BREXIT: THE HYPERGLOBALIST AND AUTHORITARIAN POPULIST MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE

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Abstract: the article explains the economic motives behind Brexit and an alliance of hyperglobalism and authoritarian populism. Major factors that influenced the Leave vote in the Brexit referendum in 2016 were nativist fears of migrants and perceptions of a loss of sovereignty through EU membership. Although these themes were greatly trumpeted and effective in mobilising the Leave vote the rationale of a section of the economic and political elite was hyperglobalism. Hyperglobalism is a desire to see the UK strengthen its position in what Wallerstein describes as the core of economic hegemons and compete more effectively with rising economies through a 'race to the bottom', leaving the EU' social model protections and becoming more competitive. Using Polanyian influenced analysis the article argues Brexit was a deceptive double-movement, anxieties and insecurities created by neoliberalism and austerity were articulated into nativism and narrow and nostalgic identity frames, these authoritarian populist sentiments found themselves in a marriage of convenience with hyperglobalism. Despite the contradictions of this union, Brexit was achieved, but the inherent contradictions in the alliance and the myth of free market utopianism may ultimately lead to the unravelling of Brexit.

Keywords: Authoritarian Populism – Brexit – Double-Movement – European Union – Hyperglobalism – Polanyi

Introduction

Through Brexit, British society has recalibrated itself in a paridigm shift of historic proportions that could fundamentally reshape the socio-economic, political and economic character of Britain. Athought it has received relatively little attention a key dynamic in this paradigm shift is an affiliation with a more laissez-faire and hyperglobalist form of capitalism that is aligned with forms of authoritarian populist nationalism. This outlook can be termed Brexit nationalism, nothing less than a national rebirth centred on

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political, economic and cultural sovereignty and chauvinism. As will be made evident in the text the former Prime Minister Boris Johnson (2019 – 2022) was to play a prominant role in shaping and enabling this transition, his departure from office and the inherent contradictions of Brexit Nationalism, the fusion of hyperglobalism and authoritarian populism, may ultimately mean this reorientation has a short time span. Using Polanyian analysis the article argues there is a chance the British public will realize that Brexit was a misguided folly and shape a new political vision that promotes a new socio-economic framework that turns its back on the dominant market fundamentalism of recent decades and encourages a more deliberative approach to decision making. This new vision of Britain could have a longer lasting legacy than Brexit.

The article provides the historical and sociological context to Brexit and the outcome of the referendum and then proceeds to describe the premierships of Theresa May and Boris Johnson and how and why Johnson pivoted towards a sharper hyperglobalist agenda which may ultimately lead to the fragmention of Brexit Nationalism through a combination of bad planning and basic inconsistencies.

The Historic Context

Although Winston Churchill is sometimes described as the Father of Europe because of his championing of a United Europe, Churchill's conception of British international relations was instrumental in keeping Britain out of European integration as stewarded by Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman. Churchills vision[1] of «three majestic circles» defined Britain's approach to the world: the Commonwealth, the special relationship with America, and Europe, would be the three spheres through which British diplomacy would work. This approach which was embraced by both Labour and Conservative governments in the post-war, indicates a sense of exceptionalism, a belief that Britain still had a global role.

However, Britain's humiliation in the Suez crisis in 1956 where it failed to impose its imperial will on Egypt and reclaim control of the Suez canal and was forced to withdraw its forces of occupation because the USA refused to lend support to its ally prompted a fundamental rethink as to how Britain should conduct itself in world affairs. President Kennedy persuaded Prime Minister Macmillan that the panacea to Britain's problems was to join the European Economic Community (EEC) that was a product of the 1957 Treaty of Rome. (Morphet, 2017). The president of France General Charles De Gaulle was to twice veto Britain's applications (in 1961 and 1967), but in 1973 under the Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath Britain was to secure entry to the EEC. An early indicator of Britain's troubled relationship with Europe and why it was coined the «awkward

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[1] Cf. W. Churchill, 1948.

member»[2], came with Prime Minister Harold Wilson's decision to call a referendum on British membership of the EEC in 1975. The referendum allowed Wilson to put to bed the divisions within the Labour Party between Europhiles and Leftist Eurosceptics, who largely saw the EEC as an attempt to bolster capitalism. In the 1975 referendum 67 percent decided to remain, helped in part by the consensus of support from party leaders and the general support of the media, features missing from the 2016 referendum.

Tensions again arose as Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1979 – 1990) took umbrage with the direction of what was now called the European Community. Thatcher derided the Social Chapter championed by European Commission President Jacques Delors as «utopianism», the new social rights were disparaged as «socialism through the backdoor»[3]. Although a keen supporter of the free market principles of the Single Market Thatcher was horrified, as was evident in the famous Bruges speech in 1988, at the perceived notion of a European super state. Thatcher[4] feared growing talk and support for federalism and a single currency could presage this development. Thatcher's stance on Europe and her increasingly presidential style, that did not sit well with British parliamentary traditions, led to a large section of her own party turning on her and ejecting her.

Thatcher's successor was John Major (1990 – 1997) and his tenure of office was to be riven with sharp divisions on Europe. As Europe moved towards greater integration the Conservative Party became bitterly divided over Europe[5]. Conservative MPs, many of them supporters of Thatcher, were deeply concerned by the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, with its pledges on political, monetary and economic union and transition into the European Union. These tensions were compounded by Black Wednesday when in September 1992, Britain was forced to withdrew the pound sterling from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism and hence monetary union. Britain outside of the future Eurozone club appeared to be drifting towards the fringes of Europe.

