ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Working with "Wogs": Aliens, Denizens and the Machinations of Denialism

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This article uses a discussion of the currency of the word "wog" in Britain to identify a pivotal, racialized position used to contain alien incomers so as to exclude them from belonging to the national community. The argument invites readers to focus on the affective energy specifically endowed in contemporary European "populist" politics by race-talk and the anti-Muslim rhetoric which share common roots in absolutist conceptions of culture and "ethnicity." It is suggested that those developments have conditioned the digital and virtual politics of contemporary racism. They connect with the deployment of machine learning and the growing application of Artificial Intelligence to build trans-national networks among White supremacists and ultranationalists in order to promote their allyship and coordinate their activities.

The word "wog" was a widely-used racist epithet during my 1960s childhood in England. Repeatedly finding myself on the receiving end of its dehumanizing velocity, galvanized my juvenile determination to comprehend the cultural and psychosocial machinery of everyday racism long before I had acquired academic perspectives that could unlock that critical impulse.

The term has vernacular analogs in other European languages. Its importance lies in the way that it identifies a liminal yet intimate position: on the inside but never welcome; present, yet firmly excluded from belonging. The afterlife of the "wog" can therefore still help us better to understand the dynamics of *contemporary* racism, especially where racial hierarchy has been articulated together with ultranationalism and xenophobia to form the potent "populist" compounds currently prized by politicians of all stripes.

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Thankfully, "wog" has passed gradually out of popular usage, yet it retains a special place in British history and in critical discussion of our country's evolving racist discourse. The position that the term marked out, at the fatal junction of racism and nationalism, has subsequently been populated by a host of other phantoms with whom we are yet to reckon. Their lingering presence remains active in the myriad ways that supposedly alien incomers get denied access to substantive dimensions of citizenship: rights and recognition. In Britain, this has been confirmed by the institutionalized cruelty revealed in the course of the "Windrush Scandal" (Gentleman, 2019) which depends upon the misrecognition signaled by the appearance of the "wog" as an unwanted, always already illegitimate presence.

The crime writer, Aspden (2007) discovered that "wog" had been cited as an alternative nationality written on David Oluwale's paperwork at Millgarth police station in Leeds by Inspector Geoffrey Ellerker and Sergeant Kevin Kitching. They were engaged in an extended process of hounding the itinerant African to death and remain the only British police officers to have been convicted of a violent crime of that kind.

Remembrance of Oluwale's killing and respect for his tortured ghost oblige us to remain interested in what the "wog" trope reveals about Britain's contested political ontology of race and nation. We should dwell over its capacity to facilitate the articulation of race *with* nation and supply connective tissue between racism, nationalism, and xenology. The Windrush debacle confirms that we need to know what the perlocutionary power of wog-talk can still accomplish. That line of inquiry reveals something both disturbing and useful about the politics of race and nation today, inside Britain and beyond its fortified borders.

It bears repetition that identifying, denouncing and hounding "wogs" mobilized forces that were simultaneously racializing and *externalizing*. They summoned and marked out the anxious boundaries of belonging and specified the embattled, official limits of recognition, violently distinguishing the nation's interior from its unhomely outside.

Here we should note that "wog" can also be considered a diminutive of the word Golliwog, another racially-saturated name that refers to the peculiar "Sambo" dolls that seem to have become popular more than a century ago, partly through literature for children written by the forgotten Edwardian pen of Florence Upton.

The "wog" is especially interesting because—against the grain of current thinking—as the term became a concept, it forced acknowledgements of the way in which Britain's everyday racism fused the many, supposedly inferior life-forms that had populated its colonial territories into a single discursive entity. As a hybrid, the "wog" shows how those distinct characters were compressed into one abject figure, dense yet voluminous enough to hold a host of inferior types drawn from all the corners of the empire. W-O-G supplied the hateful acronym for another odd English colonial projection: the Western (or westernized) Oriental Gentleman.

As its affective contours stabilized, "wog" lost its genteel, gendered characteristics and gained additional purchase in a world organized according to the rankings

specified by White supremacism. Fortuitously, "wog" rhymes with dog and nog, the second part of the word "nignog" another antediluvian term of racial abuse, today regarded as deeply offensive.

The poetic power of these linguistic ciphers has faded. Apart from the term I am required here to refer to as the "N-word" which is now spread online as the favored vector of generic anti-Blackness, there do not seem to be contemporary concepts endowed with equivalent centripetal energy.

