

# Introduction: mapping the nation

No event in recent British political history has produced the level of despondency, exhilaration and chaotic scramble such as that which accompanied the result of the 2016 EU referendum. Brexit, in the course of generating a historically unique standard of sociopolitical uncertainty and constitutional intrigue, tore apart the two-party compact that had defined the parameters of political contestation for much of twentieth-century Britain. The allure of nationalist assertion in the form of exiting Europe seemed to cross and confound the distinctions of class, geography and ideology that had underpinned so much of recent British and, truth be told, western European politics writ large.

Cutting through the already too narrowly defined divide of Labour and Conservative, the Brexit vote represented the formal consolidation of a new electoral coalition: middle-income conservatives dotted across the green shires and provincial towns of England hitched to huge swathes of previously Labour-voting working-class Britain. Copious ink has been subsequently spilt trying to account for the different motivations and socio-economic circumstances that aligned to produce this new political pivot, where ‘Middle England’ meets the ‘left behind’; a political reconstitution that has emphatically put paid to the two-party system definitive of post-war European politics.

Amid the all-pervasive public commentary, disagreement prevails about whether the underlying cause of such politics is economic, cultural or actually the result of a much wider technologically mediated collapse of trust in a liberal establishment. But regardless of how commentators contest the underpinning causal factors, the one consensus is that Brexit, and other comparable trends elsewhere, has been principally framed, in its

overt sense, by issues of immigration, race and difference.<sup>1</sup> This consensus becomes most starkly apparent in how those wrongfooted by the rise of the new right are now scrambling to parrot much of its politics. This scenario is encapsulated in Hillary Clinton's painfully tautological nostrum that the only way to repel the rise of nationalist populism in Europe is in fact to concede to its key ambitions: that is, to 'erect the barricades' vis-à-vis immigration.<sup>2</sup> Various critics skewered with relish the hollowness of this distinctly centrist brand of non-politics. As Jan-Werner Müller observed, '[Clinton's] underlying idea appears to be that one can defeat one's political adversaries [only] by imitating them.'<sup>3</sup> Or as Atossa Abrahamian drolly noted, 'Clinton evidently came out of her 2016 "deplorables"<sup>4</sup> gaffe with the wrong lesson: instead of pinning populist discontent to a range of easily identifiable social and economic ills, her takeaway was to start speaking like the deplorables.'<sup>5</sup> Such mocking of the centrist guard's spluttering is certainly warranted. Capitulation on immigration and complementary race-coded anxieties is not, however, solely a trait of the now panic-stricken centre. With regard to the ostensibly *left-wing* iteration of this same surrender, left 'realists' such as Slavoj Žižek, Angela Nagle and Wolfgang Streeck have been eager to reinterpret anti-capitalism so that it may more fluently dovetail with the communitarian and bordering principles so prized by the new nationalists. The premise that is accordingly shared by many *across* the political spectrum is that recent political events represent, in their most fundamental sense, a desire for a reconsolidation of the nation vis-à-vis immigration, multiculturalism and broader understandings of community.

Of course, amid all such talk of curtailing immigration, restoring the border, 'white shifts' and returning dignity to the 'left behind' working class, it is important not to discount the various other themes that surfaced during the Brexit campaign and its aftermath – issues pertaining to unaccountable bureaucracies, democratic deficits, the crisis tendency of the Euro, the steady drive towards centralised EU federalism, and even, admittedly from fairly fringe leftist factions, the EU as an unapologetically neoliberal single-market body that undermines the possibility of locally progressive politics. Yet in spite of these no doubt significant themes, it is not conjecture to observe that an assortment of more overtly xenophobic, race-baiting issues was 'wot won the referendum'; issues relating to immigration, refugees,

Muslims, the spectre of Turkey, the Roma, and the tyranny of political correctness, a tyranny allegedly magnified by the ECHR-sanctioned human rights restrictions that supposedly impugn and castrate the British character. The fact that populist firebrands across Europe, not least Marine Le Pen (perhaps *the* archetypal populist politician of our era), received the result with a flurry of enthusiasm is no mere footnote to the Brexit episode. It was instead an exemplary expression of the very political reality that has come to define contemporary Europe. Similarly well documented, of course, are the transatlantic dimensions of this new political stage, best embodied in Nigel Farage, the former leader of UKIP and charismatic lynchpin of the Brexit cause, decamping to the United States in order to bolster Donald Trump's own nationalist assertion. This affinity was mirrored in Prime Minister Theresa May's happy 'normalisation' of Trump while also enthusiastically ventriloquising Farage in her own electioneering, repeatedly asserting that Brexit, in terms of what remains non-negotiable about it, must represent the end of free movement.<sup>6</sup>

It ought be noted in this context that the much-celebrated recent collapse of UKIP is mostly pyrrhic. It is not the case that UKIP was defeated; it had simply been successfully absorbed into the fold of the mainstream Conservative Party. The initial consolidation of UKIP's political prominence, culminating in the Brexit outcome, certainly constituted one of the more overt instances of the new nationalist trend within the UK context.<sup>7</sup> Brexit represents, however, only one (albeit spectacular) milestone of this trend. Indeed, the issues constitutive of new nationalism, and the demagoguery intrinsic to it, only seem to have intensified in the wake of the referendum result, having worked themselves deep into the contemporary political mainstream: issues such as the purported 'refugee crisis' and immigration concerns more generally; the 'War on Terror' and related anxieties regarding the integration of British-born Muslims; the more diffuse disenchantment with any multicultural commitment and associated fears about cultural integrity, liberal values and white space; and the sudden but perhaps not entirely insincere outpouring of nativist concern regarding the plight of a disenfranchised 'white working class'. All of these are themes that intertwine to produce a densely knotted pivot of concerns conducive to nationalist solutions, solutions that escape any neat sense of party-political divides and constituencies.

## Defining nationalism

Many arguments have been advanced in an attempt to develop an analytic schema that can account for this nationalist consolidation, a consolidation that consigns both the social democratic and liberal left to the ignobly hapless position of bystander, a mere observer of history dramatically unfolding. This opening chapter adds to that body of writing, advancing an argument that trades on two claims – the first, diagnostic, the second, political.

