beneath their skirts. It was as if they were saying to the organisers, 'screw you…physiological ageing does not make us lesser persons.' When the discomforted

organisers again complained that they could not manage Stan's care, club-goer Irene summed up the sentiment in the room with her incredulous reply: 'What are you talking about? It's us who do all the caring.'

We linger on Stan's story here to illustrate the afterlives of labour after labour – animate legacies that exceed the memorial and the material. While Stan was lionised for labouring deeds done decades before his quiet retirement to the dominoes table, the mining past became more-than-memorial in expressions of solidarity when he faced exclusion from the club for a body that no longer 'worked'. The loyal bonds Stan had shared underground with his marras reappeared in the care and can-cans orchestrated by their wives, and in the shared insistence that Stan actively belonged in the colliery community – even in his inability to labour, even in the absence of the colliery itself.

Since such forms became culturally embedded and socially reproduced, they did not necessarily wither alongside industry; the closure of the collieries did not end miners' solidarism any more than weavers' embodied habit of speaking exaggeratedly, 'like *this*,' was switched off with the last of the power looms. These ways of being and knowing have lingered in the lives that went on after the mills and mines had closed.

The post-industrial industrial *gemeinschaft*

The matter of the continued affective presences of industry in post-industrial times has become a focus of an especially influential genre of scholarship, the affective turn. And, by and large, it portrays a dystopic future of growing senses of hopelessness in places like Lyng Valley and Ashington.

'I want to tell a story,' writes the cultural theorist Lauren Berlant (2007: 278-9):

> about post-Fordist affect as a scene of constant bargaining with normalcy in the face of conditions that can barely support even the memory of the fantasy [of industrial life] … [in which] all sorts of normative emotions stand in for affective urges for a better social world that leak beyond what the conventional forms deliver and stand in for.

Berlant's theorisation of 'post-Fordist affect' has been particularly influential in describing a post-industrial present in which the seeming certainties of 'thinking and feeling life' might be seen to have dissipated, along with the stable working-class employment they once affixed to. For Andrea Muehlebach and Nitzan Shoshan (2012: 337), for example, 'precariousness has undone the experiential grounds … [and] certainties' of an era not only predicated on industrial employment but on the promised futurity that came with it. In Shoshan's (2012) own ethnographic account of an East Berlin neighbourhood, the presence of (in this case, state-supported) work has given way to long, listless days in a bottle-strewn public square, where young unemployed men show off new trainers and trade third Reich memorabilia. For Shoshan, a 'future perfect' (2012: 44) predicated on industrial employment has transformed into a 'past conditional', in which present-day lack of opportunity is expressed as a longing for what 'would have been'.

For sure, we see resonances with the image that Shosan paints. In Lyng Valley, the boarded-up townscape of industry's initial departure has been largely replaced by the neatened results of a municipal slum-clearance programme and the more recent arrival of boutiques and coffee

shops. Ashington too has been affected by similar aesthetic transformations, though less of the type intended to boost a tourist economy. There are nevertheless in both places ubiquitous marks of the precarious lives that are falling through cracks in the towns' regenerated façades: young men and women standing idle and bored on street corners; the seats in the Lyng Valley park where young people used to gather during the day to swig cans of beer, but which have now been replaced by a less hospitable rose bed; parklands littered with hyperdermic needles for that most time-disappearing of narcotics, heroin – a commonplace local nickname for Ashington nowadays is 'Ashganistan'; the euphemistic hints at overdose and suicide in local newspaper reports of lives ended all too young – 'tragic family,' 'remembering our Karen,' 'young dad'; and so on.

This apparent condition of hopelessness is a central topic of conversation, especially amongst Lyng Valley and Ashington's predominantly (because of outmigration) older residents. Unsurprisingly, in these contexts which came into existence because of industrial labour their focus is almost always the matter of work. Views are often ideologically polarised. We offer examples, one each from Lyng Valley and Ashington.