Britain's locally-accented imperial and colonial vocabulary of racial terms has receded. It has been largely replaced by a U.S.-centric constellation of generic racial terminology, digitally transmitted to and by the legions of lone wolves who hunch nightly over their glowing screens. Darren Osborne, the murderous van driver of the 2017 Finsbury Park terror attack had, according to the prosecution, been radicalized via his online activities (Ganesh, 2018). Perhaps like him, those actors savor and algorithmically transmit the transgressive poetry of resentment while their precious attention is first claimed and then monetized by the insomniac machinations of surveillance capitalism.

Culture, Civilizationism, and "Dish Cities"

Ethnic absolutism can operate in the same ways as biological racism, however its accentuation of culture means that identifying it politically with racism proper became harder to pronounce with conviction. The figure of the "wog" shows how race, nation and culture have been fused.

When I began traveling regularly to the Netherlands I was struck by two tacit tendencies that I will use to frame the challenging figure of the unwanted, postcolonial denizen for whom the British "wog" figure serves as a prototype.

Recurrent conversations with avowedly liberal people in the arts and cultural sectors (as well as in academic life) consistently revealed their surprising appetite for the civilizationist pseudo-theory then being peddled by the likes of Prof. Samuel Huntington. Even before the global emergency was officially pronounced after 9/11, many in those key strata appeared eager to inhabit the grossly oversimplified political environment summoned by Huntington's certainty that the decisive question for the post-cold war phase of world history was no longer "which side are you on?" or even "who is your enemy?" but rather "who are we?"

Huntington's celebrated question extended far beyond his voicing of it as a specifically north American problem. It bespoke a wider anxiety and, shifted from its initial setting, it can be thought of as underpinning the insatiable desire for information and data that subsequently characterized the transformation of political culture and governmental tactics during the intervening decades of an unprecedented global counter-insurgency. This was the period in which answering the question "who are we?" became an issue on the proliferating battlefields of what would soon be known as the forever wars (Huntington, 2004).

Concern with the local manifestations of civilizational clash was made continuous with more distant conflicts. In Britain, we were told that troops fighting in places like Afghanistan and Syria were only there to maintain peace on the streets of our home territory. In the Dutch setting, political anxiety about the so-called "dish cities" seems to have provided a way of talking about the clustering of "non-autochthonous" populations perceived as having erected techno-cultural fortifications around their dangerous and pathological sociality (Mepschen, 2016). The alien bubbles that had been established in the home space of "Henk and Ingrid" confirmed the extent of the intruders' disruptive attachments to other places and faiths. At best, the encroaching outsiders had responded to being treated as aliens by cocooning themselves in a mesh of technology that was widely understood to inhibit or obstruct the dwindling chances of any eventual cultural assimilation. The aliens' fundamental incompatibility with local culture represented geopolitical problems considered to be matters of security, terror, and extremism. This antagonism was read largely through the magnifying lenses of gender and sexuality (Butler, 2008). These problems have, of course been multiplied by the effects of the pandemic in which, for example, the medical treatment due to "Henk and Ingrid" has been postponed because beds in Intensive Care Units are supposedly being occupied by their Muslim counterparts: "Mohamed and Fatima."

The first layer of this sort of commentary is intelligible as a problem of identity and belonging. It has been routinized, racialized, and weaponized in recent years. There is also a second theme, of spatial and technological confinement and closure, in which dwelling space is defined by bounded or private micro-cultures configured so as to exclude social connections. This is now not only a problem for ethno-racial and religious minorities. It is recognized as a more widespread social feature that defines a period in which the crisis of neoliberal relations and governance is considered chronic and should be grasped merely as the normal condition of things. These connected themes, on the one hand civilizationism/identity and on the other, privatization/bunkering provide the margins for the argument that follows.

It is not advisable to ascend to an altitude at which *totalizing* commentary on these difficult questions can more recklessly be indulged. Instead, we should embrace the importance of striving to speak parochially, that is from specific, limited locations. In my case, the place of enunciation lies in the deteriorating core of an old empire lodged uncomfortably (not to say catastrophically) on the edge of Europe. The discomfort of that posture is too big to be admitted casually but this deliberately vulgar and partial positioning is intended as a corrective gesture, both methodologically and ethically.

I will endeavor to foreground a local situation while acknowledging how the mismanaged decline of this national state continues to bleed destructively into the other locations with which it is networked. The politics of racial hierarchy enacted in this setting reveals how Britain imports dismal, anti-political energy from elsewhere, especially when the digital and virtual dynamics of racism, nationalism, and xenology are fully taken into account and critics are forced to face the extent to

which the ironic genre of Internet memes has replaced the old mechanisms of ideology which were once considered easier to track and analyse.