Nationalism's long historical arc in Europe has, by my reckoning, been punctuated by two bouts of intensity: first, the era of Romantic expressionism<sup>8</sup> and the major nationalist yearnings it sponsored, culminating perhaps in the mid-nineteenth-century 'Spring of Nations', when various revolutionary movements of 1848 coalesced around the popular desire for the formalisation of respective European nation-states;<sup>9</sup> second, the early twentieth-century era of protectionist mercantilism as tied to fading imperial influence and economic instability which suffused two global wars, fascism, and the subsequent not unrelated crafting of the welfare state contract.<sup>10</sup> This book argues that the West is in the midst of a third such nationalist moment. It is clear that the idea of nation has recovered today the lustre that had momentarily subsided<sup>11</sup> – a hiatus during the late twentieth century that fed much hubristic speculation about the 'end of history' and the teleological triumph of liberal, 'post-ethnic' democracy.<sup>12</sup> This hubris has proven spectacularly misplaced in light of today's nationalist resurgences, leading to hurried if equally hapless repudiations by Fukuyama and company of their original confidence.<sup>13</sup>

The nationalist politics of today has not gone entirely unchallenged, as was evidenced in the 2017 electoral success delivered by Labour's rehabilitation of a social democracy-cum-urban liberalism pivot; it remains, however, uncontroversial to observe that the idea of nation currently gallops across Europe with a distinct sureness and purpose. But what actually renders any such recourse to nation, nationalism? Nationalism can, of course, be read through any number of postulations. Such a significant feature of modernity, perhaps even modernity's most enduring programme, will always have many dimensions: culture and unity, territoriality and borders, sovereignty and democracy, the popular and the vernacular, alongside the 'invention of tradition' and monumentalised elite history. In short, nationalism pertains to

the manner in which modernity frames the entire aspiration for peoplehood, community and the attendant expression of political sovereignty. But if one basic principle about what constitutes Western nationalism is to be advanced, one simple premise from which all else follows, it is the relationship between political discourse, ideology and nation that is the most helpful. Namely, nationalism might be initially understood here as the set of framings by which primary culpability for significant sociopolitical problems, whether real or imagined (depending on one's political leanings), is attributed to various 'alien' ethno-racial communities. Put differently, Western nationalism can be read as the formation by which a self-appointed normative community attributes its putative sociopolitical, cultural and security concerns to the excessive presence, influence and allowances made to those understood as *not belonging*. Those who comprise the relevant field of non-belonging include the variously constituted insider minorities, but also various foreign peoples and/or international forces, some of which intertwine with and reinforce the pathologies attributed to internal, generally non-white groups. (For instance, the intensification in anti-EU sentiment in the run-up to Brexit made extended reference to how the refugees massing in Calais and elsewhere in Europe threatened to replenish the already vilified internal minority groups with whom the potential refugees share an ostensible commonality – via Islam, skin colour or country of origin.)

The contemporary certainly constitutes one such moment where much political discourse projects a significant nationalist orientation. Increasingly shrill populist debates traffic in a number of core anxieties that hinge on certain iconic figures of non-belonging. Anxieties written upon the figure of the migrant, a figure who is articulated via multiple guises – as the labour migrant, as refugee, as asylum seeker and, less frequently, as rapacious, uncouth foreign capitalist. Anxieties associated with the nihilist materialism of the black inner city, and the young black male in particular. Anxieties stemming from the purported vulgar incivility of Eastern Europeans (with the Roma becoming a particularly visceral signifier of this) stemming from their unsolicited arrival in the towns of provincial Britain as well the labour threat they pose to the white working class. And, of course, the increasingly trenchant, nigh world-historical anxieties tied to the figure of the Muslim – as patriarchal, indolent, violent, fanatical, sectarian and, perhaps most deviously, as protean and unpredictable.

It seems uncontroversial to note that the entire democratic landscape in Europe is being remade by the increased prominence of these anxieties, anxieties that ask for harsh, uncompromising responses to the threats that these multiple but often overlapping outsiders represent. Relatedly, solutions that project a nationalist tenor increasingly obtain a panacean value in the popular imagination, suggesting that various significant challenges – be they economic, security, social or cultural – will be magicked away through the emasculation of the significant Others in the nation's midst.

For instance, in Scandinavia, that timeless beacon of reasonable social democracy, rabidly nationalist parties proudly sit in government, agitating for measures that can only be described as a macabre (partial) reprise of the continent's darkest twentieth-century chapter. Consider how in Denmark, at the peak of the 2016 'refugee crisis', it was reported that those waiting to file an asylum application were stripped of any valuable possessions on their person. This aggressive spectacle of state power, which was nominally claimed as intended to finance the costs of processing an asylum application, meticulously laced the racial horror of nationalism with the deference to legal procedure that has always been the unique province of European modernity. See also Denmark's recent announcement of a 'ghetto' policy that singles out people of non-Western origin for a whole suite of specialist remedial justice and state re-education measures, a policy programme that represents a remarkably overt entrenchment of nation-state racism – whereby populations, already characterised as undesirable and deficient, are subjected to a state-orchestrated public humiliation, while also being corralled into a formal two-tier citizenry based on ethnic background (with urban geography operating partially as a thinly veiled proxy).

In Sweden, the party once known for street-level neo-Nazi violence now entertains credible hopes of a 20 per cent electoral return. The sustained political presence of the Swedish Democrats (SD) has indeed rendered them the self-satisfied arbiters of the democratic discussion, the entire political class now at their mercy; Sweden, many months having lapsed since the 2018 election, remains at the time of writing unable to form a government, owing to a complete party-political paralysis about how to cope with the SD challenge. Austria, in its characteristically understated way, was in 2016 a whisker away from winning itself a far-right president, only to successfully include the far-right Freedom Party in the ruling government the next year.