Tony Blair (1997 – 2007) and Gordon Brown (2007 – 2010) were able through their Labour administrations to give Britain a more pro-European stance and demonstrated this by opting into the Social Chapter, but despite this greater enthusiam they opted to stay outside of the Eurozone. Although the Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron marketed himself as a consensual «One Nation» leader his party continued to be deeply divided on Europe, under his predecessors William Hague (1997 – 2001), Ian Duncan Smith (2001 to 2003) and Michael Howard (2003 to 2005) there had been a steady drift towards Euroscepticism and nativist sentiments which increasingly became authoritarian populist in tone[6]. To placate and resolve these internal tensions and stem the flow of votes to UKIP who were bleeding Conservative votes with their pledge to leave the EU,

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[2] Cf. S. George, 1998.
[3] Cf. O. Daddow *et al*, 2019.
[4] Cf. M. Thatcher, 1988.
[5] Cf. S. Wall, 2008.
[6] Cf. Bale, 2016.

Cameron in 2013 promised to stage a referendum on Britain's membership of the EU, promising a referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union if he won the 2015 election. Some observers feel that in this gesture, he had taken note of Harold Wilson's stratagem of managing to bring a semblance of unity to his party by promising a referendum on Europe. It was probably an important factor in securing the first Conservative majority government in twenty-three years in 2015.

Following the election victory Cameron was compelled to hold a referendum, he opted to do so early in 2016. A central theme promoted by Leavers like Michael Gove, a member of Cameron's cabinet and a key strategist for the Leave campaign, was centred on sovereignty, to «take back control», to be liberated from the stifling bureaucracy of Brussels. Brexit was billed as part of a renaissance of Britain, an act that would restore the countries greatness. Nativism also played a prominant role[7].

The nativist dimension can be viewed as protectionist in the sense of stemming freedom of movement of people across the EU and its perceived potential to deflate wages and the negotiating demands of workers, although the reality is such impacts have tended to be exaggerated. Brexit can thus be viewed as a protectionist effort to protect living standards and in a Polanyian sense an attempt to curb the free-market wage mechanism by restricting labour supply[8]. Despite the protectionist rationale to support Brexit the rhetoric around this issue was also framed through cultural anxieties.

A Vote Leave poster featured a passport depicted as an open door with a trail of footprints making their way in a trail into the passport, alongside the slogan «Turkey (population 76 million) is joining the EU. Vote Leave, take back control». Turkey being a Muslim and non-European country stirred long standing and deep-seated fears of the orient with insinuations that these perceived 'outsiders' might be set to invade Britain which could be conceived as weak and defenceless as symbolised with the open door. The implied wave of migrants would seize British rights as was implied with the image of a passport. The nativism and orientalism of this speech act is self evident. «Orientalism» exaggerates and distorts the differences of Eastern peoples and cultures as compared to that of Europe. It perceives the East as backward, uncivilized, and dangerous[9]. Such tropes were to play a prominent role in the referendum campaign on a number of occasions. Boris Johnson, and Michael Gove, signed a joint letter to Cameron on June 16, 2016, calling on him to veto Turkish accession to the EU. The notion that Turkey was about to imminently join the EU was of course highly implausible.

The increasingly wild and inaccurate claims were not only authoritarian populist in tone but redolent of post-truth politics a «reliance on assertions that feel true but have no basis in fact»[10]. Alarmingly frontline politicians like Gove and Johnson were highly enthusiastic in mobilising populist sentiments through half-truths, nativism and

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[7] Cf. A. Ryder, 2020.
[8] Cf. J. Hopkin, 2017.
[9] Cf. E. Said, 1978.
[10] Economist, 2016.

xenophobia, moving into a style of rhetoric and political discourse that had hitherto been associated with radical right figures and parties like Nigel Farage and the UK Independence Party (UKIP).

The result of the referendum was 52 to 48 percent in favour of leaving, England and Wales were in favour of leaving but Scotland, Northern Ireland and London were in favour of remaining. How should the result be interpreted? It can be said in light of the historical overview presented in this paper that decades of irrational and polarised political debate and media reporting on Europe had taken its toll creating a deeply ingrained strand of Euroscepticism in a section of the public. Perhaps from a historical overview it is evident Britain had failed to exorcise a sense of exceptionalism, a hankering for Britain to again have a significant role in world affairs and to be a great power. This nostalgia for past greatness needs a cultural explanation and other underlying causes for the Leave vote warrant a socio-economic explanation.

A Sociological Explanation of Brexit

Favell[11] is correct to argue that Brexit is a multi-layered and multidimensional phenomenon, at the intersection of many social, political and cultural forces and processes and hence not easy to define and dissect. However, a number of reasonably clear sociological conclusions can be drawn.

The Leave vote had strong class dynamics. The Leave vote comprised: 41 percent of AB votes cast; 48 percent of C1 votes; 62 percent of C2 votes, these categories can be classed as (middle and lower middle class). However, 64 per cent of DE, working class voters opted for Leave[12]. According to Butcher 60 percent of unemployed peoples' votes cast, 63 percent of those of social renters and 70 percent of those from people defined as without qualifications opted for Leave[13]. The rump of the Leave vote can be classed as a cross-coalition of disgruntled working and lower middle class votes (the «squeezed middle», a middle class that feels precarious and insecure) susceptible to nativist arguments, whose anger had been inflamed by the austerity politics of Cameron's government which in the wake of the global financial crisis saw savage cuts to public spending and Britain entering a period of economic malaise. Corresponding with class the less educated were more likely to vote Leave. Age was another important factor, with

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[11] A. Favell, 2017, 118.

