‘If we do not have the pickers, we do not have the industry’

Rural UK under a Brexit shadow

Keith Halfacree

Introducing Brexit

The United Kingdom officially joined the European Economic Community (EEC) on 1 January 1973, a decision ratified in 1975 by a two-thirds majority in a referendum (Bailey and Budd 2019). While never one of the most Euro-enthusiastic of the 28 countries which, in January 2016, comprised what had by then become the European Union (EU), few commentators were ready for the political upheaval to come. In response to mounting anti-EU pressures within his Conservative Party and the success of the anti-EU UK Independence Party in the 2014 European elections, Prime Minister David Cameron tabled an ‘in-out’ referendum on UK EU membership for 23 June 2016. This poll involved voters responding ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the simple question: ‘Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?’ (Electoral Commission n.d.).

Cameron and many political commentators expected the referendum result to back the UK remaining in the EU, although surveys consistently showed the situation to be very tight. However, from the 72 per cent turnout (unexceptional in size if compared with General Election turnouts from 1945 until a 59 per cent nadir in 2001; Dempsey and Loft 2019), the result was: 51.9 per cent to leave, 48.1 per cent to remain, 0.08 per cent votes invalid (Bailey and Budd 2019, Electoral Commission n.d.). Supporters of what was termed Brexit (British exit) had won the day.

Notwithstanding much continuing uncertainty within what Bailey and Budd (2019, 157) sharply labelled ‘a constitutional imbroglio moving towards a crisis,’ this chapter explores some potential consequences of Brexit for the rural UK, a spatial focus underdeveloped to date. These are considered under four headings. First, withdrawal from the Common Agricultural Policy and other EU forms of economic support for rural businesses is evaluated. Second, implications of Brexit for EU-originating migrant labour, mostly involved in agriculture, are drawn out. Third, staying with international labour migrants, attention is focused on how the everyday lives of those who come in the future and those who live in the UK now may be changing with Brexit. Fourth, and

drawing on all three previous consequences plus the electoral geography of the pro-Brexit vote, the chapter suggests that a ‘revanchist rural’ expressive representation has emerged, challenging the countryside’s status as a diverse, welcoming and modern space, not least for international labour migrants.

Agricultural and other economic support

The most significant immediate economic consequence for the UK rural from Brexit is the withdrawal from the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). This prominent range of farming subsidies still absorbs around 38 per cent of the EU budget (Shucksmith 2019). Although a consistent net CAP budget contributor (Browne *et al.* 2016), in 2015, for example, the UK received over €4 billion from the CAP, of which 76 per cent comprised direct payments to farmers (Institute for Government 2020). Unsurprisingly, therefore, loss of this huge subsidy is of high prominence and concern for farmers’ groups such as the National Farmers’ Union (2019).

A strong clue to government thinking on how such substantial support to farmers may be (partly) replaced after Brexit comes from the ‘Health and Harmony’ consultation paper (Defra 2018, Downing and Coe 2018). This document, overseen by leading Brexiteer (as supporters of Brexit are labelled) and, at the time, the Environment Secretary, Michael Gove, emphasised in particular negative environmental impacts of modern agriculture. Outlining these helped politically to underpin the paper’s proposals for a post-Brexit public support system for farmers prioritising grants not for agricultural production but for provision of ‘public goods,’ such as wildlife habitats and biodiversity, flood risk, climate change, air quality, public health, and access. In CAP terminology, it suggested an almost total shift from Pillar 1 (direct income support) to Pillar 2 (rural development support). Such an impression was consolidated by subsequent publication of the Agricultural Bill 2018 for England. This proposes an ‘agricultural transition’ that will phase out (land-based) Basic Payments (Pillar 1) by 2027, the long transition period required to work out the details. Further complexity comes from the suggestion that more-or-less different agricultural support measures will be rolled out in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland (Downing and Coe 2018, Dwyer 2018, Messenger 2018).

Elsewhere, much work is required to engage with the 6,256 World Trade Organisation (WTO) tariff lines for agriculture and fisheries (Shucksmith 2019), which will come into play if no new trade deal with the EU is agreed. Although adopting WTO tariffs is a solution preferred by some Brexiteers, these tariffs on agricultural goods are typically high, with the intention of protecting domestic markets, and if the UK’s agricultural trade with the EU becomes so ruled then exports could be hit very hard (House of Commons 2018). For example, over 95 per cent of exported UK sheep meat by volume is destined for the EU but, with a likely tariff of at least 50 per cent, this would

become uncompetitive. The Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board argued that it would ‘devastating’ for the sector (House of Commons 2018).