In France, the Front National (now operating under the presumably less toxic name, National Rally), until recently a Holocaust-denying, largely *verboten* political outfit, threatens to claim executive power and has already engendered electoral havoc at the parliamentary and regional level. The party trades heavily in a demagoguery of Islam and immigration, often concomitantly, and has made a virtue of claiming that the ‘nation-state is back’ – an analytic point that escaped many sociologists but was seemingly perfectly well understood by Marine Le Pen. Similarly, in Germany, the first sustained challenge to the unfussy reign of Merkel was posed by Alternative for Germany, an uncompromisingly xenophobic, straight-talking new arrival to German politics. In Finland, a country whose immigrant and Muslim populations are very low, a quixotic party devoted to these very themes has become parliamentary kingmaker. In Hungary, the prime minister, a self-styled defender of Christendom, raised a razor-wire fence buttressed by water cannons along the country’s southern border with the Balkans, contravening any number of EU regulations regarding free movement but playing acutely well to a citizenry increasingly distressed by the brown and black ‘poison’ drifting out of the Mediterranean. And in Italy we have seen a man called Salvini, until recently presiding over an increasingly irrelevant separatist party (Lega Nord), establish himself as the country’s most prominent politician. Having restyled himself as an unapologetic nationalist, putting aside previous separatist pretensions, Salvini is now in all but name the most significant player in Italian politics – making particularly strong play of an uncompromising anti-immigration position that received major international coverage when Italy refused permission to humanitarian refugee rescue ships to dock at Italian ports.

These assorted rampages across the continent by avowedly populist new right outfits are indeed legion. They must *not*, however, be read in isolation. There is a prevailing analytic danger that the quickening march of nationalism is solely and exclusively attributed to these groups, absolving in turn the other, more established political and cultural players. Put simply, such a reading risks suggesting that new right groups operate in a vacuum of their own making, when, in actuality, they merely represent the coarser edge of formations already sanctioned by the established political parties themselves and the broader press cultures<sup>14</sup> and thinktank industries that sustain them – not least, the various centre-right governments that have

enjoyed an extended spell of power over the past decade. A nascent nationalist consensus across the centre-right was perhaps best attested to by the three most influential European leaders of the early 2010s (Cameron, Merkel and Sarkozy) all assuming a strident anti-multiculturalism position. This populist play to the ‘crises of multiculturalism’ narrative, expertly chronicled by Lentin and Titley in 2011, can retrospectively be remembered as merely a harbinger of nationalism’s full consolidation as the decisive contemporary arbiter of European electoral power.<sup>15</sup> There has been, in short, a continued oscillation over the last decade or so between the new right and what Richard Seymour succinctly captured as being ‘the soft racism of the hard centre’ – each doing the other’s work.

By drawing these preliminary emphases, I do not mean to exhaust the explanatory role of racialised outsiders when accounting for the rise of nationalist projects across the West; my purpose is simply to reconfirm the disproportionate importance of race (and as the far as the UK is concerned, imperial nostalgia) to any credible account of that project. As this book will periodically argue, complementary analyses, in explaining the rise of nationalism, would include an account of the prevailing post-welfare, ‘austere’ neoliberal consensus that provides the socio-economic context against which to situate the enhanced appeal of nationalist assertion;<sup>16</sup> they would include an account of the party-political *centrist* compact alongside the increased tendency of the EU towards opaque technocratic governance that jointly engineered substantial democratic deficits and attendant feelings of entrenched political exclusion; they would include a speculative attempt to map the emergent circuits of social media political communication that have allowed various, more rabidly populist-nationalist information campaigns to obtain a heightened historical intensity; and they would include an account of the broader fatigue with supposed liberal social equality commitments as propagated by outlets such as *Spiked* and the plethora of online Men’s Rights Activists (MRA)-inspired material that has nurtured a sense of pronounced victimhood and grievance, particularly among allegedly disaffected men.<sup>17</sup> But, significant themes as these no doubt are, a meaningful analysis would also certainly recognise the *central* role of racialised anti-minority assertions in anchoring contemporary European nationalisms.

From the brief scan of the European political moment just offered, we can slowly begin to glimpse the importance of nationalism in shaping the

contemporary, an electoral power that was, of course, realised in particularly profound ways during the 2016 US election. To quote the *New Yorker*, in the context of Trump's seemingly *carte blanche* and largely improvised political programme, 'voters are willing to tolerate [various seemingly unpopular personality details and political measures] in exchange for the rest of Trump's ethno-nationalist ideological agenda'.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, in the wake of Brexit and Trump, it seems banal to assert the contemporary importance of nationalism. Even *The Economist* pithily entitled its 19 November 2017 issue, 'The New Nationalism'.

This assertion does, however, remain necessary only because nationalism has not been afforded the social science attention that it warrants. Left to the already isolated field of race and racism sociology, mainstream social science, including its nominally critical theory traditions, has had until now impressively little regard for the nationalist ructions that are remaking the society it is putatively tasked with studying. Even more egregiously, when critical attention is given to the rising nationalist mood, sociologists and seasoned pundits alike tend towards a lazy economic reductionism. These accounts ascribe to nationalism some basic illusory properties that merely deflect or manage economic struggle, uncertainty and inequality. This frustratingly thin thesis seems to understand the fundamental allure of the nation as only being applicable to momentary crisis resolution and as temporarily deflecting more pressing questions about economic stagnation.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, nationalism is *not* entertained as being a force of modernity that exerts its own momentum, needs, desires, fears and anxieties which cannot be contained or understood solely through reference to material determinants.