Europe's political and intellectual traditions have been transformed negatively by technological change. A double weaponization of information is expressed in its excessive provision combined with its selective withholding. Liberal analysis of this combination speaks routinely of fact-checking and fake news, but remains bereft of a critical theory of ignorance and its important relationship to the increasing exercise of what might be called agno-political power.

The Dutch enthusiasm for Huntington that I found disturbing in 2001 now points to how the planetary belligerence of the Blair, Bush, and Obama years has tarnished liberalism's distinctive ambitions. Since then, self-consciously liberal analyses of weaponized power and information have been dragged through more mud by some of their most earnest advocates. These are commentators who appear to have imagined that the motion of history reached its terminal point once capitalism stood alone and unchallenged save for the stresses resulting from its own depreciating internal machinery.[1]

Data Politics and Forever Wars

Widespread militarization and regimentation of social and political life followed the conflict that began with 9/11. The resulting global counterinsurgency campaign was clapped to the rafters by Anglo-liberalism's legion of fanboy securitocrats. Gradually and perhaps unexpectedly, they become aligned with a new agenda emerging in conjunction with the innovative business models favored by Californian enterprises seeking new ways to monetize the information and attention that they had stumbled upon during the springtime of social and timeline media.

The results of this confluence were as profound as they were unanticipated. It blurred the relationship between public and private power in novel ways and demanded a new constellation of critical concepts. More than anybody else, Shoshana Zuboff has understood the consequences of this interfacing. She describes how this formation established a "surprising political-economic fraternity" as the source of what she usefully calls "Surveillance Capitalism." That epochal change created "empires powered by global architectures of behavioral monitoring, analysis, targeting and prediction" (Zuboff, 2015, 2019, 2021). The historic alliance which emerged, involved unprecedented surveillance capabilities that enabled enormous profits. The psycho-techno-cultural agglomerations on which this machine relied, enabled an as yet incomplete re-engineering of social and political orders. So far, this deployment of computational thinking has been fundamentally anti-democratic and wholly unaccountable either for its exercise of power or for the reckless use of the informational capital it greedily but covertly accumulated in the form of data.

The technological innovations that drive what Byung-Chul Han calls psychopolitics are fundamental. However racism, ultra-nationalism and neo-fascism are not

simply incidental factors in the economy of attention and affect that has resulted (Han, 2017, 2018; See also Patrikarakos, 2018; Wendling, 2018; Williams, 2018.).[2] As with the popular politics of misogyny, similarly fueled by resentment and rancor, this form of power consolidates existing psychosocial patterns. These new formations have generated, amplified, and looped back intensities of feeling that are central to the preceding narrative of populism and the racism from which it stemmed. We must strive to understand what these styles of thought help people to feel, and where those feelings might stand in relation to the residual practices of public reason and private rationality. This is more than a question of reading expressions of racism and ultranationalism as symptoms of some "pre-existing" condition. It requires being able to explain why the underlying antagonisms are so frequently and repeatedly manifested as matters of "race," in this distinct repertory of xenophobic fears, nativist anxieties, and masculinist hatreds.

Britain's 2016 vote to leave the EU was a violent and shocking introduction to the machinations of the new tools that would come to define this psychopolitical conjuncture. Leave's victory was innovatively built upon a regime of data politics in which unaccountable corporate bodies had seized and privatized the digital substance of online life, extracting and appropriating it as raw material for their exploitation of behavioral dispositions with the highest *political* value. Bewildered watchdogs and regulators were left floundering as the persuadables were indeed persuaded. Thus the idea of state capture moved from neo-colonial spaces into the chaotic hubs of the ebbing overdevelopment.

Amidst the new ecologies of timeline media (Gilroy-Ware, 2017), merely obtaining reliable, detailed information about the balance of political forces became a burdensome and debilitating task. Elements of all this will doubtless be familiar to you from your own circumstances. Discussion of these events in Europe can only be enriched by familiarity with South Africa's experience of state capture in 2018. It was notably orchestrated by the well-remunerated officers of a now defunct English propaganda specialist, Bell Pottinger and its corrupt, governmental sponsors in several locations (Caesar, 2018).

With these new techniques at their disposal, capitalism's protectors, prelates, and disciples could re-appear surreptitiously and profitably disguised as its gravediggers and critics. The history of the Gupta brothers' Bell Pottinger initiative illustrates some of the dangers that arise from computerized mediation of identity and social media instrumentalization of political ontology, weaponized in corrosive, racial and ultranationalist forms by the most unlikely of sponsors.

These developments connect directly to the deployment of machine learning and the growing application of Artificial Intelligence—a combination that appeared not only in South Africa's carefully staged online fight against the supposed dangers of "White monopoly capitalism" but in several other polities.