Some views reflect a neoliberal emphases on the normalcy of de-industrialization, economic restructuring that has led to greater labour flexibility and precarity, retreat of the state from welfare provision and, in turn, a greater emphasis on self-reliance. The attitudes of former Lyng Valley textile worker Lottie McGinty are typical. She is certainly not naïve to the absence of the 'real and imagined securities' (Muehlebach & Shoshan 2012: 337) of the industrial order: she lived, after all, in intimate proximity to the dismantling of Lyng Valley's textile industry. She watched mills close and friends and family be laid off, some of them leaving the area as the supposed solidities of 'so much work' vanished; she and her husband Clogger themselves circulated through multiple employers as mill work dried up, while Lottie's brother became one of the well-known bricoleurs in the grey economy that grew up amid the decline. Yet, her views appear to be unusually harsh. Responding to reports of rising homelessness in Northern cities, Lottie mustered little sympathy:

> Well, I just don't understand it, all this lot sat out there on the streets like that. Shocking! You never saw the like of it when I was younger, I tell you. Tents and all, they've got out there … Our Nella went to [larger regional town] shopping the other day, and there was one of them sat begging outside the bank. He'd got a dog, and he was asking folk for money for food for the dog. What does he want having a dog if he's not able to feed it? … Our Lee's partner, Tracey, now, she's got some strong opinions about this. She'll tell you. She says there's work enough out there for the taking. She's working on doing the training for the forklifts and the diggers, and that, see. Work enough for the taking. But this lot don't seem to want to do the work for themselves … they want someone else to come along and fix it all up for them … As I say, when we got a house, we'd to work for it … No, I've no sympathy for them.

Other views reflect an historic 'labourism' commonplace in places such as these. It emphasises the continued possibility of industry, enabled principally by nationalisation and Keynesian economic management such that people ought to be guaranteed work. Furthermore, it emphasises the necessity of adequate welfare, at least for those who are unable to work. In short, and in contrast to ideas of self-reliance, the emphasis is, at least where necessary, on state-reliance. The attitudes of George Brown, a 76-year old retired miner from Ashington, are typical:

> When I walk past the food bank it makes my heart sink. I think 'there but for the grace of God'. I was lucky enough to see myself through to retirement before the pits closed. But these young'ns, they're reduced to charity and have had all their dignity taken away. It makes them a different kind of person. I don't recognise them. They're like foreigners in my own town. That's what no work and poverty does. It's not right. They grew-up expecting to work in the pits, and that was taken away from them. That's when the government needs to step in, to help them, to look after them, to give them work, to give them a sense of purpose. But it doesn't anymore. These poor young'ns are made to be nothing but beggars nowadays. It makes my heart sink.

Our choice of examples reflecting self-reliance in Lyng Valley and state-reliance in Ashington is not coincidental. As we have argued elsewhere these are, in some respects, locally typical post-industrial afterlives of social ideologies forged in the individualised *versus* collective forms of production characteristic of milling and mining respectively (Dawson & Goodwin-Hawkins 2018). Furthermore, they may be reflected in voting habits. Since 2010 Calder Valley (the General Electoral constituency in which Lyng Valley is a part) has consistently returned Members of Parliament from the Conservative Party, the British political party most closely associated with the idea of self-reliance. In the same period Wansbeck (the General Electoral constituency in which Ashington is a part) has consistently returned Members of Parliament from the Labour Party, the British political party most associated with ideas of state-reliance, welfarism and the like.

Thus far, we have demonstrated how industry maintains affective presences in these post-industrial times. However, we have been careful to temper that by recognising that different forms of production generate often very different social, cultural and, indeed, political forms. These include ideological polarisation concerning work, as described above. However, fixating on such ideological polarisation would miss what these accounts share, a persistent and overriding concern with work. Whether unemployment is seen as an outcome of individual or structural failing, its consequences are seen as the same. It corrodes selfhood, rendering the unemployed as indolent, beggars, reduced in dignity, unrecognisable, a different kind of person - 'foreigners'.

In one of Sociology's seminal works, Ferdinand Tönnies distinguished between two types of social groupings (2002 [1912]). G*esellschaft*, which is commonly translated as 'society', refers to groups that are sustained by the instrumental pursuit of aims and goals. Contrastingly, *gemeinschaft*, which is commonly translated as 'community', refers to groupings based on mutual bonds and *feelings* of togetherness. The affective presences of industry manifested in post-industrial times produces, we would argue, *gemeinschaft*, or to be more specific post-industrial industrial *gemeinschaft*. And, this is, we would contend further, reinforced by the very absence of industry. As evidenced by an overriding and 'shared' concern with work, it might also be characterised as a post-industrial labour labouring *gemeinschaft* that, likewise, strengthens in the very absence of labour.

