

# Nationalism, Inequality and England's Political Predicament

Based on fine-grained ethnographic research in an English city, this book offers a highly original perspective on England's contemporary political predicament. It argues that some of the most influential academic accounts of the country's current political situation, particularly those focusing on culture or racism, have neglected the key role of nationalism as an often unspoken, banal political principle and framing ideology. Suggesting that economic inequalities remain the key causal ingredient of English political life and, crucially, that these are being interpreted by individuals in relation to a nationalist/cosmopolitan ideological axis, the author argues that any effective, progressive political future will require a reinvigorated sense of political community. Proposing a politics that will promote both nationhood *and* cosmopolitanism, *Nationalism, Inequality and England's Political Predicament* advocates a seemingly contradictory but necessary approach by which explicitly anti-nationalist and anti-racist principles coexist expediently alongside short-term protectionist and immigration control policies.

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# **Nationalism, Inequality and England's Political Predicament**

**Charles Leddy-Owen**

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**This book is dedicated to the people of Portsmouth – but especially my daughter Holly and those whose interviews are featured in this book.**



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# Acknowledgements

In about 2008 I attended a poorly staffed open evening for postgraduate degrees at Birkbeck College. While waiting in the queue to speak to an exhausted looking academic (whose name I never learned) I read the department's prospectus and decided to do an MRes in Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict rather than the more practical degree (something to do with public sector administration) for which I had been planning to apply. Without this intervention, and Eric Kaufmann's excellent course based around Anthony Smith's interpretation of nationalism studies, I doubt I would be doing the job I am privileged to have now – so thanks are due to everyone involved in what happened there.

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# Introduction

## Explaining England's political predicament

This book presents an investigation of the contemporary English political landscape. It asks what political concerns are important for the research participants of the study on which it is based, and what factors – such as socioeconomic inequalities, culture and ideology – can best explain these concerns' importance. In also asking who the 'we' of politics is and how different perspectives on this question might help to frame and shape political outlooks, a particular focus of the book is on nationhood, nationalism and the state.

The idea for the research project this book is based on emerged in 2014 when I noticed that the recent rise of right-wing populist politics and negative attitudes towards immigration in England was being analysed and understood in very different ways by different sets of academics. Some political scientists, conducting quantitative research regarding political attitudes, elections and the remarkable success of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) were explaining these patterns primarily in relation to national identities threatened by perceptions regarding immigration and liberal shifts in culture and values. Some sociologist and cultural studies scholars, conducting qualitative research, on the other hand, were interpreting the same broad patterns primarily in relation to social class, race and racism. Both sets of literature have continued along these explanatory lines, and have developed considerable steam, since the dramatic result of the 2016 referendum on the UK's continued membership of the European Union. What neither literature does at present is analyse these developments with any real, sustained focus on *nationalism* as a political ideology – a gap that this book seeks to begin the process of filling. Based on research undertaken during the campaign for the 2015 UK general election, this is not a book that is directly about the EU referendum or Brexit vote, but there is no doubt of its clear relevance to this fundamentally nationalist moment in British political history, both in terms of mapping out the preceding political landscape and some of the potential ways of dealing with the referendum's aftermath.

When I refer to nationalism in this book, I am not referring to extremist or far-right political outlooks based on perceptions of a unique national identity (though the term can of course refer to these) but to a more subtle and far more prevalent principle holding 'that the national and political unit should be congruent' (Gellner, 1983, p. 1). 'The nation' has been studied and theorised intensively in recent

## 2 Introduction

decades, as brilliantly and critically chronicled by Anthony Smith (1998), as an ideology, discourse, cultural repertoire, and so on – sometimes loud and spectacular, sometimes banal and everyday. Important conceptual and methodological advances have recently been made which raise crucial questions about the salience, sometimes even the existence, of often taken for granted notions of national ‘groups’ or ‘identities’ (Brubaker, 2002; Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008; Malešević, 2011). Returning again to 2015, when the research for this book was conceived, it occurred to me not only that the aforementioned political science and sociological literatures do not speak to each other very much, but that neither of them, with a small number of exceptions, really engages with the literature on nationalism at all. I would argue that this lack of engagement is both remarkable and problematic given the centrality of nationalist ideology to recent English politics and more generally in legitimising modern statehood and the boundaries of political communities. My aim with this book is to bring these (thus far) disparate literatures together and provide an original analytic perspective on England’s contemporary political predicament.