A similar mix of actors and tactics guided the manipulation and simulation of Black nationalist and liberation activities inside the US. Black citizens in key districts were induced to imagine that exercising their hard-won right to vote was now

a pointless act. One avowedly radical group with a significant online presence, turned out to have been animated by a Russian "troll farm" operating bots from one country that were dispersed worldwide from the jurisdiction of a second state by interests allied with private corporate bodies specializing in what was once considered a form of psychological warfare. Notable para-governmental political actors of this type include SCL Elections, Palantir Technologies, and Cambridge Analytica, the now moribund shell operation that had influenced Britain's anti-EU vote so profoundly.

Zuboff warns that arrangements like this rely on and reveal a significant intensification of informational and epistemic inequality. That deficit is captured in the discrepancy between what we can know and what can be known about us by advertisers, attention-brokers, and their governmental allies. The historic consequences of this rift may soon be clearer than they are at the moment.

Agno-politics and Denialism

In the overdeveloped world, profit-driven, algorithmic amplification, dissemination, and micro-targeting of corrupt information (much of it produced in conjunction with coordinated schemes of mystification and disinformation), have begun to disrupt and fragment even the possibility of apprehending a common reality. Psychological warfare techniques are being deployed to promote a healthier and more pliable set of emotional reactions to trauma and loss (Cobain, Ross, Evans, & Mahmood, 2016). The management of the COVID pandemic has seen these tactics move more centrally into the workings of government. Risks increase when the governmental application of behavioral science toxifies social relations and imperils societal stability because all information appears unreliable while covert statecraft feeds a disabling sense of incorrigible corruption. Biomedical contagion and public health communications have been counterpointed by wave after wave of pathological information designed to obscure and mystify the nature of the threats and risks as well as the best strategies for responding to them. A culture of denial promotes *denialism* across key areas of policy: the climate crisis and the politics of immigration as well as the mobilization of anti-vaccination groups. Again, these connections are neither contingencies nor aberrations. They reflect fundamental re-alignments that confirm the distance that has been traveled from the outworn political geometry of Left and Right.

In several countries, anti-vaccination sentiments have provided gateways into the organizations of the alt-right and the not so alternative, openly neo-fascist right. Tides of antigovernment feeling see Blacks, Browns, Greens and the dregs of the left all holding hands with conspiracists who skillfully blend sinister fantasies with the results of selective but detailed historical research. This re-alignment augments the partisan fixations of the older racial nativism. They are being further revived and extended by forces derived from opposition to the idea of a climate emergency. In Britain, the denialist convergence is supplemented by the influence of militant

patriots intoxicated by the recovery of sovereignty through divorce from the EU and by the moral energy released through anti-elite opposition to the systematic pe-dophilia orchestrated from above by the secret forces that manipulate the theatre of politics and the mainstream media alike.

In conditions of unprecedented techno-political fluidity, Europe's identitarians connect readily with north America's "alt-right" and "alt-lite." Neo-Nazism cuddles up to accelerationism, revolutionary conservatism, militant traditionalism, and new articulations of political misogyny. Despite abundant differences, these disparate tendencies readily correspond. They share a common investment in the idea of "White genocide" and the "fear of White extinction." Those racial anxieties animate and associate every major contemporary far-right tendency. Transfusions of eu-genic energy are provided to contemporary discussions of demography, population control and the planetary effects of climate emergency. We should take special note of the enthusiasm for eco-fascism trumpeted by Brenton Tarrant, the anti-Muslim mass murderer in Christchurch, New Zealand (Campion, 2021).

It is essential to remember that, even amidst this catalogue of horrors, Britain's principal neo-fascist influencer, Tommy Robinson must reassure his sympathetic listeners that he is *personally* opposed to racism and White supremacism. When campaigning to become Mayor of London, Lawrence Fox, another celebrity ultra-nationalist and anti-vaccination rabble-rouser, was careful to be photographed by the Churchill statue with a young Black woman supporter prominently positioned in a staged PR photograph. The influential occultist and former professional goal-keeper, David Icke happily holds hands with the African American womanist, writer, Alice Walker who considers him an ally in the global struggle against humankind's reptilian overlords.

The least we can say is that racism has mutated and become firmly xenological. Its adaptation returns us to the figure of the "wog" with which we began. The themes of blood and belonging have been recycled by politicians of all stripes for the populist purchase they offer. It is easier to focus on the certainties provided by racial and national metaphysics while denying, mystifying, or marginalizing more difficult and challenging phenomena like the effects of encroaching climate disaster. Anxieties about alien invasion and the attendant loss of racial and cultural purity may even be increasing because so many are disoriented and overwhelmed in the face of the existential horrors of the climate crisis. Denying the reality of that pro-cess has uneven appeal across generations but it corresponds to other processes in which the mechanisms of denialism have secured political significance. For exam-ple, in burying the history of imperial and colonial dominion and the archive of cruelty it contains.