Brexit – a future possible

For Tönnies the mutual bonds that are the essence of *gemeinschaft* can only be sustained if their very sustenance is felt to be a specific goal of the group. Moments of such goal-orientation are just that, momentary. Crucially, we go on to argue here that Brexit was one such crucial moment, when senses of a post-industrial industrial *gemeinschaft* came to the fore, and when

Brexit itself appeared to be a political project that offered the possibility of *gemeinschaft* in general, a hope for the survival of embattled post-industrial communities. Adopting the language of the affect theorists, Brexit promised transformation from the experiences of the past conditional to, if not quite a future perfect (Shoshan 2012: 44) then at least a 'future possible'.

'Brexit', as we all surely now know, refers to the moment when the UK's population voted in a referendum in 2016 to exit the European Union (EU). Brexit constitutes arguably the most significant political transformation in post-World War II Britain. Importantly, the post-industrial working class was a key agent in the Brexit vote, and its vote represented a crystallisation of that class' developing attachment to neo-nationalism in general through the 2000s (Kalb 2011). Ashington and Lyng Valley are illustrative.

In England neo-nationalism's most marked early manifestation was certainly the rise of The United Kingdom Independence Party (Ukip), a political party whose core policy was withdrawal of the UK from the EU. Ukip's support rose dramatically from 390 thousand votes (1.2% of the electorate that voted) at the first General Election it contested in 2001 through to 3.8 million (12.6%) in 2015. In 2015 the Ukip vote in Calder Valley was 11.1% and, in considerable excess of the average national Ukip vote it was fully 18.2% in Wansbeck. The difference between Calder Valley and Wansbeck may, at least in part, be put down to the fact that the Conservative Party, which has been the leading political party in Calder Valley throughout the 2000s, was more receptive to Ukip's core agenda. Notably, the Conservatives campaigned in the 2015 General Election on the promise of a referendum on EU membership. In the event the Conservative Party won the 2015 General Election and delivered the referendum in 2016. The national result in the referendum was 'Leave' 51.9% and 'Remain' 48.1%. Echoing a pattern in other parts of post-industrial Britain, in Northumberland (the European electoral region encompassing Ashington) the Brexit vote was 54.1% and in Calderdale (the European electoral region encompassing Lyng Valley) it was 55.7%.

Perceived largely as a one issue party whose purpose had been fulfilled by Brexit, the vote for Ukip collapsed in the 2017 General Election to a mere 3.5% of the voting electorate nationally. Responding to a general trend and, opportunistically to Ukip's electoral vulnerability, the UK's mainstream political parties accommodated increasingly, to a greater degree in the case of the Conservative Party (Dawson 2017) and lesser degree in the case of the Labour Party (Leddy-Own 2014), to neo-nationalist sentiment. However, in general the rise of neo-nationalism and the Brexit vote in particular left both parties fractured for a time, between remainers, leavers, 'deal' and 'no deal' leavers, and a multiplicity of deal leavers who, nonetheless, differed on the specific conditions under which the UK should leave the EU. The fracture was marked in the Conservative Party, with the majority of party members rallying, sometimes very reluctantly, around a new 'Hard Brexit'[2] leadership that came to power in 2019 shortly before the exit agreement from the EU was concluded, but a significant minority supporting either 'Soft Brexit'[3] or Remain also. The fracture was even more marked in the Labour Party, with the majority of party members supporting Remain, but, and crucially for our purposes, a significant minority of Members of Parliament from largely northern post-industrial contexts responding to local preferences and standing askance from the mainstream by supporting Brexit in whatever form. Not coincidentally for example, the Member of Parliament for Wansbeck, where Ashington is located is, arguably the leading light in this movement.

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[2] A form of Brexit in which Britain remains closely aligned with the EU.
[3] A form of Brexit that rejects close alignment with the EU.

Political Scientist Michael Kenny observes perceptively that the sentiments underlying Brexit, 'emerged in far more varied forms than is typically imagined' (2016: 1). We argue that in post-industrial contexts such as Ashington and Lyng Valley the most significant sentiment underlying Brexit is the aforementioned concern with work. Beyond these contexts themselves this tends to be recognised only obliquely, especially in a commonplace narrative that sees Brexit as a response to globalisation (e.g. Diamond 2018). However, before developing our thesis on the relationship between Brexit and work, it is important to assess critically how people in post-industrial communities, especially their majority working-classes, are typically imagined to typically imagine the logics of Brexit. For it is against that background that the views of people on Brexit in places like Ashington and Lyng Valley are constructed.