### Beyond economic explanations

Economic factors are certainly integral to the emergence of this new nationalism, given that they undeniably cultivate certain nationalist desires. Hostility towards national governments' transfers to the European Union or through international aid, claims over the financial largesse extended to refugees and comparably 'recalcitrant' Others, or competition for the diminished and seemingly diminishing resources that insecure and low-skilled labour affords, all operate as grist to the nationalist mill. The fact that

nationalism has been emboldened at the very moment when economic inequalities are widening across advanced industrial nations and as economic deregulation and recession have engendered deeper senses of insecurity – which if not directly experienced is widely felt – cannot be a coincidence. Indeed, as Shatz argued in relation to the 2016 US presidential election, ‘Trump is inconceivable without the 2008 financial crisis.’<sup>20</sup> Inconceivable, that is, without the wider economic hardships and uncertainty resulting from deindustrialisation, outsourcing, rising living costs, the casualisation of labour and the depletion of public services and social security provisions. However, I argue – with Shatz – that such economic explanations only get us so far, and that in fact to see nationalism simply as epiphenomenal of economic factors misses the way in which nationalist appeals find resonance through both busts and booms and across stark economic divides. It may not be that the economic organises nationalism, but that ideas of nation itself shape how material forces are comprehended and responded to.

There are in turn three brief observations I would like to make here that help situate the economic in a manner that avoids attributing to it an exhaustive, reckless and/or misrepresented causality. First, despite regular intimations to the contrary, it is not just the ‘white working class’ that has experienced hardship as a result of the broader neoliberal consensus, most acutely experienced in the wake of the 2008 recession. In Britain, as elsewhere, minority ethnic groups remain disproportionately worse off across a range of indicators in the areas of employment, housing, health and poverty, and have been severely impacted by both the recession and subsequent state austerity. The play to class as being the preserve of white people is, therefore, at best naive, at worst, an incendiary racial nativism.<sup>21</sup> While it remains understandable that the economic hardship encountered by working-class people who happen to be white is presented as a contextualising factor vis-à-vis recent politics, this foregrounding needs to be sensitively handled, so as not to obscure the shared if not worse working-class penalties endured by many racialised minorities.

Second, the voter base for the new nationalist politics is not simply or exclusively this oft-invoked ‘white working class’. This nationalism is in fact more electorally reliant on the middle and lower middle classes, those who inhabit the provincial towns of Middle England, as well as capturing a not insignificant share of the affluent conservative vote – appealing here

to a shared hectoring around moral decay, multicultural excess and welfare dependency.<sup>22</sup> This important acknowledgement helps us better understand that it is not simply acute economic abjection that is fuelling these recent political turns. Needless to say, the appeal of new nationalism confounds traditional class distinctions and, for that matter, always has. A defining hallmark of fascism was, after all, its ability to rescue from the ruins of industrial exploitation and *fin-de-siècle* alienation an invigorating, putatively unifying ethnic ecology. Similarly, one simple context that immediately compromises the economic thesis regarding new nationalism is the case of Norway.<sup>23</sup> Norway has seen over the past decades the slow emergence of the very same nationalist political discourse and electoral capture that is now being rehearsed elsewhere. The reality that Norway famously enjoys some of the highest living standards in the world and has witnessed steady economic growth across the last thirty years, premised on its well-managed petro boom, seems to do nothing to dispel the nationalist anxieties around immigration, Muslims and multiculturalism that are definitive of the nationalist formation.

Third, some try to equate nationalist populisms with certain new left, anti-capitalist agitations – reading the nationalist rise as a misrecognised and/or deformed critique of contemporary neoliberalism, and constituting in turn a disjointed expression of solidarity against a global elite; a critique and yearning that is said to otherwise sit more naturally within the supposedly equally prominent left-wing agitations. If only. This wilfully optimistic reading of the political spectrum bundles the newly emboldened, often youth-driven leftist movements' *desire* for change with the *actual* change and brokerage of power already exercised by nationalist factions. This is therefore not the age of populisms *sui generis*, as is suggested by John Judis and others.<sup>24</sup> It is instead the age of *nationalist* populism. This adjectival specification is not a minor quarrel. It instead fundamentally alters how we, as analysts and critics, diagnose the present.

Only one brand of politics and mobilisation has successfully claimed the mantle of power – democratic, media (mainstream and digital) and otherwise. That brand is nationalism. Brexit belongs to the real, while left-wing movements such as Occupy and Momentum still remain essentially gestures of hope. The National Rally belongs to the general, the *Nuit debout* and *gilets jaunes* protests and Mélenchon to the particular. (Mélenchon is doubly

interesting here, as his subsequent attempt to obtain wider popular appeal has resulted in him pursuing at times a more explicitly nationalist position.) The People's Party and the Progress Party, both long-term Nordic stalwarts of xenophobic alarmism, are *in* government, not merely aspirants. (Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece represent powerful counter-examples but remain by my reckoning exceptions that prove the rule, and are also buffeted by historical and present circumstances that render both contexts substantially different to the broader northern European clustering, and the place of Britain in particular, that is the direct focus of this book.)

Closer to home, Theresa May did not try to secure her otherwise absent mandate as premier through an appeal to the virtues of class solidarity, scrutiny of capitalist alienation and an end to boom-and-bust crisis cycles. Rather more prosaically, May tried to shore up her legitimacy through an unambiguously nationalist interpretation of Brexit as having constituted a straightforward proxy referendum on immigration: her pilloried attempt at negotiating a Brexit deal boasted only one red line, this being the absolute end to free movement. Similarly, in her inaugural party conference speech as PM, May tried to cement this nation-making ploy through pointed appeals to 'putting the power of government squarely at the service of ordinary working-class people'. In claiming this platform for herself, she proceeded to excoriate the establishment: 'They find your patriotism distasteful, your concerns about immigration parochial, your views about crime illiberal, your attachment to your job security inconvenient.'<sup>25</sup> All these are different ways of conjuring the same normatively majoritarian constituency while affirming their putative concerns about immigrants and/or various racialised minorities. This broader positioning was a proactively nationalist gamble that – according to Kenneth Clarke, the resident dissident of the Conservative Party – would have made even Enoch Powell blush.<sup>26</sup>

### Which nationalism?

There is, however, an underlying validity to the argument that the contemporary populist form is not merely right-wing and conservative. Herein lies the distinctive analytic emphasis of my intervention, which accordingly constitutes the *second* observation upon which this opening argument

turns. Namely, it is not that populisms of all different constitutions are currently competing in a largely unresolved contest for cultural ascendancy. It is rather that new nationalist populism, as *the* ascendant form, absorbs and rearticulates a wide variety of political constitutions – constitutions that traverse, crudely put, the ‘Left–Liberal–Right’ spectrum. Put differently, much of what poses today as populism is in actuality just nationalism, but, importantly, nationalism’s current appeal and vitality lies precisely in its ability to draw upon an assortment of opposing ideological traditions, meanings and symbols.