This bringing together of literatures also involves a methodologically novel approach. In employing qualitative research methods – semi-structured interviews and participant observation – focusing on the residents of a single English parliamentary constituency (that of Portsmouth South) to explore individuals’ political concerns, an immediate contrast can be drawn to the dominant approach for researching contemporary politics, which involves surveys of nationally representative samples followed by quantitative analysis. Rather than measuring and comparing isolated social and attitudinal variables in order to help explain election results, the emphasis in this book is on qualitative, narrative depth – on emplaced, contextually and personally rich accounts of politics. Unlike most survey-based approaches, the research presented here is not concerned with party politics *per se* but with a more general aim of increasing our political understanding vis-à-vis ‘the degree of plasticity in our collective fate at [this] time [and] the range within which it can, or might be, modified by our own, or others’ actions’ (Dunn, 2000, p. 104). Through an inductive, qualitative, focus on politics at a micro-social scale, this book therefore shares many characteristics with the dominant methodologies applied in the contemporary sociological and cultural studies literature on racism, and I will argue that the particular perspective on nationalism and society provided here offers some important interventions regarding recent political science analyses with regard to the notion of a ‘cultural backlash’ or beckoning ‘culture wars’. However, my methodological approach also *differs* from recent qualitative research in its focus on the formal politics of the state during a general election campaign, and in its overall concern with what might actually be *achieved* politically in England today. I will therefore also critique that literature’s highly principled but as yet largely visionary (perhaps chimerical) political prescriptions. This book therefore, on the one hand, aims to provide a far more sociologically critical perspective on politics than much political science currently provides, and, on the other, a more politically grounded and practicable perspective on democratic state politics than offered in much sociology and cultural studies.

The fieldwork for the research on which this book is based took place during the campaign for the 2015 general election. Until the release of the exit poll at 10pm on the evening of May 7th it seemed likely – for those of us who, back then, still trusted the opinion polls – that Ed Miliband would soon become Prime Minister on behalf of the Labour Party, probably through some manner of coalition with the Scottish National Party. Instead, David Cameron's Conservative Party obtained a small overall majority. A little over a year later, this government fulfilled its manifesto commitment to hold a referendum on the UK's continuing membership of the European Union, with the shock vote in favour of 'Leave' leading to Cameron's resignation. His replacement, Prime Minister Theresa May, called another general election a year later in 2017 on the assumption that the Labour Party would be heavily defeated at the polls thanks to its election (and re-election following a failed set of challenges from parliamentary colleagues) of avowed socialist Jeremy Corbyn as leader. Following a resurgence during the election campaign by Corbyn's Labour, at the time of writing (August 2018) the UK is governed by a minority Conservative government attempting to negotiate the state's exit from the European Union.