[12] Cf. J. Butcher, 2019

[13] The categories referred to are based on the National Readership Survey's system of categorising social class. This divides the population into 6 categories, A B C1 C2 D and E, the first 3 taken to be 'middle class' and above, and the latter 3 'working class'. The short definitions are: A -Higher managerial, administrative and professional; B – Intermediate managerial, administrative and professional; C1 – Supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative and professional; C2 – Skilled manual workers; D – Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers; E – State pensioners, casual and lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only.

approximately 60 percent of the over fifties voting leave in contrast to 70 percent of 18 – 24 years olds opting for remain. These older voters «carriers of cultural legacy» can be described as a throwback to a more monocultural Britain, a Britain imbued with a sense of exceptionalism and hostile to the European project[14].

Globalisation was also an important factor in the Leave vote. De-indistrialisation and economic hardship had fragmented working class identities and solidarities, making them susceptible to nativist political arguments[15]. Also the rapid change to communities and culture brought about by globalisation, migration and cultural change was greatly disorientating to some traditional white communities and older voters. Brexit was seen by some as a tool that could stem this cultural tide of change. It is interesting to note 72 percent of those who see themselves as English voted Leave compared with 43 percent of those who frame their primary identity as being British. Thus, Brexit can be interpreted as an assertion of English monoculturalism, however we should note that a slight majority of Welsh voters supported Brexit too, forms of monoculturalism, and de-industrialisation may have had a part to play here. Research demonstrates that those who perceive of themselves as English are more likely to be Eurosceptic[16]. In contrast Britishness is more at ease with multicultural patriotism and progressiveness[17]. Some of these tensions between reactive interpretations of identity and more fluid and adaptable notions of identity, sometimes termed as culture war is evident in the Brexit vote. Those with more conservative and rigid views on social issues were more likely to vote for Brexit, as is evident from the table below:

Table 1 - Public Views on Societal Issues (How the UK voted on Thursday and Why

How did the people who thought the following were a force for ill vote in the referendum in 2016	*How did the people who thought the following were a force for good vote in the referendum in 2016*
Multiculturalism - 81 percent Leave **Feminism** – 78 percent Leave **Immigration** - 80 percent Leave	**Multiculturalism** - 71 percent remain **Feminism** - 62 percent remain **Immigration** - 79 percent remain

Source: Ashcroft Polling 2016

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[14] Cf. Boyle, 2017.

[15] Cf. S. Winlow *et al*, 2016.

[16] Cf. Goodhart, Kaufmann, 2016.

[17] Cf. J. Denham, M. Kenny, 2016.

Leavers such as Boris Johnson were able to effectively manipulate these cultural and socio-economic triggers through speech acts that securitised sensitive issues around identity and migration and elites, in an act of political mobiliation which contained all the hallmarks of populism in terms of the selected triggers and rhetoric[18]. The extent of the seismic shift in British politics was evident in the comments of Craig Oliver, a close aide to Cameron, where he concluded that Gove and Johnson were setting out an alternative government «The words attempted coup spring to my mind. They seem strange on my lips as I later test them out on other people»[19]. Oliver[20] also concluded «What kind of country do we live in? This has gone way beyond winning and losing on the EU – it feels like a battle of Britain». Oliver detected an important sea change in British politics where elements of the Conservative Party morphed into authoritarian populism and undermined traditions of British representative democracy and tradition that was to also signal fundamental socio-economic change. As will be evident in the next section the huge irony was that Brexit was actually enabling and facilitating forces that had the propensity to worsen the predicament of those who supported it from the working and middle classes.

Hyperblobalism

Although the economic rationale behind Brexit was rarely discussed in the referendum campaign and certainly did not receive equal attention to sovereignty and migration it was a key strand of thought for the elite actors that orchestrated Leave. The economic agenda can be described as hyperglobalist.

Hypergobalism is in effect a major re-evaluation of Britain's economic model in a rapidly changing globalised world. Rather than seeking to regulate or control the excesses of globalisation hyperglobalists contend that the role of government should be to control inflation and the deficit and resist excessive interference in the market. It can be seen as an attempt to return to an age when free market principles were at their zenith in the nineteenth century when the economic philosophy of Malthuss and Ricardo persuaded decision makers that markets should largely be left to their own devices and be self regulating, a notion that could be described as economic Darwinism[21]. According to Rodrik[22] a «trilemma» exists with hyperglobalism where with reference to national sovereignty, democracy, and globalization, only two of these policy goals or forms of governance can be simultaneously achieved to the full extent, but not all three. Hyperblogalism in the modern world has led to national governments ceding control of

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[18] Cf. Inglehart, Norris, 2016.
[19] Cf. C. Oliver, 2016, 264.
[20] Ivi, 332.
[21] Cf. S. Cremaschi, M. Dascal, 1996.
[22] Cf. D. Rodrik, 2011.

financial flows to corporations and a weakening of institutions and democratic control of the economy. Democracy became the servant of the economy rather than the other way around. The Hungarian thinker Karl Polanyi[23] was to deride the notion of the power and efficiency of unregulated markets as a fallacy argung that unregulated markets led to socio-economic and political dysfunction and invariably prompted a reflex, a double-movement of reform and regulation that sought to tame the excesses of the market.