A passing glance at the historical theorisation of the nation-state helps situate this important claim. As Hobsbawm and Ranger memorably clarified, nationalism hinges on the ‘invention of tradition’ that establishes a polity’s preferred historical bearing and its entrenching of what Anderson described as a ‘simultaneous temporality’ – a conception of peoplehood that ties the present to a particular imagining of the past but also the future.<sup>27</sup> These narrative mechanisms culminate in engendering a profound sense of a timeless ‘we’, a ‘deep horizontal comradeship’<sup>28</sup> that placates other social divisions and inculcates a continuous desire for cultural and political integrity – an ever-present but insatiable appetite for closure and wholeness.<sup>29</sup> The nation consequently offers modernity the fundamental lens through which it renders *community*, as the appeal to a shared entity of belonging beyond those whom we know and congregate with at any given moment. This fundamental sociological concern regarding communal membership, framed in classical sociology as the question of *Gesellschaft*, is therefore, when properly drawn vis-à-vis modernity, a concern with the nation.<sup>30</sup> No other modern social formation has been able to generate the communitarian taxonomy and feeling that is, in any historical context, so central to how a society manages and expresses its sociopolitical transactions and ambitions.

It is now certainly a truism, in the time after Anderson, Hobsbawm and Thompson, to assert the historicity of the nation, the idea of nation finding its proper expression via the waves of Romantic nationalism and the subsequent ‘mass society’, state-centralisation periods that succeeded it. This historical contingency of the nation is perhaps made most beguilingly apparent in Massimo d’Azeglio’s 1861 exhortation, as an ambivalent observer of Italian unification, that ‘we have made Italy, now we must make Italians’.<sup>31</sup>

Less well understood, outside of the shamefully neglected canons of post-colonial and anti-racist scholarship, is that this construction of the national ‘we’ is not in any sense benign. Rather, as scholars attuned to the nuances of racism’s centrality to colonial modernity have observed, nation-states do not simply reflect pre-existing framings of ethno-national membership.<sup>32</sup> It is in fact states that actively produce and entrench ideas of nation, conceptions of the national subject (what Balibar calls ‘fictive ethnicity’)<sup>33</sup> that are, in turn, necessarily *exclusionary*. To revisit an elementary structuralist observation, in the making of the nation, definitional emphasis is placed on who is *not* part of that nation. And crucially, this process of national self-definition through relational negation has always found ideas of ethno-race and broader civilisationist constructs of the ‘West and the rest’ to be its most instructive typology.<sup>34</sup> As Gilroy and Goldberg have regularly noted, that the European nation and ideas of race both began to find their proper definition at the same historical moment is no coincidence.<sup>35</sup> It is instead the fundamental constitutional interplay that the very premise of European modernity regarding its sense of community and peoplehood rested upon and continues to rest upon.

This brief theoretical digression regarding the historicisation of the nation – which in the next chapter will be expanded upon in much more detail – is necessary here only in order to clarify an understanding of nationalism’s relationship to the more general concern of political ideology. Simply put, the nation, which is at its plainest a constitution of the normative ‘we’, has no inevitable political complexion other than that of its own exclusionary ethno-racial desires. Contrary to the often assumed propinquity of the nationalist to the crudely pictured conservative, a more watchful analysis will note that nationalist sway at any given historical moment requires a particular kind of racial Othering that is able to assemble an ideologically disparate collage, comparable to what Solomos and Back have called, in the course of summarising George Mosse’s important commentary on racism’s elasticity, ‘a *scavenger ideology* which gains its power from its ability to pick out and utilise ideas and values from other sets of ideas and beliefs in specific socio-historical contexts’.<sup>36</sup>

I accordingly posit that any real reckoning with the current nationalist moment must better locate its mooring within very different and at times contradictory ideological clusters. This diffusion is in fact central to its

current triumph. This might be phrased even as the nationalist *overdetermination* particular to the present historical conjuncture. The ability of nationalist affirmation to find its *sense* amid contrasting ideological vocabularies and symbols plays a vital role in accounting for the intelligibility of contemporary nationalism to so many different factions and recesses constitutive of Britain's current political scene.

To give this claim a little more initial definition, of interest here is the ability of contemporary nationalist discourses to appropriate and occupy a number of prominent political platforms, each of which have had a substantial role in shaping the recent political history of western Europe. These multiple discursive heritages that have become susceptible to nationalist expression include:

- 1 The *liberal* – as the self-arrogated and ethnically weaponised European claim to values of tolerance, free speech, secularism, the rule of law, alongside the more indefinite sense of liberal civility and everyday etiquette.
- 2 The *conservative* – as the nostalgic appeal to the moral and aesthetic clarity of the provincial, the imperial and the rustic.
- 3 The *neoliberal* – as the symbolic premium placed on a moral distinction between the deserving, self-reliant and entrepreneurial capitalist self ('homo economicus') on the one hand, and, accordingly, the work-shy dependency of others.
- 4 The *communitarian left* – as the collective, as the welfare state, as the critique of market individualism, and as anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation sentiment.

Across these basic contours also lurk more finely tuned political movements and lexicons, not least the nominally feminist rhetoric of gender equality and sexual liberation, the conservationist feeling for and visualisation of bucolic environmentalism, and even certain speculations about ideal urban life – in terms of regeneration, leisure consumption and habitation. It is in turn these distinctly different and often contradictory ideological traditions and the manner in which they have all been made to bend to the service of nationalist imperatives that will be the focus of the chapters that follow in this book.