Besides CAP funding supporting direct agricultural employment, rural regions of the UK also receive project funding and, hence, employment support from the EU’s Structural Funds (Browne *et al.* 2016). Through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), there is support for innovation and research, small businesses, digital infrastructure provision, and decarbonising the economy. The European Social Fund (ESF) further supports labour mobility and development of education, skills, and institutional capacity. Although the UK is not a prime recipient of such funds, it still contains two Less Developed Regions (west Wales, Cornwall, and the Isles of Scilly) and 11 intermediate Transition Regions (Browne *et al.* 2016). Loss of ERDF support would clearly have negative consequences for their development and employment (Shucksmith 2019).

Although current figures may immediately suggest massive economic consequences of loss of EU support after Brexit, some commentators are more sanguine. For example, Browne and colleagues from the Institute for Fiscal Studies not only note how the ‘UK’s gross contribution to the EU Budget represents about 2% of total public spending... the net contribution about 1%’ (Browne *et al.* 2016, 48) but also observe how, in total:

The UK benefits relatively little from the two largest [EU] budget items. It is too rich to benefit significantly from structural and cohesion funds... [and a] relatively small agricultural sector and large amount of unimproved agricultural land... attract little subsidy [which] mean[s] that it receives less per person than most other EU member states from the CAP.

(Browne *et al.* 2016, 36, my emphasis)

Nonetheless, if assessment shifts from such a macro-scale overview to the individual farmer or rural business, the loss of support can be potentially financially devastating. For example, it is estimated that around 80 per cent of Welsh farm income comes from subsidies (compared with 55 per cent for the UK overall), not least directed at ‘less favoured’ sheep farms on often steep ground with thin soils and heavy rainfall (Messenger 2018, Morris 2019). Elsewhere, the National Farmers’ Union (NFU) have warned of potential rises in farmer suicides over, at least in part, worries about the impacts of Brexit on already challenging livelihoods (Case 2019, Parveen 2019).

This more discriminating focus on individual cases and situations becomes more pertinent still when other areas of potentially significant change and challenge across the entire post-Brexit agri-food sector are taken into account (Lawrence 2017, Maye *et al.* 2018, 270). These include changes to: overseas trade; food security, food standards, health and environmental regulations; wage rises in the sector that may lead to higher food costs; and other changes in the rural labour market. One must anticipate all the upheavals of a

‘major new phase of agrarian change and regulation’ (Maye *et al.* 2018, 271; Lawrence 2017), while recognising Brexit as already active across the rural UK, as indicated in the next section.

Seasonal and migrant labour

It is widely noted that concern about ‘migrants’ coming to the UK was a major stimulus to the 2016 pro-Brexit vote (Clarke *et al.* 2017). During the referendum campaign it appears that ‘a reservoir of latent racism was activated,’ the Leave campaign frequently bringing to the surface ‘pre-existing community sentiments that migrants were “a drain on local resources”’ (Lumsden *et al.* 2019, 172, 179–180), blamed for things from housing shortages to pressure on the National Health Service. From a specifically EU perspective, critics noted the openness of labour movement and recruitment through the whole Union under European Freedom of Movement (EFM): ‘a fundamental principle... enshrined in Article 45 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union’ (European Commission 2019).

Freedom of EU nationals to migrate to the UK contrasted markedly with the situation for non-EU residents wishing to work in the country. For such nationals, a five-tier Points Based System (PBS) since 2008 has sought only to welcome the ‘brightest and best’ and emphasises their need for ‘self-sufficiency’ (Kilkey 2017, 805) via a prioritising of wealth and income. It seems increasingly likely that EU citizens will become entangled in a similar PBS-type scheme after Brexit, possibly one modelled on that used in Australia (Sumption 2019). Indeed, it is suggested that freedom of EU nationals to move to the UK will be curtailed immediately on Brexit if no agreement on this issue has been reached (Abboud 2019).

Such change to the legal labour migrant framework for the UK has major potential implications for rural economies (Lawrence 2017). This is because the UK agri-food (and beyond) sector is highly dependent on EU migrant labour (House of Lords 2017). Moreover, within this labour force there is ‘no easy distinction... between skilled and unskilled labour (House of Lords 2017, para. 259),’ strongly suggestive of how loss of such hard to categorise workers may not be easily replaced.