It would therefore be fair to say that three years is a very long time in politics – and there is no space here to even summarise the tumultuous goings on over this period involving populist, nationalist politics in continental Europe and the United States. A lot has changed since May 2015, and with Brexit apparently rapidly approaching in March 2019 and a consistent swirl of rumours circulating about another general election, a second referendum and the potential for splits in one or both of the two main parties, it seems that further, perhaps even more dramatic, change is around the corner. However, it is also clear that three years is not a very long time at all if we consider the long duration over which broad political outlooks and, even more so, ideologies are formed and settled. The evidence suggests that the political divisions identified by political scientists as having emerged in England in recent years have their provenance in long-term socioeconomic, cultural and political dynamics (Ford & Goodwin, 2014; Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Jennings & Stoker, 2016; Jennings, Bua, Laurence, & Brett, 2017). These divisions have manifested themselves at different times in different ways – whether in terms of UKIP's third place popular vote polling in 2015, the Leave victory or the Corbyn phenomenon – and it is in relation to these general patterns, evident in 2015 but perhaps amplified by later events, that this book's contribution lies. At the same time, however, there is some evidence that attitudes on key issues such as immigration have shifted over this period (Curtice & Tipping, 2018), and in the chapters that follow some of the research that has poured forth following both recent general elections and the referendum will form a key part of this book's analysis of the contemporary and potential future situation.

This book's overall argument, and the overarching suggestions made in the conclusion with regard to political ways forward, are broadly progressive in character. This will not come as a huge surprise to anyone who reads academic sociology. However, I would also argue that many of the findings could be of value to those of a more conservative disposition, particularly as some of the conclusions

are arguably quite conservative with regard to the analysis and prognosis of relationships involving nationhood, politics and the state and the current character and pace of attitudinal change regarding these.

Prior to providing an outline of the book's structure, it is finally important to make a note regarding the English focus of the study. The research investigated a UK election, and, as is well known, some of the key political issues relating to nationhood and nationalism in the UK relate to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. As an outcome of the book's research location and the concerns of its participants this book will barely engage with these issues at all (other than through one participant who discussed Scottish nationalism). Its focus is therefore on nationalism in England. However, it is not a book specifically about *English* nationalism. The methodology applied did not make any attempt to render English nationalism distinct from British nationalism, other than when participants themselves clearly did so in their narratives, due to the fiendish level of complexity required in attempting to isolate when someone in England is specifically discussing English rather than British nationhood (or vice versa, or both). Nevertheless, I will sometimes draw on, the relatively small but impressive political and social science literature on the topic (e.g. Aughey, 2007; Denham, 2017; Kenny, 2014; Kumar, 2003; Mann, 2011; Wellings, 2010), and I hope my findings will contribute to its further study.

### Chapter outline

Chapter 1 will introduce the two key areas of research I am building on and arguing against. First, recent quantitative political science research, which broadly argues that economics or culture are responsible for contemporary political divisions in England – and that if the latter is the most salient dimension then a US-style 'culture war' is looming in which political coalitions and compromises will be difficult to forge. Second, sociological and cultural studies accounts that foreground racism and class. I will argue that neither broad sets of literature take into account the fundamental role of nationalist politics. The chapter will then introduce the constituency of Portsmouth South as an appropriate research site due to its socioeconomic disparities and unique political volatility.

Chapter 2 will introduce some classic sociological theories regarding nations, nationalism and cosmopolitanism before discussing some recent methodological approaches to the critical study of nationhood in everyday contexts. It will then introduce the research methods of the present study, notably the qualitative narrative approach to research, the interview structure and sampling process. Chapter 3 then discusses the political concerns of participants who described themselves as being in economically precarious situations. It will be argued that though the content of their narratives was highly varied, they all foregrounded personal experiences of material hardship and a feeling of being 'overlooked' by the present political setup.

Chapter 4 will discuss how nationalist ideology was mobilised and identified by some of the same participants as they tried to interpret, explain and solve difficult

personal experiences and relate them to a broader terrain of action. It is demonstrated that most of the arguments on which their nationalist (and often racist) politics were based – particularly with regard to immigration – stem from misperceptions framed and fuelled by nationalist ideology. An implication of this and the previous chapter is that the concerns of the ‘overlooked’ (or ‘left behind’, ‘left out’, and so on) relate above all to socioeconomic hierarchies, and nationalist, political interpretations of these, more than they do to any sense of ‘cultural threat’ or ‘threatened national identities’.