## Labour (the left) and contesting nationalism

Recognising this expansive ideological map accordingly prevents the all too convenient attribution of the current malaise to an allegedly vulgar, largely emotive rump of fear and bigotry. Instead, any attempt to resist nationalism must first involve properly addressing its sophisticated affinity to multiple ideological forms, some of which we mistakenly consider to be inured from such trends. Importantly, I am not simply arguing that all political repertoires are capable of racism: that is, the left too can be racist or the liberal too can be nationalist. This is already very well understood and I have no wish to rehearse such truths. Rather, I am merely positing that nationalism, in order to become ideologically overdetermined, requires all these various repertoires. And part of the resistance to this nationalist wave, as much as it involves a critique of the economic conditions that render populist nationalisms more likely, is also about clawing away at these ideological contradictions that comprise European nationalisms.

This argument also constitutes a particular reminder to those with left or left-of-centre leanings that nationalism cannot be opportunistically gamed for other political ends. Nationalism is itself the contemporary populist play – all else is merely marshalled in its service. Of course, as Maya Goodfellow comments, to realise a popular politics without appealing to the totems of anti-immigrant xeno-racism might seem a Sisyphean task.<sup>37</sup> But it is the challenge that must be reckoned with, as otherwise one merely gives further succour to the nationalist call, a call that might absorb other ideological positions but is ultimately promiscuous, only committed to its own ethno-racial exclusion and nativism.

It is within this context, and as the Corbyn movement started to find some serious momentum, that the observant Ash Sarkar despaired via Twitter, ‘I asked last year if it was possible to do leftist populism without nationalism, and Labour apparently cba [can’t be arsed] to even try.’<sup>38</sup> Sarkar’s frank frustration was warranted. There are increasingly vocal summons that ask the left, via Corbyn or otherwise, to bargain with the nationalist case. Thankfully, the dignified and unapologetically social democratic policy vision set out by Labour for the 2017 election did seem mostly to decline the nationalist invitation. Labour does, however, remain frustratingly silent, even conflicted, on actively rebuffing the anti-immigration

consensus. Relatedly, it remains largely non-committal on Brexit and the particular issue of migration that is most emblematic of the Brexit debate. But transposed to the context of this book's argument (the discussion of the left's relationship to nationalism becoming particularly prominent in the book's two final chapters), it is hoped that Labour can continue to perform credibly without emulating nationalist impulses. If it succeeds in doing so, it might then obtain the base and time to pursue a sustained spell of coherent and confident opposition that might in time allow for a political template to take root that constitutes a distinctive and substantial left-wing alternative to nationalist politics. Or seen inversely, it remains clear that a mangled attempt to ventriloquise nationalist motifs, as some of the current Labour Party and its commentariat are attempting, will only prove counter-productive. Doing so will only sow further confusion while still conceding relevant territory to those outfits, not least the established right, that already boast a well-defined anti-immigration and racialised law and order line. These outfits will accordingly always outmanoeuvre Labour if offered these terms.

Labour must then recognise that any attempt to recycle nationalism has become a fool's errand. Nationalism is not a viable vehicle towards other political ends, not least leftist collectivism. Nationalism is, in the final instance, primarily about its own exclusionary racisms – anything else is largely a convenient bedfellow co-opted to make its appeal more likely. Or, as was put analogously by Nesrine Malik, 'you cannot outflank the [nationalist] right by adopting its promises, that way you only end up as its handmaiden'.<sup>39</sup> This reflection is important. The deep affect of nationalism, once galvanised, is not easily reversed, diluted or repackaged. By working to its tune, it remains hopelessly naive to assume that one can 'strategically' opt back to a more orthodox left-wing programme, should that even be the ultimate intention. Any friend of the left who wishes to realise a politics that finally escapes the demands of nation would do well to remember this.

### The structure of this book

The far-ranging and cacophonous ideological scope that characterises contemporary nationalist thinking requires both recognition and theorisation – an understanding of how multiple major political rationalities simultaneously

converge around the idea and politics of nation. Put differently, I posit in this book that a comprehensive contemporary analysis of new nationalism must acknowledge the ideological multiplicity animating it and the deeply hostile whiteness that suffuses much of this expansive terrain.

Any such understanding of the wider ideological underpinnings of new nationalism also allows us to repudiate the simplistic complacencies currently prevalent among many commentators about what nationalism is. Nationalist populism is not just a base appeal to fear and hatred, lacking any broader conceptual and affective loading.<sup>40</sup> This book will instead make apparent the complicity of multiple political rationalities in conceptually *anchoring* and symbolically *sustaining* the nationalist wave. Recognising this expansive ideological map accordingly prevents the convenient attribution of the current nationalist malaise to a pool of unreconstructed racists, whose only impulse is one of base fear and parody parochialism. Instead, any attempt to resist nationalism must first properly address its sophisticated affinity to multiple ideological forms, some of which – such as various leftist, feminist and liberal political repertoires – are mistakenly seen as being largely inured from such trends. Conversely, any attempt to draw out a reading of ideological multiplicity also necessitates commentary and analysis of the respective ideological platforms themselves. Hence this book, as much as it purports to constitute a reckoning with new nationalism, is also about the respective ideological threads relevant to contemporary Western life – not least, classical value liberalism, left socialism and/or social democratic ideals regarding the welfare state, neoliberalism and conservatism. For instance, one of the key ambitions of this book is to disentangle conservatism from neoliberalism, a conflation that is otherwise endemic to contemporary critical analysis.