In both instances, pathological denial shuts out troubling information that might threaten our ideal portraits of ourselves and our national communities. Freud's writing on the mass psychology of twentieth-century fascist movements supplies an account of these dynamics. To paraphrase him, when a group's self-love gets threatened, its adherents will be more likely to resort to violent extremes. They

are much more likely to lash out in acts of narcissistic aggression than to accept the uncomfortable possibilities of being shamed or humbled. In those circumstances, there is no limit to the stupid, cruel, and aggressive things that people will do in order to protect their fundamental affirmation of themselves and the national or ethnic groupings with which they affiliate. What goes for nationality and ethnicity is doubly true when an elevated position on the ladder of racial hierarchy is at stake.

This direction of thought also suggests ways to understand how pandemic denial which presents COVID as a governmental hoax could become so readily connected to the forms of racial nationalism unleashed by the Brexit vote which can accept neither the task of working through the history of Britain's departed empire nor the burden of shame that attends its horrors.

While we ponder how the shared psychic structures of denialist formations contribute to the practical political work involved in campaigning, mobilization, and public assembly, we must also note that these themes have already converged organically (Dacombe et al., 2021).[3] They can be seen, for example, in the pages of *The Light* a self-styled British "truthpaper" supposedly providing a fearless alternative to the "Mainstream Media." This publication is placed in letterboxes and freely distributed in farmer's markets and green settings. It is also apparently influential among the "wellness community." Its pages offer a deeply disturbing portal into the political realignment that is underway. *The Light* confirms that strands of ultranationalism and alt-right activism have been connected to the communicative and affective infrastructures of climate denial and COVID paranoia. Indeed questions of race and nation, belonging, and exclusion have been fundamental in the diversion of green sensibilities into eco-fascism's nativist reflexes.

These developments confirm the value of Zuboff's plea to turn our attention towards the epistemological disorientation integral to surveillance capitalism's rewiring of political communication. Conspiracy theories argue that a variety of domination is being instituted which draws heavily upon experiments previously undertaken in the laboratories provided by colonial rule. The resulting unfreedom overrides and avoids all democratic scrutiny, replacing manifestly inadequate regulatory accountability and failed enforcement with aggressive, computational governance routinely supplied by corporate resources. This process operates—not only with its eyes closed—in the interests of revived fascist mobilization because this is a system that makes money by facilitating and enhancing the intensities on which it relies.

Directed and sustained by the illegitimate, extrajudicial and monopolistic authority of tenaciously private power, these algorithmic systems already boast of being able to know us better than we know ourselves. They will increasingly decide upon the allocation of resources and the management of risks. In the meantime, they engineer doubt and amplify uncertainty in the service of the most dubious of forces as well as the immediate financial interests of their architects among whom the pieties of the alt-right are often audible (Smith and Burrows 2021).

The scenario Zuboff outlines cannot be adequately understood within the opposition between chaos and order that she uses to frame it. That formulation conveys only the cataclysmic shock to liberal dispositions which did not—and perhaps, *could not*—anticipate these new arrangements. Legislators in some polities are belatedly attempting to assert regulatory control over these anti-social platforms. Fundamental rights and the rule of law should, we are told, apply equally to online environments. Britain has initiatives aimed at instituting a duty of care that would hold big tech companies responsible for public harms and create a number of new regulatory mechanisms.

Regrettably, Europe has proved to be just as vulnerable to the technopolitical strategies pioneered by the neofascist forces revealed under the dismal arc of the Trump presidency and its ongoing aftershocks. The ultranationalists and Islamophobes are carefully networked and highly skilled in their gaming of the digital order. Their British recruiting-sergeant, Tommy Robinson and his associates are eagerly awaiting the new social media platform that has been promised by former-President Trump to his allies—actual and virtual.

We can see from the online manifestos written by notorious mass murderers that the work of European thinkers like Jean Raspail, Renaud Camus and Alain de Benoist has played a fundamental role in shifting the language and policies acceptable in the mainstream. Their influential texts have been translated and transmitted far and wide across an infrastructure that confounds outmoded distinctions between left and right, revolutionary, conservative and liberal.