Chapter 5 introduces the study’s more economically secure participants, whose political concerns are similar to the less well-off but relatively removed from material hardship and necessity. This relative affluence will be demonstrated to have a crucial impact on the qualitative character of these participants’ political concerns and attitudes. Their relationships with the city in which they live, and with a sense of place in general, are shaped by utility and more individualist and privatised notions of home and belonging than those discussed in the previous chapters. These participants describe lifestyles involving a routine sense of mobility, with many, despite ostensibly holding to progressive political principles, implicitly stigmatising and pathologising, as culturally and politically backward, those who live in more deprived areas of Portsmouth.

Chapter 6 will discuss how, for many of these relatively affluent participants, the individualism and sense of mobility discussed in the previous chapter feeds into more cosmopolitan (or, as the chapter terms it, nationsceptic) political outlooks through which the normalised relationships between nation, state and society posited by nationalism are destabilised. However, the general political outlooks of these participants are found to be barely less parochial than those of nationalists. They thus express an effectively nationalist form of politics absent of a clear sense of nationhood – that is, their political concerns are localised to this state, but there is little sense of *national* community or identity associated with it.

The concluding chapter will reiterate the argument that socioeconomic hierarchies and political divisions rather than any cultural bifurcation are key to understanding and engaging with England’s contemporary predicament. From progressive political perspectives concerned with equality and justice at local and global scales it will be argued that the present situation outlined in Chapter 6 of ‘nationalism without nationhood’ among England’s more affluent population needs to be reversed – that is, a greater sense of political community and attachment to place is required to counter prevalent individualistic norms. However, this will need to be combined with a more explicitly cosmopolitan politics if it is to resonate in a highly globalised society and culture in which cosmopolitan political principles are making headway. With this aim, of promoting both nationhood *and* cosmopolitanism, the book will conclude by advocating a pragmatic, seemingly contradictory approach in which avowedly anti-nationalist and anti-racist principles coexist expediently alongside short-term protectionist and immigration control policies.

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behind’ communities and ‘Anywheres’, deep political divisions and extraordinary electoral volatility – and all within a remarkably compact urban area. In short, if we are looking to analyse ‘two Englands’ – perhaps even all English life – there are few more appropriate sites than this post-imperial island city struggling to find a role in the world.

## Notes

- 1 Due to what I consider to be the historical familiarity of these patterns, I resist referring here to a ‘new nationalism’ as witnessed in some news media (such as the a 2016 edition of *The Economist* [cited in Valluvan (2017, p. 234)] and academia [see Valluvan (2017), Antonsich (2017), and also the 2017 *Association for Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism* conference]).
- 2 Similar concerns about this literature have been voiced previously – from, as it were, within – in Hainmueller and Hopkins’ (2014) review of the global quantitative analysis of attitudes towards immigration (albeit with no reference to nationalism). The authors note a general lack of conceptual work underlining these studies, meaning that such ‘scholarship . . . has . . . too often treated immigration attitudes as isolated from partisanship and political ideology’ (p. 3), thus leaving it ‘to a striking extent unintegrated [with] broader research on the sources of political attitudes’ (pp. 20–21). They conclude by arguing that ‘carefully crafted experimental designs that manipulate ethnocentrism and stereotypes could help to better identify the causal role of these variables’ (p. 21), a call largely not taken up in Britain so far – though for a recent exception, albeit one that does not deal directly with political attitudes, and which again fails to mention nationalism, see ‘Laurence and colleagues’ (2018) article in which a longitudinal analysis suggests that pre-existing prejudice and social class rather than increased ethnic diversity are key for explaining declining social cohesion in areas where ethnic diversity has increased.
- 3 McLaren’s (2015) book-length discussion of attitudes towards immigration at least involves a discussion in which the author makes clear that she accepts a particular nationalist ontology and methodology, citing sociobiologist and ethnosymbolist theories regarding the nation (p. 11). Eric Kaufmann (e.g. 2004, 2017c), a student of Anthony Smith, and an important theorist of nationalism in his own right, is similarly if not always explicitly accepting of an ethnicist or nationalist ontology.
- 4 In what follows some of those qualitative researchers cited – such as Susan Condor, Michael Skey, Robin Mann and Steve Fenton – are not necessarily associated with critical studies of race, though I would suggest their work is very closely located. This research is included here as it dovetails effectively with the race literature and can add some depth to this review of qualitative research on nationalism in England – which, as will be argued, has to a substantial extent failed to research national identifications in substantial detail among the ethnic majority.