UK agriculture’s high reliance on EU migrant labour is especially expressed by horticulture’s 80,000 seasonal workforce, where 90–98 per cent presently come from the rest of the EU, especially the eastern countries (House of Lords 2017, FLEX 2018). Moreover, it is not just peak demands of seasonal employment that rely on EU migrants. It is important to distinguish here between migrants who respond to the high labour demands of planting, harvesting, and Christmas sales, and those who are more permanently employed. Some 60 per cent of workers employed to produce poultry meat, 50 per cent of egg-packers, and 40 per cent of egg farm workers are from outside the UK, 20 per cent of pig farms employ migrant labour, and 11 per cent of UK dairy

processing workers are migrants (House of Lords 2017). Very many of these people are long-established in the UK. Broadening the perspective still further, 48 per cent of newly registered vets in the UK in 2016 qualified elsewhere in the EU or European Economic Area (House of Lords 2017).

That Brexit is already very active in the rural UK (Maye *et al.* 2018) is very clear from consequences stemming from a lack of this agri-food migrant labour, especially seasonal workers. As the Chair of the British Soft Fruits Industry put it in 2017: 'If we do not have the pickers, we do not have a soft fruit industry' (quoted in Butler 2017, np). This fear was soon being realised. The NFU's website features the challenge of recruiting labour prominently (www.nfuonline.com) and their survey of UK horticulture in 2017 found over 4,000 (12.5 per cent) unfilled labour vacancies (rising to 29 per cent for the September harvest) (Carrington 2018). This expressed, in part, a decline in the proportion of international workers returning for the harvest from 41 per cent in 2016 to 29 per cent in 2017, a trend that mirrored the large overall decline in EU migration to the UK since 2016 (Vargas-Silva and Fernández-Reino 2019). Reasons given for this decline were a rise in xenophobia and racism, the weak Pound and a general sense of uncertain employment futures (Carrington 2018), all relatable to the wider Brexit atmosphere explored in the next two sections.

A first consequence of this employment shortage situation, which has been repeated and worsened since 2017, was a shift by farmers to production overseas (Butler 2017, O'Carroll 2018a), a trend which, if accelerated, would have major implications for UK horticulture (and other farm sectors). Second, and still more immediately, the press soon picked up on foods such as strawberries or apples being left to rot in the fields (Carrington 2018, Ennals 2019). Third, and in part reflecting how just 0.06 per cent of the seasonal workers covered in the NFU survey were UK nationals (Carrington 2018), there grew a call, articulated by the government in their 'Health and Harmony' consultation paper, 'to help attract more of our graduates and domestic workforce into this vibrant industry' (Defra 2018, 10). How immediately realistic this prospect is can be doubted, given the physical and other challenges of much of the work which is, nonetheless, often paid only minimum wage plus bonuses (Abboud 2019).

In response to these labour concerns, the UK government in July 2019 launched a two-year pilot scheme involving issuing 2,500 visas to non-EU nationals, although it was argued that at least 10,000 are needed (O'Carroll 2018b). If deemed to be successful, this scheme might revisit the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS) scrapped in 2013 after EU expansion. This would reinforce the point noted earlier that international (labour) migration to the UK is being sharpened towards guest-worker style schemes. These assume the overwhelming predominance of 'single, temporary workers without family members (Kilkey 2017, 800),' thereby reinforcing the position of seasonal workers as compared with more permanent labour migrants. This

is in stark contrast to rights and practices under the existing EFM, which ‘does not reduce migrants to individual units of labour’ (Kilkey 2017, 798). Instead, it allows family migration/reunion and the sense of home place-making discussed in the next section. SAWS-type schemes have also attracted specific criticisms (FLEX 2018), not least in terms of how they can restrict workers’ ability to escape abusive relationships through being so strongly tied to a specific employer.

Futures: settlement undermined?

The anticipated and ongoing major shifts in state support for agriculture and migrant labour practices clearly have significant implications for UK rural futures. The details are hard to pin down yet, and predictions may be unwise because Brexit is still very much an emerging experience. However, a wider sense of futures is engaged in this section and the next in respect of Brexit’s potential impact on the everyday cultural and socio-political experience and place of the twenty-first century UK rural. This is examined in this section through noting Brexit-related changes in the everyday lives of international labour migrants in rural places. The significance of such changes will be broadened in the next section and shown as both congruent with and feeding into a ‘revanchist rural.’