A cultural-studies-inspired analysis of ideology proves to be particularly useful for working through the political multiplicity that contemporary nationalism comprises, a theoretical tradition steered magisterially by Stuart Hall and those who worked around and after him. Of these later theorists, a particular interest arises for me in the analysis offered by Wendy Brown on the complex and ostensibly unlikely intertwining of neoliberalism with neoconservatism in American political culture. Brown, in the course of her exposition, makes a number of highly helpful clarifications that she sources in the Hallsian reading of ideology.<sup>41</sup> First, she observes that it

might be best to see ideology as ‘political rationality’, insofar as ideologies bestow on the public and its different fragments a particular but active way of *thinking* about the world around it. Or, as follows the oft-circulated definition of ideology offered by Hall himself: ‘By ideology I mean the mental frameworks – the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation – which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, figure out and render intelligible the way society works.’<sup>42</sup> This is a salutary insight central to my own book’s argumentative emphasis. In terms of considering the contemporary nationalist capture of the political, I am interested in how the different ideological traditions it sources offer denizens a whole assortment of symbols, values and rationales with which to think through. Hereby, nationalism’s contempt for the racialised minority and/or the racialised foreigner cannot be reduced to some derivative notion of ideological deception, but rather must be read as being *actively affirmed* through the conceptual tools and symbolic repertoires available. It becomes, in short, the *sense-making* schema via which we reckon and respond to our social and political horizons. This process of making sense (thinking) therefore captures an understanding of ideology that goes beyond ideas of a passive and impressionable subject, but instead incorporates a whole circuit of desires, anxieties and overlapping political solutions that the subject actively navigates.

Relatedly, Brown reminds us that any significant historical moment is best understood in terms of how it grafts and cobbles together very different traditions. A ‘dreamwork’, Hall’s coinage (via Freud) for how all ideology rests on setting a fantastical horizon against which it orients itself, is not ‘monological’ or ‘coherent’.<sup>43</sup> On the contrary, it is most efficient when multiple, often contradictory, traditions manage to converge around it. It is in this manner that a conjuncture can become overdetermined towards a particular political orientation, whereby many different political tendencies all become susceptible to the same resolution – in our case, the nationalist resolutions that aspire to stymie, defuse, obstruct or exclude the relevant minority communities (e.g. Muslims), their foreign equivalents (e.g. Middle Eastern refugees) and/or their alleged facilitators/enablers (e.g. the liberal establishment). The rest of this book then seeks to map these multiple, contradictory traditions, interrogating the various formations through which contemporary nationalisms are advanced – specifically focusing on

Britain, but also considering other European discourses, a broader regional context within which the British case is no exception.

The opening chapter offers a wide-ranging picture of the different theoretical accounts relevant to addressing nationalism. I reprise here the various canonical debates over how the nation-state emerged as a concrete historical force. In so doing, particular clarifications about how best to understand the constitutive elements of nationalism will be offered. This argument will involve, among other things, a reappraisal of the early modern circumstances germane to the formalisation of the nation-state; it will distinguish the idea of nation from the politics of nationalism; it will more properly define the terms by which nationalism is to be understood by its specifically *exclusionary* mechanisms; and it will situate the colonial context within which the nation-state as an idea and practice became fundamentally imbued with meanings of race.

Chapter 2 will briefly repudiate the increasingly common attempts to read contemporary politics through the lens of populism. It will be argued that a notion of populism, if overstated, risks analytically obscuring the racial nationalisms that in fact underlie any such populist politics. The notion of ‘progressive nationalisms’, as often attributed to certain trends within contemporary Catalonia and Scotland, will also be critically addressed here. Having established these two clarifications, as regards populism and progressive nationalism, the following chapters will substantively situate contemporary nationalist discourse within the respective and contrasting political traditions that it calls upon.

Chapter 3 explores the assertion of ‘muscular liberalism’ and civic nationalism. A sustained trend in academic political discourse over the last two decades, as led by figures such as Ignatieff and Habermas, contended that a national community need not be demarcated by its ethnic origins but by its civic, liberal principles (what is sometimes called the ‘post-ethnic’ nation or ‘constitutional patriotism’). That is to say, it was asserted that what determined an inclusive European polity was its adherence to liberal and democratic principles. While this did open certain interesting progressive possibilities regarding visualisations of the democratic polity, it is also apparent that an aggressively white, anti-minority nationalism has been very successful in publicly capturing this liberal position and the broader legacy of Orientalist civilisationism that sits within such affirmations. An anecdotal

primer of this capture was evident in the then Prime Minister David Cameron's notorious call for a 'muscular liberalism' in the context, and this is important, of a speech on Muslims, terrorism and integration – signalling how many ideas of liberal virtue become ethnically coded during the course of centrist populist demagoguery. More broadly speaking, it is important to consider here the intensity with which many ethnic minorities are popularly presented as lacking the cultural disposition to assume these prized liberal virtues, virtues that are foregrounded as constitutive of the national self.

The argument of Arun Kundnani and his concept of 'values racism' is also helpful here, certainly in relation to liberal demagoguery vis-à-vis European Muslims.<sup>44</sup> This is the basic postulation that Muslim culture is said to be uniquely adversarial to a liberal value base, the base that defines the nation. The opportunistic recourse to certain putatively feminist themes regarding gender and sexuality in propagating an ethnically aggressive civic nationalism becomes a uniquely telling site of analysis here in terms of scoping the full, sophisticated reach of a racialised liberal nationalism, particularly in relation to the public demagoguery around European Muslims. Most pertinently, in the British context, Gargi Bhattacharyya's *Dangerous Brown Men* constitutes a particularly generative opening deconstruction of this densely knotted political terrain.<sup>45</sup> Sara Farris's concept of 'femonationalism' also offers a particularly helpful recent reworking of some of these themes.<sup>46</sup>

Such 'faux-feminist'<sup>47</sup> positioning also becomes allied to wider understandings of a Muslim assault, under the auspices of multiculturalism's governmental hold, on consecrated liberal values – not least, a particularly disingenuous weaponisation of free speech and secularism.<sup>48</sup> The chapter will accordingly assert that what ultimately materialises here is a particular kind of self-satisfied liberalism, one that is expertly steered by *The Times* and other such bastions of Middle England political propriety – an aggrandising and racially marked liberal civilisationism that in turn does a great deal of work in terms of how nationalism attains a degree of popular validity, particularly in terms of its attractiveness to certain middle-class constituencies.