The disasters wrought by unregulated markets was most notably illustrated in the 1929 Wall Street Crash that nurtured profound global poverty and enabled the rise of Nazi Germany. This cataclysmic moment prompted efforts to forge a more just and regulated global economic system through the Bretton Woods agreement of 1944 that sought to bring some stability to currencies and trade and the ascendancy of Keynesian economics as exemplified by intervention, restribution and welfarism. Ruggie[24] described it as «embedded liberalism», a system which tamed market excesses and promoted more equitable social policy. The French economist Jean Fourastié[25] called this time «Les trente glorieuses» the glorious thirty, a gilded age where from 1945 to 1975 living standards rose dramatically. However, inflation caused by the Vietnam war and the rise in oil prices by OPEC in 1973 fragmented the consensus achieved at Bretton Woods and led to the neoliberal turn where economists like Hayek and Friedman encouraged more laissez-faire economic approaches and led to increasing de-regulation, privatisation, lower taxes for elites and cuts in welfare expenditure[26]. Despite the failure of unregulated markets again becoming apparent in the 2008 global financial crisis and Eurozone crisis of 2012, the supremacy of unfettered markets was not seriously challenged, in fact political actors became emboldened in their advocacy of free market thinking, hence the embrace by some sections of the radical right of hyperglobalism.

One of the earliest manifestations of this hyperglobalist turn was the Tea Party in the USA which emerged as a protest to the budgetary stimulus presidents Bush/Obama devised in response to the financial crisis. The Tea Party represented a populist shift within the Republican Party invoking the language and rhetoric of anger directed at vested interests framed generally as a liberal elite but ironically aligning itself with the interests and agendas of economic elites seeking a freerer market[27]. The Tea Party favoured a strongly hyperglobalist deregulatory frame based around an insular and restrictive form of identity that was repulsed by feminism and LGBTQI identities and indeed cultural adaptation that threatened rigid conservative traditionalism. Here we see the first flower of this contradictory union of hyperglobalism with narrow conceptions of nationalism and identity. It was a movement that blossomed into and created the foundation for Trumpism, which contained many of the ideological tenets of the Tea

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[23] K. Polany, 1944.
[24] Cf. J.G. Ruggie, 1992.
[25] Cf. J. Fourastié, 1979.
[26] Cf. R.W. Garrison, 2007.
[27] Cf. D. Dietrich, 2014.

Party, a highly agonistic and polarising period in US political history, where as with Brexit nativism, culture war and attacks on distant liberal elites provided cover for an economic agenda that actually favoured powerful elites[28].

The same processes were at work in the Conservative Party and the Brexit phenomenon can be interpreted as the «Tea Partyisation» of British conservatism. During the early years of Cameron's premiership a group of rising stars within the Conservative Party published the book «Britannia Unchained» that argued that Britain «rewards laziness», that British workers were «the worst idlers in the world», and that «too many people in Britain prefer a lie-in to hard work»[29]. The book also declared «If we are to take advantage of these opportunities, we must get on the side of the responsible, the hardworking and the brave…We must stop bailing out the reckless, avoiding all risk and rewarding laziness». This pathologising of the poor was the excuse for their aspiration of a low welfare public spending state, with minimalist state intervention and low taxes. The radical hyperglobalist Conservatives who contributed to the book went on to hold important cabinet positions under Boris Johnson: Dominic Raab (Foreign Secretary), Priti Patel (Home Secretary) Lizz Truss (Secretary of State for International Trade) and Kwasi Kwarteng (Business Secretary). During this period Boris Johnson was not part of the hyperglobalist cabal within the Conservative Party, at that time he projected himself as a moderate and inclusive One Nation Conservative. Johnson's attachment to hyperglobalism only became apparent around the time of the referendum.

Brexit hyperglobalism believed the EU to be a Franco-German and now increasingly German dominated project to create a European federal state with excessive regulation and taxation. For the hyperglobalists the panacea was to be found in reclaiming British sovereignty and enabling a more neoliberal approach with new trading partnerships with North America and Asia. This ambition revealed a sense of deep nostalgia for Britain's past where it had become through free trade, innovation and a pioneering spirit a global superpower[30]. The Brexit agenda also hinted at a more recent sense of nostalgia with Thatcher's former Chancellor of the Exchequer, Nigel Lawson[31], proclaiming Brexit presented an opportunity to complete the «Thatcher revolution». Using Wallerstein's[32] World System Theory Brexit can be seen as an attempt by Britain to bolster its place within the economic core by moving away from the social protections of the EU and becoming more competitive and able to compete in a 'race to the bottom' with emerging and rising low tax/low regulation economies at the periphery. This had been the economic zeitgeist in force in the nineteenth century, the previous highpoint of liberal free trade economics, it had created a powerful economic elite, but also huge poverty and inhumanity as captured in the novels of Charles Dickens.

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[28] Cf. G. Kabaservice, 2020
[29] Cf. K. Kwarteng *et al*, 2012.
[30] Cf. D. Baker *et al*, 2002.
[31] Cf. N. Lawson, 2016.
[32] Cf. I. Wallerstein, 2011.

The Leave campaign was financially oiled by rich philanthropists like Aaron Banks and other establishment figures such as media barons, editors and hedge fund managers. United in a shared vision of Britain as a low tax, low regulation – «Singapore on stilts» and cast adrift from Europe[33]. With the EU starting to crack down on tax havens was this part of the rationale for some sections of the financial elite supporting Brexit?[34]. One of the most prominent broadsheet supporters of Brexit the Telegraph (2017) exclaimed, «the ultimate goal of this whole process should be to … set the wealth creators free»[35]. Nigel Farage the leader of UKIP and one of the principal sirens of Brexit could not resist, despite the hyperglobalist agenda behind Brexit and the money of a hyperglobalist elite, dressing the result up as an act of insurgency «We have fought against the multinationals, we have fought against big merchant banks, we have fought against big politics»[36]. Hence, the deception continued beyond the referendum.