As a key agent of Brexit, the post-industrial working class came to be a focus of significant scapegoating for the unexpected Brexit result in the years that followed it. The process is illustrated graphically by the banner (which came to be infamous) carried by an obviously middle-class protester at a 'Remain – keep Britain in Europe' rally. It read, '*HELP! We're trapped on an island that's been taken by MAD PEOPLE*!' Though largely inchoate in statements such as these, scapegoating of the post-industrial working class in relation to Brexit resonates with historic and stigmatising tropes deployed by the middle classes (McKenzie 2013). We consider three such tropes to be of particular salience in relation to Brexit.

Firstly, the post-industrial working-class, and its 'Brexiters' (Brexit supporters) in particular, is commonly stereotyped as racist and xenophobic. The early Twenty-First Century brought significant changes to the immigration profile of many of the UK's post-industrial contexts. Of greatest impact were the National Dispersal Program that re-settled forced migrants in mostly post-industrial areas (Dawson 2002), and the large influx of immigrants wrought by EU expansion in 2004. For example, between 2004-8 roughly 1.5 million people arrived from the new member states (UK Border Agency 2008). At first blush these circumstances may appear to be solid grounds for the emergence of racism. Indeed, the anthropological record documents significant instances of racist hostility (e.g. Evans 2006; Grill 2012). However, its greater part documents practices of immigrant accommodation (e.g. Rhodes 2012; Watt 2006). Notably, studies document how working class people in many post-industrial contexts incorporate immigrants within their communities (Edwards 2000; Fortier 2007; Watt 2006; Rhodes 2012; Tyler 2015), and, as a result how new working class cosmopolitanisms have emerged (Werbner 2006; Wise & Velayutham 2009).

Secondly, the post-industrial working class, and its Brexiters in particular, is commonly stereotyped as being characterised by a resurgent Englishness in the sense of growing sentiment for English culture and tradition (e.g. Eichhorn 2018). There are grounds for this, especially in the much observed 'English indigeneity' (Evans 2012) that emerged in response to immigration and labourist multiculturalism (see below). The idea of English indigeneity has been deployed tactically by far-right groups such as the English Defence League (EDL) who ingeniously turn post-colonial politics on its head (Kuper 2003) and re-represent immigration and multiculturalism as forms of ethnic cleansing that presage genocide of the 'native' English. Ukip was, however, more successful in terms of garnering support for an anti-immigration agenda by casting it less in terms of the overtly racist (and paranoid) rhetoric of fringe groups such as the EDL, and more in terms of concerns about the unrestrained free-movement of people wrought by an increasingly 'borderless' Europe. Nonetheless, like the EDL, for Ukip, 'Englishness is an important pivot around which key elements of the party's appeal revolve' (Hayton 2016: 400).

Having said all this, as several observers have pointed out (e.g. Kenny 2016), resurgent Englishness is a much-exaggerated phenomenon based on a series of inappropriate assumptions. For example, Englishness is not an inevitable dialectical outcome of either the presence of a greater number of non-English people or resurgent Welsh and, particularly Scottish nationalisms. Likewise, Ukip's and the Vote Leave campaign's widespread use of symbols of English culture and tradition should not be confused, as it so often is, with an attachment to said culture and tradition by the ordinary people who supported them (Kenny 2016). To illustrate, way back in 1996 flying that most emblematic symbol of Englishness, the flag of St. George became commonplace in the Northeast. The practice was propelled amongst other things[4] by the success of the England football team in the European football championships of that year. Crucially, the team's success was based largely on the extraordinary performance of Paul Gascoigne, a player from Tyne & Wear[5], which is considered locally in places like Ashington to be England's 'cradle' of football. At the time one football-crazy Ashington informant of Dawson's explained the St. George flag flying above his pigeon 'cree' thus: 'That's all about Geordie pride bonny lad,' i.e. not England. Twenty-two years later the England team of 2018 surpassed the exploits of their 1996 counterparts, this time making it to the World Cup semi-finals, and again largely on the back of outstanding performances by Tyne & Wear born men – goalkeeper Jordan Pickford and captain Jordan Henderson. This time, in the midst of the Brexit crisis the same informant was even more careful to leave no room for misunderstanding. Speaking of his now tattered St. George flag he stated: 'I am all for Brexit. But that […pointing at the flag] has got nowt to do with it. England's for them fucking Cockneys[6]. My flag's all about Geordie pride bonny lad.' It would seem that regional (and especially their material) manifestations of Englishness can, and often are, oxymoronically anti-English in certain respects.