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with the relevant theories and research discussed in this and the previous chapter, where relevant making links between my analysis and more generalisable research. In what follows, participants names have been changed as well as some identifying features such as details of their employment, though in any such instance the replacement detail aims to match the broad character and social location of the participant.

## Notes

- 1 Seventeen participants were recruited by postal advertisements around 800 of which I delivered by hand in areas of the constituency targeted along the lines of social class, ethnic diversity and political affiliation. Thirteen were recruited through internet advertising and six were contacts made from interviews. A further three were recruited in public houses (see Chapter 3 for further details).
- 2 The sample was still disproportionately active compared to the wider population (Hay, 2007, p. 22). Six of the participants could be described as highly politically active in terms of canvassing and campaigning for particular political parties and another six were members of political parties but only irregularly active. A small number of young interviewees discussed occasional involvement in pressure group activity, consumer activism, the regular signing of petitions, and so on, of a kind associated with 'post-materialist' forms of politics (Stoker, 2006, pp. 87–88). None of the other participants (23 out of 39) reported being directly involved or active in formal politics.

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Nationalist perspectives among the overlooked were not, however, limited to the Westminster-centred populism of UKIP. As with those on the left such as Peter or Carol, right-wing nationalist outlooks also occasionally drifted into anti-democratic waters. As we will see in Chapter 4, some arguments about the rights of immigrants and ethnic minorities made by these participants, particularly with regard to deportation and human rights, could be considered antithetical to notions of rule of law in a liberal, pluralist democracy. More comprehensively, Dennis advocated a more efficient and authentic representation of the popular will by way of ten-year parliaments, and also suggested that the monarch ‘should have more power’ by acting less as a figurehead for the state and making occasional policy interventions (particularly vis-à-vis defence and foreign affairs). This autocratic solution has some echoes of Peter’s left-wing subversion of democratic norms. As Chapter 6 will demonstrate, right-wing nationalist and radical left-wing populist outlooks were also adopted by more affluent participants, and constitutional rights and norms were also troubled by the middle classes. However, this similar content (as with the content of their overall political concerns) was ultimately of a qualitatively different character, marked by a less urgent, radical and more gradualist approach and tone. That chapter will analyse these patterns and their relationships to a sense of agency or powerlessness in further detail.

For now, in contrast, it is important to note that the feelings of being overlooked analysed here and the proposed solutions to this situation were, deep down, structurally and emotionally similar regardless of the ideological content of the political outlook expressed. Remedies as disparate as supporting a populist parliamentary party, a left-wing revolution or a reappraisal of monarchical power all, as Samuels (2015, p. 18 [original emphasis]) would suggest,

have something *psychological* in common. They all emotionally reject big politics, its pomposity and self-interest, its mendacity and complacency. . . . They are all committed to a transformation of politics . . . to get[ting] a sense of purpose, decency, aspiration and meaning back to political culture.

A populist ethos was central to this kind of critique, with nationalist populism, particularly in relation to the political achievements of UKIP, the most coherent and (at least for now) concrete such response voiced. However, as Bonikowski (2017) argues, ‘populism is at best an oppositional moral framework’ (p. 185). What requires elaborating with regard to England’s present political predicament are answers to the question of why some of those who feel overlooked articulate and identify with this, the most successful, contemporary strain of populism in the West.