It is important to note though that not all sections of the economic elite shared these hyperglobalist goals some large companies and the Confederederation of British Industry were opposed to Brexit, they were supportuve of the Single Market and believed it to be condusive to the interests of modern day capitalism, a position which was attacked by the hyperglobalists[37]. Also in some cases the hyperglobalist camp was contradictory with Leavers like Johnson waxing lyrical about how when freed of Single Market restrictions Britain could intervene more directly through forms of statism in the economy and rejuvenate de-industrialisted areas, this «boosterism» as it was termed of active government may have been no more than a sugar coating for a largely hyperglobalist pill. Johnson's government's flagship policy of «Levelling-up» to regenerate depressed regions and close the gap between rich and poor materially failed, many of the large infrastructure projects were cancelled and the regions that were the focus of the policy are now worse off in terms of investment, income and living standards[38].

Brexit clearly illustrates the forms of market fundamentalism and blind faith in unregulated markets that Polanyi forewarned against and which as was the case with Germany led to dysfunction and fascism. According to Polanyi the rise of Hitler and his intervention in the economy, centred on militarism and expansionist planning, created jobs and gave some balance to the market, in other words a reactive form of double-movement. Brexit is a strange fusion of hyperglobalism and nationalism, the market fundamentalism of hyperglobalism reflects a deeper commitment to globalisation and a probable acceleration of cultural change and migratory flows, indeed as is the case with India a price for new trade deals with countries like India will be Britain accepting more

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[33] Cf. N. Clegg, 2017.
[34] Cf. J. Morphet, 2017.
[35] Cf. A. Ryder, 2020.
[36] Cf. J. Garside *et al*, 2017.
[37] Cf. R. Patient, 2017.
[38] Cf. A. Westwood, 2022.

Indian migrants[39]. These hyperglobalist forces will also accentuate the socio-economic tensions that motivated Leave voters to support Brexit, low wages and low welfare support will add to their hardships and the solace they have sought to find in a nostalgic form of monoculturalism will do little to address those tensions. Thus in Polanyian terms Brexit can be described as a reactive and deceptive double-movement[40].

The inherent contradictions of hyperglobalist visions of Brexit and the lack of a clear consensus on what Brexit actually meant and how it should be translated into policy destabilised the premiership of Theresa May (2019-2019).

Theresa May and Global Britain

Following the resignation of Cameron in the wake of the Brexit vote Boris Johnson and Theresa May emerged as key contenders in the leadership contest that took place. Johnson though was to withdrew his nomination after his principal ally Gove announced that he believed Johnson lacked the skills of leadership and decided to stand himself. However, Home Secretary Theresa May was to emerge triumphant. May had been a cautious remainer, she had largely sat on the fence during the referendum and only gave one major speech on the need for a Remain vote. As Home Secretary May had developed a reputation for being tough on migration, this contributed to her popularity within the Conservative Party. May was quick to relinquish her commitment to Remain and signalled that she would not countenance a «Softer» version of Brexit by adopting a Norway type arrangement where Britain remained in the Single Market. May boldly stated «Brexit means Brexit», this meant leaving the single market and custom union. May also sought to stress she had a mandate for this vision by continually stating she was in a Rousseuian sense an instrument reflecting the «will of the people» as reflected in the referendum result, a mandate which in her view trumped the objections of parliamentarians who sought to thwart or soften her vision of Brexit[41]. Within her cabinet May also signalled her support for a harder Brexit by placing key Leave campaigners in cabinet positions responsible for Britain's EU departure, Boris Johnson was appointed as Foreign Secretary.

In her Mansion house speech in January 2017 May set out her vision for Brexit where she confirmed she wanted Britain to leave the single market and customs union and would if necessary walk away from negotiations declaring a no-deal would be better than a bad deal. There was a sense of bluff to such claims and was part of May's neogotiating strategy, she clearly hoped an agreement could be reached with the EU to avoid the chaos of a no deal scenario. By triggering Article 50, the notification sent to the EU informing them of Britain's formal intention to leave which would trigger a two-year

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[39] Cf. J. Clinton, 2022.
[40] Cf. A. Ryder, 2023.
[41] Cf. A. Ryder, 2020.

negotiation period to resolve the departure details, May had fired the starting pistol hoping no doubt that the frantic efforts to find a consensus to avoid no deal would lead to Conservatives agreeing to make concessions. Some observers felt it was an act of supreme folly to start this process with no clear consensus on what Brexit meant, this was in part a consequence of the vague ballot question in the referendum. Voters were asked to endorse or reject Leave but what did it mean? Would it be a soft or hard departure? The answers to these questions were unclear and de-stabilised May's premiership. The stability of her administration was hugely undermined by her attempt to increase her majority by calling an election in 2017.

May had inherited a majority of thirty MPs from Cameron but within the party there were remainers and a small but influential minority who preferred a soft Brexit, these MPs could derail May's harder vision of Brexit, especially if they aligned with the opposition. May felt a huge majority was easily attainable as the Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, a left populist, was unpopular with voters. Labour was also riven with discord, with mainstreamers within the party suspicious of Corbyn's more statist conception of socialism and blaming him for the Brexit result because of a poorly presented and led Labour campaign to Remain, not helped by Corbyn's late conversion to Remain followed decades of left euroscepticism, such was the level of distrust some claimed he had got the result he had secretly hankered for[42]. The election was a disaster for May a poorly executed campaign, robotic performance by May and energetic campaign by Labour led to the Conservatives actually losing their majority and becoming dependent on Ulster Unionist votes to vote through parliament Britain's departure, but the opposition of a small rump of Conservatives opposed to harder forms of Brexit made May's exit strategy seem perilously vulnerable[43].