Explicitly anti-Islamic interventions are being made by a younger generation of identitarian ideologues. Twentieth-century writing by the likes of Bat Yeor and Alexander Dugin has been freshly folded into the classically fascist, anti-Semitic, accelerationist and ultranationalist positions established years earlier by the likes of Evola, Schmitt, Jungr and Spengler. A number of academic commentators, among them Chetan Bhatt, Ed Pertwee, Jose Pedro Zuquete and Cynthia Miller Idriss have shown how, in spite of internal contradictions that would in an earlier period have precipitated serious fragmentation, European activists with differing priorities and emphases have been building a multi-national movement galvanized by the need to protect the White identity that they believe is increasingly confronted by an aggressive inflow of alien life (Bhatt 2021; See also Miller Idriss, 2018; Pertwee, 2017; Zuquete, 2018).

The fascists and ultranationalist disagree about gender, but those minor fissures can be papered over with a racial metaphysics that furnishes the hardcore for their shared efforts: the place where various spokes intersect and where their movement's centripetal force is greatest.

Foundational investments in racist civilizationism, anti-Muslim and anti-Black sentiment are often now presented publicly with humor or in avowedly ironic modes. Those weightless qualities assist in maintaining a strategic momentum guided by the application of a broadly Gramscian perspective. From this angle, politics is considered "down-stream from culture."

Under the benediction of Internet celebrities such as Robinson and Paul Joseph Watson, England's xenophobes and racists, like those in many other countries, have been moved to act by the idea that supposedly "indigenous" and homogenous populations of Whites are being systematically *replaced* by an invasive, "genocidal" inflow of overly-fertile aliens. The old cries of "Keep them out" and "send them back" which greeted the arrival of "wogs" in days gone by have been succeeded by a new chant: "You Will Not Replace Us" (Guiffrida 2021). "Judeo-bolshevism," initially recoded as "cultural Marxism," is now presented in the perplexing apparition of "Islamo-gauchism."

Britain's post-war and postcolonial incomers enjoyed the notional benefits of imperial citizenship. However, their descendants demonstrate no deep or significant connection with the inner life of our declining polity and the special heritage of our plucky union of nations. Over time, the aliens just revert to inferior racial types. Disabled by their pathological cultures they are identifiable only as a problem to be solved, a deviant presence to be excised. This is how the spirit of Britain's hostile environment was reproduced for more than half a century. This is the climate that created the Windrush scandal and though the word "wog" is no longer spoken, the positionality of the "wog"—an intimate stranger—remains as a substructure.

Along with concern to prevent the fatal engineering of *replacement*, existential anxiety about national culture and racial difference has been orchestrated to erupt periodically, generating additional political effects inside and beyond the mainstream. There is a mounting sense of cultural deficit, of being bereft of the type of resources enjoyed by aliens and strangers who, unlike the locals, know who they are and are allowed to celebrate it. Those fears are strongest where the populist overtones of racist nationalism chime with the voices of the precarious, the poor and marginalized victims of austerity and inequality. The resulting mix has fed a compensatory identity politics in which homogenous, undifferentiated Whiteness is produced as the sole authentic measure of belonging to the national community.

These recursions originated in a deeper disruption: the crisis in our nation's ability to represent itself, both to itself and to the world. Heritage and history are contested. Culture wars are declared from on high to channel and politicize the symptoms of melancholic disorientation and guilt.

Yet a different, future-oriented energy emerges from the other factions in this proxy civil war. A few streets and pubs are renamed. Statues may occasionally be toppled. However, Britain's inability to acknowledge and work through its contested colonial past is a perennial failure. The country is unable to examine its changing demography, to accommodate its irreversible plurality, and assess the conspicuous successes of its cultural and civic integration during the last half-century. That was before the tribes of leave and remain remade the landscape we share and the most right-wing government for decades could decorate itself with the exotic bodies of its Black and Brown ultras.

The same epoch-making, racist lexicon has been repeated for half a century by both the right and the left as though it provided a ready-mixed, formula for

generating and recovering the appeal of the fading parties and institutions of the industrial age.

Official politics responded by striving to cultivate this kind of hateful rhetoric in order to hold electoral blocs together. Those attempts to instrumentalize racist sentiment cannot be ignored by properly historical assessments of the political significance of racism and nationalism. Respectable leaders—who once knew better—began to think their middle of the road political goals could be accomplished or enhanced simply by recycling fascist slogans like "British Jobs For British Workers" or repeating the xenophobic triggers of the far right. The political class became culpable for its disinclination to take racism seriously enough to comprehend it as a problem that could imperil the whole edifice of democracy.