Thirdly, the post-industrial working class, and its Brexiters in particular, is commonly stereotyped as being characterised as hanging on to misplaced senses of entitlement, both in terms of livelihood and polity. Key symbols of this are, respectively, the welfarism and corporatism (in which unions were partners with government and industry in policy-making and power more generally) of the post-World War II era, an era in which Labour – the party of the working-class - was viewed widely as the 'natural party of government'. The most apocryphal and commonplace illustration of this alleged sense of political entitlement is the 'demarcation dispute', where, it is claimed, for example, it took three men to bring light – one to erect the ladder, one to fit the bulb, and one to flick the switch – and three unions to ensure that no one worker usurped another's role. In fact, and as many of our working class informants testify, those days are widely viewed as having long gone, if even they existed. They are acutely aware of livelihood disenfranchisement wrought by the roll back of the welfare state and new and precarious neoliberal employment practices, and the representation of many of 'their own' as contemporary folk devils (Cohen 1972) - 'welfare scroungers' and the like. Likewise, they are acutely aware of their political disenfranchisement (see also Bottero 2009; Rhodes 2011; Rhodes 2012; Edwards et al. 2012; Evans 2012; Smith 2012). That process was instigated and cultivated through nineteen years of neoliberal Conservative government following the election of the Thatcher administration in 1979. Its effects included, crucially the weakening of unionism, the symbolic centrepiece of which was the defeat of the National Union of

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[4] Such as 'Cool Britannia', a period of increased pride in the UK, and especially English culture that was inspired largely by pop culture and the success of bands such as Blur and Oasis.

[5] A metropolitan county in the north east of England around the mouths of the rivers Tyne and Wear.

[6] A term generally used to refer to people from London's East End, though commonly used by many northern people to refer pejoratively to all people from southern England.

Mineworkers in its year-long strike of 1984-85. However, arguably, the most significant moment in working-class political disenfranchisement was, paradoxically, the Labour Party victory of 1997. The party rebranded itself as 'New Labour'. 'New' referred, in part to the party's 'Third Way' politics. In essence, and in what turned out to be a successful attempt to capture the electoral centre-ground, the Third Way's core injunction was prosperity through merit rather than class entitlement. Simultaneously, and in the context of a country that was becoming increasingly ethnically diverse through immigration, New Labour also very explicitly embraced multiculturalism. In short, New Labour abandoned 'Old Labour's' historic partisanship for the, predominantly white, industrial working class.

The veracity of each of these tropes – of working class racism, Englishness and entitlement – is clearly questionable. Nonetheless, we observe, in the Brexit milieu they were re-animated and undergirded by another historic and, in its case, master trope – of what has been described elsewhere as 'povertyism' (e.g. Shildrick et al 2012), whereby the working-class is presented as lacking the requisite knowledge to be able to act in its own interest. In terms of this master trope the working class vote for Brexit was, as one middle class resident of Lyng Valley put it, a 'wrong vote based on wrong knowing'.

On matters of immigration, the views of Lyng Valley informant Jos Blackshaw are typical. Jos was born and raised in Lyng Valley, but spent his working life in a Northern city, climbing the corporate ladder. A recent conversation with a former schoolfriend, who had stayed on in the area, turned to Brexit. Jos had voted to remain; his friend revealed that she had voted to leave. Jos scathingly recounted:

> Half her problem is that she just doesn't like to see brown faces. That's the immigration they're on about, this lot who say they want curbs on immigration. Well, it only shows how little they know about the EU, because that's not the immigration coming out is going to stop. … She said to me, oh, see, you know about these things because of your education. Please! She wants to educate herself, and I told her that. It's complete – excuse me – *cluelessness*, and all this mithering[7] about some lost golden age that never actually happened … it's people like that who've landed us now in a right mess.