May ploughed on with her vision of a harder form of Brexit and did not pivot towards a softer version as she probably knew that would inflame further the opposition of the hyperglobalists within her party to her strategy. Part of the reason May opted for a harder Brexit was because of her intention to appeal to nativist and protectionist sentiments and end free movement, a Norway/soft arrangement would not enable this. As May notes (2016) «I have said all along that I believe that underlying part of the vote to leave the European Union was the desire of the British people to have control over immigration, and for decisions on immigration to be made by the Government here in the United Kingdom. We should deliver on that. I look at these issues in terms of the deal we want to negotiate and the outcome we want, which is the best possible deal for trading with, and operating within, the single European market, but that should be commensurate with the other requirements we have: British laws made here in Britain and control on immigration»[44].

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[42] Cf. A. McSmith, 2016.

[43] Cf. T. Shipman, 2017.

[44] Cf. T. May, 2016

May was content to try and frame her vision of Brexit in hyperglobalist terms in her rallying call for a «global Britain», appealing to the nostalgia of Britain as an economic hegemon in an age of exploration Empire and industrial revolution, where Britain would now seek to emulate economies like Singapore[45]. In her Lancaster House speech May (2017) trumpeted a vision of Britain that would be: «a magnet for international talent and a home to the pioneers and innovators who will shape the world ahead. I want us to be a truly Global Britain». The theme of Global Britain appears to be a central one in the Lancaster House speech appearing 11 times alongside 10 references to free trade.

However, there were inconsistencies with a hyperglobalist vision of Britain. May appealed for a more interventionist role for the state. For example, May's commitments to the greater regulation of utility companies and the fees they charge and Disraelian claim to be the party of the working class[46]. However, it should be noted even Singapore countenances some forms of intervention. More strikingly May appeared to accept an alignment with the standards of the European Social Model in order to achieve a withdrawal agreement with the EU and frictionless trade. This concession appeased one of the greatest fears of the European Union, namely that Britain might engage in a hyperglobalist «race to the bottom» moving away from European safeguards and protections[47]. If Britain could pledge to align with European standards the EU was willing to be more generous in the terms of the trade deal and access to the European market following Britain's departure from the EU and it was in this sphere that May was to make concessions, concessions that clearly diluted the hyperglobalist vision of Brexit and ultimately led to the demise of her premiership[48].

Johnson aware of the growing pressures for alignment with EU standards warned that too close alignment with the EU would defeat the purpose of Brexit and represent a form of subjugation. In the Times newspaper Johnson said in the event of such alignment people «would say, 'What is the point of what you have achieved?' because we would have gone from a member state to a vassal state»[49]. Johnson's concerns about the dilution of a hyperglobalist Brexit eventually led to his resignation from May's cabinet in 2018. For Boris Johnson the withdrawal agreement May unveiled in 2018 consigned Britain to the status of a «colony». David Davis the Brexit Secretary who also resigned from May's cabinet, argued that the deal was an affront to Britain's constitution, as the EU would continue to influence British affairs as a consequence of the backstop solution to the Irish border, a mechanism that sought to keep Northern Ireland within the EU regulatory sphere and thus avoid a hard border between Northern Ireland and the

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[45] Cf. D. Dorling, S. Tomlinson, 2019.
[46] Disraeli (Prime Minister 1874 – 1880) was able to attract working class support through a combination of paternalism, social obligation and pride in Empire.
[47] Cf. C. Cooper, Q. Ariès, 2017.
[48] Cf. M. Bevington *et al*, 2019.
[49] Cf. J. Watts, 2017.

Republic of Ireland. In a fit of nationalist outrage Davis declared «The authority of our constitution is on the line»[50].

These pressures were to build up within the Conservative Party with a rump of hardcore hyperglobalists and Brexiteers within the Conservative parliamentary party called the European Research Group actively agitating for May's departure and clamouring for Johnson's assumption of the leadership. Although May survived one leadership contest it looked like she would not survive a second that was being planned and hence resigned in 2019 without finalising a Withdrawal Agreement with the EU. Taggart[51] notes with some prescience when such thoughts are applied to May's premiership that populism requires extraordinary leaders, larger than life and bold, bordering on reckless, in their speech and behaviour. May was not cut in this cloth, Boris Johnson was in some respects the man of the moment, the archetypal Weberian «charismatic leader». The dilemma of Brexit was that it was a populist goal achieved through populist tactics but needed a political system based on representative democracy to achieve its ends. The legalism and deliberative debate and analysis of the British parliamentary system, dependent on representative judgement, did not sit well with a populist agenda like Brexit. Furthermore, the strange and inconsistent alliance of hyperglobalism and nationalism with a slight majority of voters favoring Brexit many of whom were woefully ignorant and misinformed of the nuances that Leave entailed meant Brexit had been built on weak And unstable foundations.

Boris Johnson: Unleashing Demons

In his insider account of Brexit, working as an advisor to Cameron at the time of the referendum Craig Oliver[52] noted how Cameron had mused that a victory for Leave would unleash a number of demons into the British political system, this observation was insightful and some uncharitable observers of Johnson's premiership would conclude his time in office epitomised the instabilities and dysfunction that Cameron had predicted.