Debates and news coverage of Brexit to date have seen a notable ‘absence of migrant workers’ voices (Maye *et al.* 2018, 283).’ This reflects a broader lack of recognition of such people’s place in today’s UK rural (Green *et al.* 2009). Although many migrant workers have settled in rural locations, their presence within the diversity of people brought together within the broader academic concept of counterurbanisation, for example, has still to be fully recognised (Halfacree 2008). Consequently, it pays here to move away from emphasising the ‘temporariness’ within the rural UK of many of these people – ‘seasonal workers’ – and instead to note settlement processes and often broader family projects. All migrant workers into rural areas now comprise a key component of the twenty-first century UK countryside. In some locations they are critical to reversing still-dominant out-migration and population decline, such as in parts of rural Scotland (Green *et al.* 2009, Scott and Brindley 2012). This makes international labour migrants’ rural occurrence, relatively at least, still more significant than their more fully recognised urban presence.

In their study of central and eastern European labour migrants resident in rural Scotland, Flynn, and Kay (2017) emphasised how such people, just as much as the non-migrant population, need material and emotional security for the playing out of ‘a present and future life to be imagined in rural Scotland’ (p.56). Overwhelmingly, while employment reasons explain their arrival in these remote places, the importance of ‘settlement’ soon emerges and develops within their life course (also Lumsden *et al.* 2019 on labour migrants in Boston, England). This broader appreciation is helped

conceptually by taking a more temporal or event perspective on migration, rather than just seeing it as snapshot in time (Halfacree and Rivera 2012).

Within this post-relocation life course evolution, Flynn and Kay (2017) went on to note how migrants' development of an emplaced emotional security drew relationally (also Botterill 2018) from numerous sources. These ranged from the destination's recognised scenic beauty to the building of social connections in what was perceived as a safe, quiet, friendly context. Settlement ultimately encompasses the whole 'lived experience.' And an official part of this experience is a legal 'right to remain,' which has been thrown into doubt by the Brexit issue.

Research by both Botterill (2018) on Poles in Scotland and MacKrell and Pemberton (2018) on eastern Europeans in rural England are among other studies that reinforce Flynn and Kay's (2017) findings. For example, challenging any overly unique Anglo-centric cultural affiliation to the concept, MacKrell and Pemberton (2018) argued for an often strong fit to be recognised between the migrants and versions of a 'rural idyll.' This is expressed through newcomers' rural settlement being reinforced and 'normalised' (p. 55) by them exhibiting characteristics which conform to noted aspects of the idyllic representation (Bunce 2003, Halfacree 1993). These include a generally strong work ethic and record of getting jobs done, a large degree of self-sufficiency, relatively high 'community' involvement, and their whiteness of skin. However, following the 2016 Brexit vote, change was noted in this settlement fit. Migrants were feeling less comfortable, even 're-assessing their options... [on] whether to stay in the English countryside or to leave England' (MacKrell and Pemberton 2018, 56; also Lumsden *et al.* 2019). Or, if not 'going home,' Botterill (2018, 546) showed how Poles' feeling of rejection and alienation post-referendum often resulted in withdrawal 'from cosmopolitan modes of belonging towards the familiar, comforting national frames of belonging.'

These changing migrant experiences in respect of belonging suggest that, irrespective of what arrangements are made to meet rural labour requirements after Brexit, those providing this labour may struggle to settle. This is clearly likely to push rural migrant experiences and lives towards the 'anywhereness' of 'simply' being an inherently fluid and transient atomised individual and away from the 'somewhereness' of a more entangled, emplaced, and caught-up social person (Goodhart 2017). Such existential change has clear implications not only for the migrants but also for the whole socio-cultural and experiential character of UK rural places. It is likely to reinforce a highly divisive sense of 'us' (established population) versus 'them' (labour migrants). Thus, Boston in England, a noted location for both European labour migrants (Scott and Brindley 2012) and the strongest pro-Brexit vote (76 per cent leave; BBC 2016), has also witnessed migrants' post-referendum withdrawal from community and public spaces and a retreat into the private space of the home (Lumsden *et al.* 2019). Thoughts of return migration are also developing, expressed powerfully by this migrant:

I was getting used to local life, people, rules making it more my home. Since the referendum I don't feel this can be my home ever. I wasn't given the right to decide about my future here, while the others did. I cannot plan my future in this uncertainty. I can't see my future here.