Jos characterises a racist working class that voted to leave because, ignorantly and counter-instrumentally (at least in terms of the stereotype of working class racism) its members thought that would prevent the immigration of black people when, in fact, the main effect would be to halt the immigration of, largely white Europeans. On matters of entitlement and disenfranchisement the views of former Ashington school headmaster John Wise are illustrative and typical too. John devotes much of life in retirement to the 'good work' of dispensing nourishment to the poor from one of the town's several food banks. His bewilderment at the Brexit sympathies of many of his clients knows no boundaries:

> Half the folk around here need caring for. They cannot fend for themselves, and they cannot even think straight. Half of them are still saying, 'It'll be alright when Brexit happens'. They can't see that it'll be so much worse. See […pointing to his copy of The Guardian], even according to the modest estimates of the Civil Service over fifteen years GDP will contract by at least 3.9%. In the case of a no deal Brexit it'll be 9.3% (HM Government 2018). 9.3%! Do you hear that? Do they know what that means? It's devastation. And,

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[7] Fussing or moaning.

as it says here, the poorer you are the greater the negative effect (Ipsos MORI 2016).

And, John went on:

> What they don't see is that with Brexit they're swapping Europe for Trump. Give me Europe any day of the week, but this lot need[s] it even more than the likes of me. Without the protections of the EU they can look forward to the end of welfare, the free market running riot and the end of all the economic benefits that being in Europe gives them. For goodness sake, many of them don't even see the irony. There's a great big plaque on the door of the place where they collect their free lunches. It says, 'provided by European Union funds'. Really. They're cutting their noses to spite their faces. God bless the misguided.

During the referendum the most effective campaigning slogan was undoubtedly the Brexiteers' (campaigners for Brexit) 'Taking Back Control'. It seemed to speak to issues of sovereignty, of re-controlling the borders in order to halt immigration and the demise of Englishness, and replacing increasingly Europeanised institutions in order to reverse processes of disenfranchisement. Reflecting the master trope of ignorance and inability to act in one's own interest, views such as those articulated above present, instead working-class Brexiters as a people who, as John Wise went on to put it succinctly, 'aren't taking back control. They're giving it away.'

The trope of ignorance and inability to act in one's own interest – of 'cluelessness', of being 'misguided', and of needing 'caring for' – articulated by many middle class people was commonplace too within Remain-supporting media and several political parties, especially The Liberal Democratic Party. In continuing to campaign for Remain it gave scant respect for the Brexit majority and, indeed, dismissed it with confrontational slogans: most infamously 'Bollocks to Brexit'. And, perhaps it paid the price for this when it failed miserably in the General Election of 2019, when even its own leader was not re-elected. The sense of entitlement to do this, and, indeed, the trope of the working class' ignorance and inability to act in its own interest generally may, we would argue, come from a deep English tradition of upper and middle class paternalism (Thompson 1978). Importantly however, contemporary paternalism in the context of Brexit may be counterproductive. As E. P. Thompson observed long ago, paternalism serves to heighten class tensions and polarise classes in relation to issues that they may otherwise agree upon, were it not for the offensive and patronising articulation of that paternalism (1978). Perhaps this is one reason why, in the face of damning assessments of its likely impacts, support for Brexit amongst working class people remained remarkably resolute (YouGov 2019). Furthermore, contemporary paternalism in the context of Brexit is certainly hypocritical. As Gary Younge points out, voting against one's apparent self-interest, as large sections of the liberal middle classes frequently do by selecting (usually out of good conscience) high taxing governments that will erode their incomes more than others, is not solely the preserve of the working class (2019). Given this, and in the classic anthropological tradition (Evans-Pritchard 1976 [1937]) our task ought to be, then not to patronise and critique but, instead to uncover the logics operated by members of the post-industrial working class in voting for Brexit in the context of their knowing that in many ways it may cut against many of their interests. In other words, our task ought to be to understand why, as one man from Crewe – the now run down centre for maintenance of Britain's locomotives (that most iconic form of transport in the industrial era) – described Brexit, 'it is terrible, but I still want it' (Pidd 2019).

In her study of a former coal-mining town in South Yorkshire Catherine Thorleiffson highlights as both typical and key in terms of explaining support for Brexit the comments of an informant (2016). He states, 'people don't realize that in our community, mining was *all* they (sic) ever known and done' (2016: 560). Thorleiffson sees in such statements an expression of helplessness and, thereby, Brexit as a protest vote. In contrast, we see the expression of a kind of hope, specifically that Brexit may afford a future of *work,* the very thing that brought the formerly industrial places where these people live into being and, thus, the very thing that, as mining and milling people imply and, as we state, continues to define who they are today. Such hope may be misguided, but it is certainly not, *à la* the povertyist trope based on a lack of knowing. Indeed, commonly articulated work-related logics for Brexit are often complex and, dare we say it in the face of the povertyist trope, remarkably sophisticated. These logics also often confound other key stereotypes of the Brexit voting post-industrial working class. By way of illustration we offer two here.