Boris Johnson[53] revealed a year before he took office the political playbook he would use if responsible for the navigation of Brexit and mused on the benefits of a Trumpist approach, «I have become more and more convinced that there is method in his madness…imagine Trump doing Brexit..He'd go in bloody hard… There'd be all sorts of breakdowns, all sorts of chaos. Everyone would think he'd gone mad. But actually you might get somewhere. It's a very, very good thought». Some observers would conclude that the securitising and emotive rhetoric and strategy of Johnson revealed such traits. Johnson inherited a diffucult position when he assumed office in 2019, he had no

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[50] R. Syal, L. O'Carroll, 2018.
[51] Cf. P. Taggart, 2000.
[52] Cf. C. Oliver, 2017.
[53] Cf. B. Johnson, 2018.

majority, presided over a divided party and was hesitant to keep on asking for extensions on Article 50, at the same time he had promised a bolder vision of Brexit. In these circumstances how could he deliver?

Invoking populist «will of the people» rhetoric Johnson[54] denounced the critics of Brexit as being part of a counter-revolution «I fear that some people are becoming ever more determined to stop Brexit, to reverse the referendum vote of June 23rd, 2016, and to frustrate the will of the people. I believe that would be a disastrous mistake that would lead to permanent and ineradicable feelings of betrayal. We cannot and will not let it happen». The «Benn Act» was a key manoeveur by Brexit dissenters, named after its principal sponsor Hilary Benn MP. The parliamentary Act seized control of the House of Commons agenda and mandated Johnson to seek an extension on Britain's departure from the EU in the event of a deal not being negotiated, thus avoiding a no deal scenario which some feared Johnson was working for. Johnson was outraged[55] in his opposition to the Benn Act, he declared «It means running up the white flag». Such intemperate invective became a constant feature of Johnson's premiership. Johnson's heavy handedness and efforts to stifle parliamentary scrutiny was evident in his proroguing (suspending) parliament for five weeks. The Supreme Court ruled the prorogation was illegal[56].

Johnson's vision of Brexit also revealed a deep nostalgia for Britain's past. At the Conservative's national conference Johnson[57] stated «This country has long been a pioneer. We inaugurated the steam age, the atomic age, the age of the genome. We led the way in parliamentary democracy, in female emancipation. And when the whole world had succumbed to a different fashion, this country and this party pioneered ideas of free markets and privatisation that spread across the planet. Every one of them was controversial, every one of them was difficult, but we have always had the courage to be original, to do things differently, and now we are about to take another giant step to do something no one thought we could do. To reboot our politics, to relaunch ourselves into the world, and to dedicate ourselves again to that simple proposition that we are here to serve the democratic will of the British people». Johnson wanted to see a return to the buccaneering ethos of the nineteenth century.

These sentiments were reflected in the political declaration for the Withdrawal Agreement that Johnson eventually negotiated, avoiding the UK wide level playing field rules that May had included in her draft deal[58]. During the Conservative leadership contest Johnson[59] revealed his more hyperglobalist credentials and commitment to non-alignment «We will be free to substantially diverge on tax and regulation», he said. «I

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[54] *Ibidem*.
[55] B. Johnson, 2019a.
[56] Supreme Court Judgement, 2019.
[57] B. Johnson, 2019b.
[58] Cf. Busby, 2019.
[59] B. Johnson 2019c

have had enough of being told that we cannot do it – that the sixth biggest economy in the world is not strong enough to run itself and go forward in the world». Johnson secured a Trade Deal with the EU that allowed Britain to diverge from the EU regulatory system on areas such as social rights and the environment and hence gain a competitive advantage[60]. The new Political Declaration on the deal differed from May's by removing references to alignment, references were made to maintaining environmental, social and employment standards but this statement is nothing more than a statement of intent and is non-binding. Corbyn (2019), the Labour leader of the opposition, declared in his conference speech that Johnson was seeking «A race to the bottom in standards and workers' rights to create an offshore tax haven for the super-rich».

Now having negotiated an agreement with the EU and having lost the support of a number of rebel Conservative MPs Johnson's position was even more precarious. Johnson conducted a bold and populist election campaign promising to «Get Brexit done», a slogan that appealed to public frustration and exhaustion over Brexit and the continual political wrangling[61]. Johnson's hyperglobalist visions of a new buccaneer Britain was balanced with more moderate and interventionist Conservative One Nation sentiments that promised to «Level Up» Britain and regenerate and revive de-industrialised parts of Britain, this appealed greatly to working class communities that had supported Brexit. However, such promises to reduce gaping inequalities were in contradiction with his hyperglobalist agenda[62]. The drift of working-class votes to the Conservatives was aided by the unpopularity of the opposition leader Corbyn and his unclear and highly complex position on Brexit which lacked the simplicity of Johnson's «Get Brexit done» mantra.

In the election the Conservative secured a majority of 78, many of the seats gained were at the expense of Labour in northern working-class communities. Labour's tally of 203 seats was the worst result in terms of seats that it had suffered since 1935. The Conservative secured 43.6 percent of the vote, Labour 32.2 percent and the Liberal Democrats 11.5 percent and the Brexit Party a mere 2 percent. Despite Johnson's decisive victory 52 percent of voters had supported pro remain parties. The result reflected a deep cultural divide between large cities that had sided with remain parties and small towns, the countryside and de-industrialised communities that had voted Conservative. Some contemplated as to whether Johnson was the architect of a new populist approach that might be the undoing of the European project with other radical right leaders on the continent potentially emulating his strategy[63]. Britain was to formally leave the EU in 2021 but Johnson's moment of triumph was to be short-lived.