(Migrants' Rights Network 2017: 7)

Brexit, in short, thus promotes the rural UK as *not* a place for international labour migrant settlement. Instead, it promotes the kind of rural place introduced next.

Futures: a revanchist rural?

Reinforcing and developing divisions between settled populations and migrants is not just of immediate concern for the lives of both groups in the rural UK today but also serves to undermine other positive labour and community trends that have been emerging in part through migrant settlement. For example, Flynn and Kay (2017, 58) observed how EU8 migrants were taking up 'devalued work,' while Green *et al.* (2009) earlier noted an increase in migrant workers to rural England in areas such as health, hotels, and catering. In other words, rural labour migrants are not only employed in agriculture but have begun to build links with and may ultimately underpin other key elements of twenty-first century UK rural economy and society, not least related to hospitality and caring. While such employees could also be 'reduced' to contracted 'anywhere,' labour migrants post-Brexit, a greater sense of their achieving settlement would surely reinforce and add value to their inherently social and emplaced activities.

The rural UK as a place for overseas labour migrants to regard more as an 'anywhere,' evaluated purely on its ability to provide waged work, rather than as a 'somewhere' suitable for more permanent settlement does little to promote it as a space of diversity and difference. Instead, it links to noted concerns within the broader academic literature of the rural evolving into a selective space of increasing socio-economic homogeneity (Woods 2011). This is often expressed via rural population turnover, whereby – crudely speaking – in-migrating middle-class counterurbanisers replace ever-declining numbers of out-migrating working class 'locals' (Woods 2011). However, the present chapter's perspective cuts across this class emphasis by drawing attention to the differing lives of settled residents and migrants, suggesting rural selectivity and exclusivity is also being potentially reinforced in population terms by Brexit-related overseas labour in-migration changes.

Moreover, enhanced rural selectivity and exclusivity, especially in how the rural is represented (Halfacree 1993), is arguably also a more central feature of the whole Brexit experience. This can be approached through consideration of the electoral geography of the Brexit vote. Although by no means unanimous or conclusive – very many rural UK people voted remain and are

very supportive of the EU – this vote begins to suggest the rural in certain configurations as a key pro-Brexit player.

The Brexit referendum saw two cross-cutting voting patterns stand out (Hennig 2017). First, there was clearly a ‘regional’ distinction, with London and many of its surrounding areas, Northern Ireland and Scotland favouring remain. Second, there was a rural-urban contrast, albeit inconsistent, with the Brexit vote favouring more rural areas. Analysis of this geography soon recognised a complex range of divisions within both the pro-EU and, most especially, the pro-Brexit vote. An urban-rural distinction was again drawn out by numerous commentators, paralleling analysis of the equally surprising pro-Trump 2016 US presidential vote (Beckett 2016, Halfacree 2018; Jennings and Stoker 2018). For example, while a leave vote was quickly ‘associated with the politics of the urban [rustbelt] “left behinds”’ (Boyle *et al.* 2018, 101), it was particularly strong in many affluent rural areas. An urban-rural angle was also apparent in Burn-Murdoch’s (2017) ‘six tribes of Brexit.’ All three of his ‘remainer’ groups were largely urban. Of the three ‘leaver’ groups, however, while young, anti-establishment ‘working-class leavers’ were urban, both lower education ‘moderate leavers’ and anti-immigrant, older, and well-off ‘British values leavers’ had a strong rural edge. Rural voters, it might thus be observed, had electorally outwitted the urban ‘elite’ with Brexit. Certainly, cultural factors, as much as economic and political concerns, all rooted in place, together mapped Brexit geographies (Bailey and Budd 2019, Clarke *et al.* 2017).

To begin to understand the rural-Brexit affiliation, one can first note the economic hopes of groups such as farmers and fishers for a more prosperous post-Brexit future, notwithstanding the post-CAP uncertainties for the former noted earlier. However, while most people in these ‘traditional rural’ groups supposedly did vote to leave (Clarke 2017, Wollaston 2018), their relatively small numbers alone do not explain adequately the rural-Brexit link. Instead, the voting of the rural population more generally must be considered, including people who have moved into rural areas. Indeed, this latter group is held responsible by geographer Danny Dorling for Wales voting overall to leave the EU, expressed specifically in terms of pro-Brexit votes by English migrants to rural and small town Wales (Perraudin 2019).