## Note

- 1 The socioeconomic division laid out here was the crucial one for this sample, but I am not arguing that the political significance of social class should be boiled down to economic precariousness – it is, of course, not possible to make such claims based on a



sample of this size and in relation to a highly complex, socioeconomically fragmented society. However this argument's basis in socioeconomic hierarchy and a sense of precariousness rather than class categories or identifications can be linked to some important research in this area (Bottero, 2004; Gidron & Hall, 2017; Jennings, Bua, Laurence, & Brett, 2017; Laurence, Schmid, & Hewstone, 2018), and it maybe that the findings in what follows could be suggestive for further, more representative research in terms of the key qualitative differences in the character of participants' outlooks.

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very different beast to the more severe cultural bifurcation set out in much recent political science research.

Turning, finally, to how nationalist politics among those who feel overlooked might be considered by those conducting research into contemporary racism in England, we have seen that, even among the most ardent nationalists, racism is a widely stigmatised outlook. However, we have also seen how it is often (and routinely) explicitly evaded and implicitly legitimised as part of a nationalist outlook. I would suggest that the importance of the nation-state in the reproduction and legitimisation of racism and Islamophobia suggested in this chapter makes a case for those researching these areas to further consider – and in far more depth than found in much of the existing literature – the role of nationalist political principles and ideology in framing and normalising ‘us’ and ‘other’ with regard to the politics of the state. It could even be argued that without an intervention that also critiques and destabilises the very notion of a politically privileged national community within a state, the impact of any anti-racist politics will be undermined and delimited. This raises difficult questions, particularly with regard to practical steps forward, which the book’s conclusion will discuss – though first these questions will be made more fraught and complex (and, from progressive perspectives, arguably more *promising*) by way of the following two chapters’ analysis of Portsmouth South’s more affluent population.

## Notes

- 1 Though, as discussed in the previous chapter, I did see two young men of South Asian heritage verbally abused by white men outside a mosque in Somerstown, I did not hear whether this abuse was racist. The perpetrators had just meted out similar treatment to a car they had stepped in front of, which I suspect probably suggests non-discriminatory behaviour.
- 2 The phrase ‘ardent nationalism’ is borrowed with thanks from a recent chapter by Bart Bonikowski (2017b).
- 3 ‘Pompey’ is a colloquial term for the city of Portsmouth.

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political outlooks will vary tremendously by important socioeconomic categories only touched upon in this study (such as ‘the precariat’, the upper middle classes, and so on), in relation to more conservative and right-wing middle class individuals than were sampled in this study, and in relation to important intersections largely unanalysed here relating to age, ethnicity and region. Nevertheless, I would argue that further research regarding socioeconomically shaped qualitative differences in political outlooks of the kind claimed in the earlier analysis is required if our aim is to provide the most useful picture regarding the causal substance of politics – that is, ‘the patterns of practical interaction between human groups and their prospective consequences’ (Dunn, 2000, p. 104). Public concern about particular issues will require policy responses of a specific character if they are to succeed in satisfying constituents from different social backgrounds with qualitatively different relationships to these concerns. In this context, a real and perhaps present danger of a contemporary socioeconomic structure and party political system in which relatively affluent voters hold the balance of power electorally (Evans & Tilley, 2017, p. 200) is that if political concerns regarding issues such as injustice, inequality and representation are important but also clearly a lot less urgent for this population then there will be less motivation for politicians to engage in a sustained, effective and potentially risky, way with these issues. An implication of this is the potential, effective exclusion from politics of the concerns and needs of the least well-off.

With this socioeconomically divided demos in mind, the next chapter will explore more affluent participants’ political outlooks in further detail vis-à-vis their perspectives on the ‘we’ of politics, nationhood and nationalism. In relation to potentially worrying patterns raised in the present chapter regarding social and political solidarity, the rather dark picture painted here is going to get yet more gloomy.