Britain's departure from the EU coupled with the impact of the Covid pandemic has greatly weakened Britain's economic position which has witnessed a significant drop in

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[60] Cf. M. Bevington *et al*, 2019.
[61] Cf. Kirkup, 2019.
[62] Cf. J. Crabtree, 2020.
[63] Cf. A. Sullivan, 2019.

trade and rise in inflation much greater than increases within the EU or G20. As was noted earlier many of these pledges of Johnson's One Nation «Levelling-Up» agenda was undelivered by the end of his three-year term of office. Not only did the worsening economic situation and widening gap between rich and poor erode Johnson's popularity but so did his chaotic management of the Covid Pandemic where Britain experienced one of the highest death rates. More gravely for Johnson he was found to have broken his own rules on social distancing during the pandemic by participating in illegal social gatherings or allowing such events. Eventually Johnson was forced out of office by these scandals with mass resignations from his cabinet that forced him to resign in 2022. Johnson's misdemeanours were compounded when he was found to have lied to parliament by a parliamentary committee which could have led to a recall vote, basically a by-election in his parliamentary seat. To avoid this risk and likely defeat in a marginal parliamentary seat Johnson resigned his seat in the House of Commons, in Trumpian language claiming he was the victim of an establishment stitch-up. Four years after his election victory in 2019 and securing of Britain's departure from the EU Johnson was a disgraced and humiliated former Prime Minister. Not since Anthony Eden who resigned over the Suez crisis had a British former prime minister suffered such an ignominious end to his political career.

Conclusion

Donald Tusk, when President of the European Council, had stated in the wake of Brexit «As a historian I fear that Brexit could be the beginning of the destruction of not only the EU but also of western political civilisation in its entirety»[64]. Such apocalyptic language now seems misplaced, the dysfunction of the Trump political bandwagon may have punctured the authoritarian populist global political bandwagon. Furthermore, the dysfunction and chaos of Brexit has led to other populist parties retreating from pledges to stage a leave/remain referendum in their countries. The EU seems more secure and cohesive that what it has been for many years. A recent survey revealed only 18 percent of 2016 leave voters in the UK believe Brexit has been a success, according to polling for the thinktank UK in a Changing Europe. However, 61 percent think it will turn out well in the end[65]. Further economic hardship may disabuse the 61 percent of any hope that Brexit may turn out well. Both Trump and Johnson are now discredited and tarnished figures who are unlikely to make political comebacks.

The hyperglobalist agenda within the Conservative Party undermined by Johnson's successor Liz Truss. Truss and her Chancellor of the Exchequer Kwarteng, who had

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[64] Cf. D.B. Charter, 2016.
[65] Cf. H. Stewart, 2023.

contributed to the hyperglobalist clarion call book «Britannia unchained»[66], discussed earlier, decided to remove barriers on bankers' bonuses and reduce business taxes. Given Britain was in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis these reforms created considerable disquiet. However, this created a deep economic crisis and Kwarteng and then Truss was forced to resign. Truss was Britain's shortest serving prime minister having been in office for 49 days. Hyperglobalism within the Conservative Party has been greatly weakened, the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (2022 – 2024) may well have considered himself to be a hyperglobalist but charted a more cautious approach than Truss. The new Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer has signaled a desire to forge a more constructive relationship with the EU but not to rejoin, time will tell whether this position is sustainable.

The growing failure of Brexit and the populist phenomenon could be a turning point. The ejection of Johnson was a testament to the resilience of British parliamentary democracy but in light of what occurred there may be a need to review its workings and effectiveness. One important measure is to address the sense of disconnection some voters feel with political elites that fed into the Leave vote is to find new participatory tools that tap into public sentiments such as deliberative polling, participatory budgeting and measures which can form communication channels with a revitalised civil society and parliament, fusing the best elements of representative and direct democracy.

Another important stabiliser will be to move away from a hyperglobalist vision of society, comprehensive welfare regimes and high standard public services centred on progressive tax could do much to allay the tensions that fuelled Brexit. But such a vision is only possible in a highly globalised and interconnected world if others make similar transitions, hence Britain could re-join the EU. However, in rejoining the EU Britain should agitate for change and seek a Europe no longer premised on ordoloberal conceptions of hyperglobalism but instead a vision shaped by a more robust version of Social Europe, countenancing more interventionist and redistributive regimes[67].

Such a vision of a New Social Europe may ultimately entail some new form of Bretton Woods that creates a more regulatory and just world trade system, challenging the zealousness of what Stiglitz[68] termed market fundamentalism and return to the post-war trajectory of a more robust and environmentally and third world friendly «Les trente glorieuses» but leaps rather than baby steps being taken in a bolder and more transformative form of gradualism. This would not mean the end of globalisation but would mean it becoming more controlled and managed, such a state of affairs might deflate the tensions that have forged more reactive forms of identity and instead nurture a more fluid and cosmopolitan view of who and what we are. By promoting a level playing field, a better system of global social rights and giving nations that seek to undermine social rights, human rights and democracy less favourable trade rights this

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[66] Cf. K. Kwarteng *et al*, 2012.
[67] Cf. A. Ryder *et al*, 2020.
[68] Cf. J. Stiglitz, 2019.

new system of global economic governance could promote an agenda of social justice[69] Such a scenario could create distance between what Ramet and Adamovic[70] describe as «traumatic nationalism». A notion of being besieged and under threat and the victim of injustice. In his biography of Winston Churchill, Johnson, observed that, «To some extent, all politicians are gamblers with events. They try to anticipate what will happen, to put themselves on the right side of history»[71]. It may still be the case that in the longer frame of history Brexit was on the wrong side of a more cosmopiltan and just trajectory and was no more than a blip, a temporary aberration. Time will tell.

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[69] Cf. D. Rodrik, 2011.
[70] Cf. S.P. Ramet, L. Adamovic, 2012.
[71] B. Johnson, 2014.

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