The working class that gets invoked here, against all the evidence, as exclusively White, aggrieved and vulnerable is actually held in contempt by its would-be celebrants. The redundant epiphanies of class politics are just another means to vivify the respectable leader's tactical projects, to invest them with bogus charisma or routinely to temper centrist aspirations with a meretricious authenticity. This nationalism and racism are empty, demotic prescriptions that reveal nothing more than the inability of Leftists to break free of the discursive habits established by an extreme Right which understands the psycho-political game better than they do.

The resilience and effervescence of the resulting popular racial nationalism is striking. Its political geography is important, but there is more to be said specifically concerning the inertia of liberalism when confronted with the new violent militia of mask-refusing monument-defending, immigrant-hating, anti-elite Islamophobes animated by the righteous desire to protect children from the twin evils of vaccination and predatory pedophiles.

It is not enough to point to the impact of the financial crash and the imposition of austerity in muting critical commentary on these issues. Refusal to address the problems created by the idea of racial hierarchy fosters the resurgence of nativism and the exaltation of personal feelings and primal (if ambiguously racialized) group affiliations over all and any inconvenient social alternatives.

A Politics of Diversity?

Many of the things that have happened since the #BLM revolt of summer 2020, ought to be basic features of institutional life redressing obvious wrongs and inequalities. However, too many responses to injustice and inequality have lapsed into managerial exercises: diversity and inclusion box-ticking. In educational settings, those gestures frequently translate into ritualized and tokenistic opposition to the effects of racial hierarchy employing tools like Implicit Bias Training which has come under attack since the Johnson government, following US precedents, declared war on teachers of "critical race theory."

Managerial-corporate preoccupations with "diversity" are ubiquitous but inadequate. They make anti-racism appear trivial or peripheral when set alongside the

tangled machinery of ableism, gender differences and the unthinkable prospect of sex-based rights. Specific commitments against racial inequality and injustice get forgotten. They must be defended as substantively political rather than associated only with the personal and psychological dynamics that would elevate lived experience and individual feelings over other considerations: structural and habitual.

Antiracists seek more than the diversification or even the decolonization of the 1%. As I have already argued, racism and nationalism have been widely and comprehensively articulated *together* and that wog-generating association opens directly into the affective dimensions of today's fascist resurgence.

The afterlife of the "wog" affirms that the relationship between nationalism and race-thinking continues to be pivotal, but the racialization of Britain's national culture is now animated by a number of new threats. Most notably, the Muslim has been defined as a racial type and Islam, which did not feature as a political or cultural problem even three decades ago, is now considered as a major problem of both race and culture. In devising responses to that blockage, which bears a family resemblance to twentieth-century anti-Semitism, much will depend upon whether the history of Britain's global dominion is recovered and how it can be worked through as part of a revised history of the present.

Currently those overdue operations are inhibited by invented memories of the nation at war which are as partial as they are tendentious. They assemble the polity as an organic cultural entity regardless of class divisions, but it is represented as exclusively White, largely rural, and most effectively organized by its military obligations.

That version of Britain has been configured according to the cultural specifications of the antediluvian television comedy, *Dad's Army*. In the odd environment that results, renewing the narrative of postcolonial settlement, as Steve McQueen's recent TV series, *Small Axe*, tried to do, can help to clear away the obstruction that has enabled the triumphant projection of the underdogs' plucky anti-Nazi efforts to screen out all of the country's subsequent conflicts, not only over decolonization, but over the kind of country Britain would like to be.

Opinion is divided over exactly how far back into the past the country will need to travel in order to be repaired or restored. For some, the community-building Blitz spirit of 1940 will always take pride of place. For others, the bleakest trench warfare of World War One provides the favored destination, precisely because its revisionist telling makes it the motherlode of cultural plurality united in imperial adversity. Whichever war gets preferred as the sacred site of national palingenesis, most commentators share the melancholic opinion that their fractured nation no longer appears to be what it was. The visible diversity of today's motley citizens confirms their lack of belonging to the proud nationality of yesteryear.

There is no year since 1914 in which British military forces have not seen action on a battlefield. Little surprise then that the history and memory of the second world war are reassembled so as to support morbid yet heroic conceptions of what the nation could become if only its martial and military virtues could be transposed

into the substance of ordinary, peaceable social relations. The messianic figure of Churchill looms over that fantasy. He is pre-eminent among a crowd of grisly statues, all of which ought already to have been readied for storage.

The advocates for restorative monoculture have grown combative as they face the ailing planet's creole future. They have had the political wind in their sails during the last few years, but their pronouncements often sound paranoid, out of touch, and out of time. They seem to have lost the old confidence which derived from certainty that racial superiority and global dominion were guaranteed by nature and history alike. Anxiety is now the governing mood that points to what the anguished country's next chapter will comprise.