To understand more of the rural-Brexit link it helps to note how the world seemingly desired by much pro-Brexit discourse has a strong conservative to reactionary imagination that chimes strongly with similarly backward-looking rural representations. Regarding the former, Dorling and Tomlinson (2019) firmly and thoroughly link the pro-Brexit vote to the last gasps of colonial attitudes and imperial nostalgia. Similarly, Boyle *et al.* (2018, 102) were suspicious that ‘imperial mentalities lurk deep in the dark recesses of the British mind’ and that this came through in Brexiteers’ invocation of a supposed Second World War (1939–1945) spirit, the ‘Little England(er)’ being able to survive alone in a hostile Europe (*sic.*). Likewise, Bailey and Budd (2019, 169)

argued that ‘Brexit appears to have created a nostalgia for an imagined imperium that never existed.’ Crucially, these ‘end of Empire’ (Dorling and Tomlinson 2019) perceptions underpinning the Brexit vote can also invoke reference and connection to an equally ‘besieged rural,’ as articulated in long-noted powerful cultural constructs such as Wright’s (1985) ‘Deep England.’ In other words, overall there was some specific rural ‘emplacement’ of nostalgic pro-Brexit sympathies and hopes for the future, albeit within a rural also represented as a very conservative and besieged spatiality. Or, adapting slightly Calhoun’s (2016, 56) words, voters ‘went to sleep in Great Britain and woke up in Little [rural] England.’

Projecting a rural nostalgia as a future hope did not just sit passively in the cultural political imagination but emerged more actively via the pro-Brexit vote as ‘revenge’ by a group seeing themselves as (geographically) marginalised by urban elites, especially from London (Calhoun 2016). It forms part of what Rodríguez-Pose (2018) more widely recognised as ‘[t]he revenge of places that don’t matter’ (also Halfacree 2018, Jennings and Stoker 2018). For example, the millennial discourse associated with the Countryside Alliance, a rural pressure group, of the need to ‘listen to the countryside,’ appeared reinvigorated after its earlier failure to prevent the outlawing of hunting with hounds (Woods 2005). Furthermore, and critically, this time many urban residents seemingly bought into a discourse favouring a quasi-Countryside Alliance UK over a more cosmopolitan European Union component state.

The net result of these cultural trends and the changing settlement experiences of international labour migrants noted in the previous sections mirrors for the rural UK a political process long-noted for many cities across the global north. Specifically, there seem to be parallels between the UK’s pro-Brexit rural and the ‘revanchist city’ (Smith 1996). In short, a ‘revanchist rural’ has emerged.

The revanchist city expresses ‘a broad, vengeful right-wing reaction against both... “liberalism”... and the predations of capital’ (Smith 1996, 43, my emphasis). In other words, it seeks not only to challenge efforts to make the city more inclusive and diverse but also takes issue with certain trends within capitalism’s engagement with the city. From the first perspective:

The revanchist city expresses a race/class/gender terror felt by middle- and ruling-class whites who are suddenly stuck in place by a ravaged property market, the threat and reality of unemployment, the decimation of social services, and the emergence of minority and immigrant groups, as well as women, as powerful urban actors.

(Smith 1996, 207)

From the second perspective, revanchism also takes issue with certain capitalist interests in the city, not least in terms of expressions ranging from extreme speculation to promotion of alternative economic actors.

For Smith (1996: 43–44), revanchism had both ‘overtaken gentrification as a script for the urban future’ but nonetheless kept ‘gentrification... an integral part of the revanchist city.’ In other words, upper middle class-based (re-) appropriation of the city remained the dominant trend but was not complacently simply ‘going on.’ Instead, it had also to engage critically with other urban experiences that could be seen as threatening to itself.

Such a tension over emerging futures is also arguably apparent for the UK rural and has been made more so via 2016’s pro-Brexit vote. A proposed ‘revanchist rural’ expresses a highly selective rural spatiality that is seeking ‘revenge’ on forces perceived as seeking to undermine its hegemony. Crucially, this expression, although helping to explain the rural-Brexit link introduced above, is not restricted to rural residents but is articulated, albeit again unevenly, across the pro-Brexit population. Just as urban revanchism goes beyond (urban) gentrification, so too does rural revanchism not just involve rural lives and experiences. Put differently, in contrast to rural narratives always being transformed and thereby reduced by the urban, making rural an increasingly residual category, within Brexit the rural revanchist discourse has come to exert influence on the urban.