Firstly, in the context of matters of disenfranchisement the meaningfulness of the Brexit maxim 'Taking Back Control' was, we observe, rarely a nostalgia for lost welfare or corporatism. Rather, it was an expression of hope that Brexit might presage an escape from EU adherence to international conventions – such as the Kyoto Protocols – and the free trade Eurozone that appear to stand in the way of the reinvigoration of, especially extractive, industries and, hence work.

Secondly, in the context of immigration the meaningfulness of the Brexit maxim 'Taking Back Control' was, we observe, rarely an expression of racism. Access to an international labour force that EU membership affords is, quite reasonably seen as having militated against local people's ability to find work now. Furthermore, and congruent with the logics of 'Austerity'[8], it is seen as undergirding cut-backs in training, retraining and the development of local human capital more generally, such that the inability of many local people to find work now will continue into the future. As one informant explained to Dawson his apparently paradoxical support for the immigration controls promised by Brexit whilst bestowing the virtues of his Polish neighbours: 'there's nothing hard to understand about it. It's just a case of hating immigration and loving immigrants (2018b: 7).'

Conclusion

This comparative ethnography of post-industrial northern England began by outlining the impacts, historically of industry on sociality, culture and affect, and how these differ according to particular kinds of industry. In particular, we highlighted individualism in milling and solidarism in mining. Then, we took issue with a common assumption, especially within anthropological literature: that de-industrialisation disrupted industrial socialities, cultures and affects to such an extent that the communities upon which they were founded are now 'lost'.

In contrast, we illustrate ethnographically the continuity of industry's presences, especially at the level of affect, and how these affective presences, or 'industrial afterlives' continue to frame social action and community. Drawing on the seminal work of Ferdinand Tönnies, we describe this as 'post-industrial industrial *gemeinschaft'*, a grouping of people based on mutual bonds and *feelings* of togetherness that, in this case were engendered by industry and are reinforced

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[8] The reduction of government budget deficits through spending cuts and/or tax increases.

rather than dissipated by the very absence of industry. The core of those bonds in towns like Lyng Valley and Ashington, which came into being because of industry is, inevitably work. Indeed, we demonstrate, concern about work transcends even deep political schisms between attachment to neoliberal-like and labourist ideologies that have emerged, in part from the contrasting individuated and collectivised forms of production and work in these contexts.

In the tone set by influential cultural theorist Lauren Berlant (2007), contemporary work on post-industrial affect tends to theorise de-industrialisation alongside industry's continued affective presences generating such social groups in ways that are, however characterised by senses and experiences of hopelessness. Where once Marxian theorists spoke of the mutuality of the oppressed (Dawson 1998), affect theorists tend to depict a mutuality of the post-industrial depressed. This elides with some of our observations, but not all of them! And, it is in this sense too that we see particular value in the notion *gemeinschaft*. As we have stated, for Tönnies the mutual bonds and feelings that are the essence of *gemeinschaft* can only be sustained if their very sustenance is felt to be a specific goal of the group.

Moments of such goal-orientation are just that, momentary. We have argued that Brexit was one such crucial moment. Its central slogan 'Taking Back Control' was, to adopt the anthropological parlance, multivocal (Cohen 1985). Yes, for some working class people no doubt, it spoke of Brexit addressing their racist sentiments, English patriotism and senses of entitlement. However, we demonstrate, through reference to both ethnographic and secondary material, these dispositions do not apply to many other working class people in England's northern post-industrial hinterlands. They are, more often than not manifestations of deep-seated middle class stereotypes about the working class that came to the surface in the political cauldron of Brexit. For the members of the post-industrial working class to whom we refer Brexit brought another kind of hope – for , if not quite a 'future perfect' (Shoshan 2012: 337) then, at least, a future possible in which reality might be able to realign with people's 'affective urges' (Berlant 2007: 278-9) that were borne of industry. In short, in Brexit the post-industrial working class saw, above all, a glimmer of hope for a world of work and, hence a return to senses of normality and their reason for being.

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