New political geographies have become visible. Brexit is the sharp end of a cultural wedge that has been driven between London and elsewhere. Experience differs between big cities and small towns, north and south, red walls and blue rinses. These divisions project opposed conceptions of the past and an uncertain future.

In spite of these problems, where convivial contact across the culture line is routine, it has not prevented the demand to see "people who look like me" from becoming a socially-mediated clarion call of minority grievance. But the desire to have one's own defining characteristics reflected back, multiplied and projected across the mediascape in an infinite recursion is not an exclusively minoritarian concern.

Those feelings, and the security and distraction they afford, are evident everywhere in political and cultural life. In that flux, the brittle ghosts of memorialized slaveholder/philanthropists routinely rub shoulders with titanic, undead figures. Not only Churchill, but Smuts, Dyer and even patriotic proto-feminist women freshly cast in bronze like Millicent Fawcett. Thus Britain's difficult journey into the future is hijacked and diverted through the poorly maintained gardens of the national necropolis. The peculiar intensity with which those imperial icons are embraced conveys the extent to which the nation is now unable either to adapt or progress.

It is as though our sense of human being is itself diminished and racialized instead of being re-worked, endowed with new meanings and new hope as the shadows of common yet unequal vulnerability to new perils threaten to engulf us.

Nonetheless, we are told repeatedly that, at last, racial inequalities and injustices are really over and done with. Nobody pauses to inquire why the old appeals to racial exclusion and racial hierarchy keep coming up and coming out. Or to ask why are they still so politically productive? Why they alone so easily distill the antagonisms that can spark the so-called culture war?

I have worked for many years to identify the blockages that produce this repetition and to understand the sources and meanings of what looks today like an intractable pattern conveyed in the mentality which insisted that the "wogs begin at Calais." This is certainly an English complaint, however, similar patterns and the dismal yearning to reset the clocks of political time are evident in the lives of other nations.

Governments everywhere have buckled under pressure from the growth of ultra-nationalist and neo-fascist movements with and without immediate electoral ambitions. New technologies have increased the tempo of racist mobilization and fostered closer links between expanding neo-fascist forces everywhere (Singer & Brooking, 2018).

The new media ecology is poorly understood by people outside of the technological world it creates. It has refined the tactics previously described as dog whistling into a new repertoire of overt signals. They are often now delivered by enthusiastic Black and Brown affiliates of the oligarchy whose presence in the elite stratum conveniently makes it harder to name the policies being pursued as racist even when that is their explicit and shameless content.

The corporate kitemarks and consultancy warrants awarded by McKinsey and its ilk make the politics of diversity into a game about visibility rather than recognition. This is congruent with the cry that rises from younger activists whose militancy stems from the failure to see anybody who looks like them seated at the top table or in the boardroom. The idea that new personnel will be sufficient to bring in the always generic conception of "change" rests on the hyper-similarity of racial types, the identity of interests and a distance from politics. Intensified by closed racial ontology and phenomenology and seated at the screen, this nihilistic formation retreats into a quiescent being which is invested with a sacred, revolutionary significance.

As we approach the eye of the Brexit storm, any plea for historical understanding as a catalyst for the development of healthier polities probably sounds absurd. We know that the crisis conditions to which we are becoming habituated are not friendly towards historical knowledge—particularly in relation to the significance of the colonial and imperial dimensions of European history.

In Britain, and perhaps elsewhere, the continuing salience of racial divisions and the militant upsurge of energetic young people, have made this a good moment to revive uncomfortable questions about the afterglow of colonial history and the importance of racial hierarchy for the way unhappy, divided countries understand and construct themselves as a political bodies. The figure of the "wog" and, more recently, of its phantom progeny are integral to that belated reckoning.

Notes

1. For years, the subculture of Britain's scholastic liberals has had next to nothing to say about racism. Isaiah Berlin's most assiduous intellectual guardians have more or less capitulated to the unwritten rule that these matters are unserious and unworthy. Thus the tragedy in what John Gray calls Berlin's "tragic liberalism" has been compounded by additional layers of complicity. The intellectual and political trajectories of Michael Ignatieff, John Gray, and Timothy Garton-Ash can be used to triangulate this problem and bring it to light.

2. Han suggests that we have been delivered into the clutches of algorithmic political culture and predictive analytics that have made human behavior predictable for the first time. This change is epochal and demands a more elaborate understanding of the relationship between information, communication and power than anything that Machiavelli, Foucault and their various successors were able to provide.

3. See also: https://sandiadams.net; https://profdolorescahill.com/in-the-news/; https://www.newworldalliance.co.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/The-Devon-Insight-1-v6.pdf Last accessed 13 February 2021.

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