## Notes

- 1 The argument here is not that the affluent *are* more agentic – as many of their own perspectives would have it – but that they *feel* that they are (and are widely represented as such by politicians, within the media, and so on).
- 2 I asked Stephen whether he would like to stop the interview but he said he was happy to continue.

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state-based ideology, cosmopolitan politics here seem to be in the exact inverse situation of explicit, ardent nationalism discussed in Chapter 4. As a result, though the nation's lights might be out for many, or at least fading, nationalism survives as a kind of revenant, zombie ideology – shorn of living national content but obdurately stumbling on with some of the most objectionable and dangerous political patterns it reproduces intact.

## Notes

- 1 During the period of the general election campaign alone the RAF launched 59 airstrikes into Iraq (retrieved from [www.gov.uk/government/publications/british-forces-air-strikes-in-iraq-monthly-list](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/british-forces-air-strikes-in-iraq-monthly-list)) in support of an Iraqi government offensive. This offensive, and a subsequent IS counterattack, saw over 100,000 Iraqis displaced in April 2015 alone (International Organisation for Migration, 2015), with the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (2015) reporting unverified but credible accounts of 'large numbers of casualties' among civilians. This combat saw probably the fiercest and bloodiest fighting anywhere in the world at that time with the possible exception of some of the battles being fought in neighbouring Syria.
- 2 Surveys and polls measure public interest in these kinds of issues in inexact and inconsistent ways, through different categories such as 'foreign policy', 'Europe', 'defence', 'immigration/asylum', and so on. One prominent poll, from YouGov, during the election campaign did not include foreign policy at all as a key issue for respondents to choose, though 'Europe' scored quite highly (15%) (Jordan, 2015) and another, which did not include 'Europe' as an option, saw 'foreign affairs/terrorism/defence' score 16% (Ipsos-MORI, 2015). Though somewhat ambiguous I would nevertheless suggest that there is therefore some nationally representative evidence here for the parochial political focus discussed in this chapter, which has been found in previous studies focusing on culturally cosmopolitan research participants (Favell, 2010). This pattern is further supported by analysis of media coverage of the election. Television and newspaper coverage of the campaign positioned 'foreign policy' as respectively 20th and 24th out of 26 main issues, comprising of 0.5% and 0.3% of the total coverage (Deacon, 2015, p. 12), with the absence of discussion regarding these issues lamented by several newspaper commentators at the time (e.g. Coughlin, 2015; Guardian, 2015).
- 3 Indeed, I would suggest that Billig's (1995) entire thesis of banal nationalism requires reconsideration in relation to a more nuanced analysis of whether the themes he analyses relate to statehood (and its relationships with peoplehood) more than to nationhood. However, this may be a particularly Anglocentric critique if we consider how McCrone (1997), Bhambra (2017) and Kumar (2003) have all persuasively identified tensions and gaps in the relationships between nationhood and statehood in England as a result of institutional histories involving the Union and Empire.

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planked in the long ago, yet willable forward again and again and again'. While the 'far-seeing joker' in a ship's lookout might declare that 'the actual ship had stolen away from beneath him by the time that he had got himself down', the ship in actuality remains. It helps to carry us onward, to various potential locations, and we have the means to try and steer it with and against the wind. One day we might be able to disembark. Until that day, without a committed political and ethical project aiming for a *modus vivendi* inclusive of cosmopolitanism and a greater sense of political community at the enduring state level of politics, the future for England and Britain seems bleak. As historian Tony Judt (Snyder & Judt, 2013) put it in a late interview, '[t]his is going to be a long road. But it would be irresponsible to pretend that there is any serious alternative' (p. 388).

## Note

- 1 Recent research suggests high levels of identification with nation-state categories among groups from all ethnic and religious backgrounds e.g. Easton (2018), Press Association (2012); [www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/jun/30/ethnic-minorities-uk-british-research](http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/jun/30/ethnic-minorities-uk-british-research)

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