Turning directly to the proposed revanchist rural, the liberal ‘terror’ (Smith 1996, 207) is here represented by a perception of metropolitan (urban) elites, immigrants, liberal reformers, and others – all, in a Brexit context, associated with the EU project – not so much directly challenging the UK rural as it exists ‘on the ground’ but as undermining its status as the ‘ideal type’ geography of how the UK supposedly used to be and, in utopian terms, could be again (post-Brexit). And, as with urban revanchism, some currents within capitalism are also not seen as helping. The EU economic system, in particular, it is suggested, is regarded as more aligned with the priorities and logics of a multi-national, even global, capitalism than with the nationally emplaced interests of the UK. Rural revanchism, in short, seeks to ‘take back control’ for the UK through resisting the forces of both liberal and neo-liberal ‘threat.’

Where now, post-Brexit rural UK?

Although Brexit at the time of writing still has to occur formally, a consistent message through this chapter has been that the UK’s imminent departure from the EU speaks of a considerable number of likely disruptions for its rural areas and people. These were introduced through four themes, each of which will now be briefly revisited.

First, loss of agricultural support through the Common Agricultural Policy will undoubtedly have a major impact on UK farming. This need not be ultimately negative, however, as it throws up the potential to make UK agriculture ‘greener,’ suggested by the government’s ‘Health and Harmony’ paper (Defra 2018). As Lawrence (2017, np, my emphasis) argues, ‘departure from

the EU represents both an existential risk to our food and farming system *and* a once-in-a-generation chance to reform it.' Nevertheless, while this potential may seem hopeful from a sustainability perspective, how change plays out in terms of farming incomes, marginal at best in some locations, and of the survival of the present farming diversity found across the UK raises strong concerns. And what is the future more generally for UK rural employment if other forms of economic support now obtained from the EU are also not (fully) replaced (Shucksmith 2019)?

From the second theme, international seasonal and migrant labour, the uncertain 'replacement' of present-day largely eastern Europeans has severe implications not only for the economic survival of many agricultural enterprises but also for the diversity of the UK rural population. More than this, however, and moving into the third theme of migrants' everyday rural experiences, any switch to migration for specific work demands only, as in a new SAWS scheme, has the potential to reinforce rural population instability through undermining settlement and inter-personal and place connections. This will not meet rising demands for workers in the growing rural hospitality industry and in healthcare, especially noteworthy given rural population ageing (Milbourne and Doheny 2012). Need for such workers seems poorly acknowledged now, as they are a group that often stays 'under the radar' of popular consciousness, but clearly requires urgent post-Brexit consideration.

The fourth theme built on the undermining of migrant workers' settlement in the rural UK to suggest that such lack of place within the country, except as passing-through transient workers, is in line with the Brexit discourse's reinvigoration of a reactionary rural imaginary. This representation has become a quasi-utopian statement in some Brexiteers' hoped for 'new' UK. While certainly taken up by all rural residents and, indeed, is to be associated as much with urban residents as rural, as a representation little attuned to the late twentieth century, let alone the twenty-first century, it articulates a rural revanchism rooted in political currents increasingly marginalised in the cosmopolitan world of the European Union. Yet, now having been taken up not just by conservative rural voters in 2016 but more generally within pro-Brexit discourse, it is a rural imaginary reinvigorated, with clear negative implications for those striving to recognise and make the rural UK a more diverse and inclusive place.

To end on two positive observations. First, Brexit has clearly drawn more than just academic attention to the neglected place and significance of international labour migrants, in particular, in the rural UK and their complex entanglements with farming systems and rural places. International labour migration can certainly no longer be seen as something largely irrelevant to the rural. Second, just as the revanchist city is never completely 'closed,' so will any UK 'revanchist rural' still have to deal with various presences, practices, and flows implicating rural places and people who challenge its representation in diverse ways. Struggles from within economy, society, culture, and/or

politics will all feature prominently in the production of a post-Brexit rural UK that is never completely preordained. Letting in enough pickers to keep UK horticulture going will only be the start...

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