Chapter 4 examines more traditional, conservative appeals to racialised notions of blood, territory, purity and tradition as a means of reclaiming the nation. Popularly seen as the direct antonym of a liberal position, the conservative flank of contemporary nationalist assertion is perhaps the most

obvious to parse. I explore here a set of conservative nostalgias – a pastoral and imperial nostalgia, or what Gilroy famously called ‘postcolonial melancholia’ – that has become particularly pervasive of late.<sup>49</sup> These nostalgias are seen, for instance, through the rehabilitation of monarchy and its recurring spectacles of reproduction and weddings; the revival of Edwardian and interwar period drama; the Help for Heroes campaign in terms of how it relates to the valorisation of the soldier both past and present; and also the all too explicable popularity of the television programme *Countryfile* and other cultural phenomena that sponsor a similarly provincial ideal. All these instances speak to a conservative cultural nostalgia and the deeply seated imperial mythology that underpins it. It is a nostalgic formation that remembers greatness and a genteel whiteness necessary for that very greatness.

However, what is often elided or misunderstood in existing analysis of conservative nostalgia is that much of this commentary and cultural performance does in fact pivot off a critique of unbridled free-market capitalism. This critique is often expressed via a conservationist, pastoral, Christianist and/or culturally elitist mould. It becomes necessary therefore to disentangle this particular formulation of nationalist desire from neoliberalism, a line of thought that it is often but wrongly bundled together with. Doing so helps capture another constituency and tradition, significant as it is, in the broader flurry of voices that animate the nationalist cry.

Chapter 5 examines how neoliberalism, through its recourse to discourses of meritocracy, entrepreneurial self and individual will, alongside its exaltation of a ‘points-system’ approach to the ills of immigration, engineers its own unique rendition of the nationalist crisis. A traditional concern of the neoliberal right posits that a market-society ideal is hampered by cultures of welfare dependency and the absence of individual responsibility. This neoliberal position individualises outcomes of success and failure, muting in turn issues of structure and access. But, again, important questions arise regarding the imperative of this neoliberal frame to also racialise conceptions of failure, dependency and national crisis. It is imperative to understand here that neoliberalism is not only an economic or legislative programme but that it is also fundamentally a cultural and moral programme. So while it is on one level quite obviously about the retreat of the redistributive and interventionist state in favour of the market and its internal mechanisms, it is also a cultural category that foregrounds particular

value sets and motifs, including the modelling of the ideal individual as the aspirational, responsabilised, self-reliant subject.

This modelling of nation and enterprise generates a particular anxiety as regards immigration; an anxiety that can only be resolved through a particularly aggressive ‘points-system’-led streamlining of how migration into the country is to be managed. It is also the case that the symbolic mediation of these ideals draws upon established racial representational frames in asserting who is *not* the ideal neoliberal subject – for example, the black ‘welfare queen’, the lazy, deceitful ‘immigrant’ leeching on the largesse of the welfare state, or the ‘Muslim’ denizen and her unproductive proclivity for family, religion and custom. These are what we might call the racialised subjects of the neoliberal. Indeed, even when some white working-class figures are brought into the fold of a general capitalist shaming, they are often judged by their proximity to the pathology of blackness. An obvious but nonetheless telling instance was when the ubiquitous Tudor historian David Starkey claimed in the wake of the 2011 riots that the ‘whites have become black’.<sup>50</sup> Or simply consider the racial implications of the term ‘white trash’ or consider why the term ‘chav’ is seen as the preserve of poor white people – signalling a reaffirmation of whiteness, when properly realised, as the marker of neoliberal success.

Similarly, the neoliberal imperative’s prizing of urban consumerism, and the remaking of cities and their inner cores as havens of experience shopping,<sup>51</sup> also bring about a series of racialised anxieties, whereby certain bodies, languages and tastes become antithetical to the ideal consumer space and, in turn, the ideal consumer citizen.<sup>52</sup> These bodies become repulsive and disruptive to pleasurable consumption, adding a further significant layer to how the neoliberal rallies a particular anxiety about the outsider, the new migrant, and the urban poor more broadly. Put bluntly, if Roma people show up on your carefully curated consumer street, it poses a challenge to neoliberal, hipster aesthetics.

Moving accordingly to the converse political flank, the final substantive chapter examines how amid the historical advance of the neoliberal orthodoxy, an influential counter in 1990s public commentary was the communitarian position – a left-driven critique of the increased normalisation of the market society, globalisation and its attendant neoliberal individualism. It was argued that an altruistic, progressive society that might

operate beyond the terms of solipsistic self-reliance and provide meaningful solidaristic reference points for its polity requires a common community bond. Considerable emphasis was placed here on the ‘thick affective ties’ (as opposed to the ‘thin abstract altruism’ of humanism and/or cosmopolitanism)<sup>53</sup> necessary for a defence of a redistributive welfare state ideal.

However, this line of argument did not merely entail that a sense of the public good was unviable without a sense of community to undergird it, but, rather, that it was only via the realisation of *ethno-national* community that this very idea of the ethical, as being accountable to something beyond oneself, could materialise. Within this context, it is vital to observe how this communitarian critique of global capitalism’s excesses is straightforwardly appropriated by nativist discourses. For instance, there is increased talk of how a defence of the welfare state is only possible if we can rekindle an idea of a unitary ethnic community. The emergence of a tendency called Blue Labour, a communitarian school within the pre-Corbyn Labour Party, and also the general ubiquity of David Goodhart’s writing and political influence all speak to this ideal of ethnic homogeneity. Goodhart’s famous ‘Too Diverse?’ paper was, I contend, particularly formative for a whole spate of nationalist left-leaning commentary. I argue in turn that this putatively progressive understanding of community, as a critique of market individualism, has been reduced in prominent public analysis to a concern with normative *ethno-national* community. Indeed, it is interesting here that the putatively far-right parties across Europe exhibit a very assertive but racially coded defence of the welfare state, workers’ rights and collective solidarity, a defence that is presented as a central plank of their nationalist aspirations. This move is now finding some qualified rearticulation among certain new left parties, not least the high-profile breakaway attempt in Germany to launch a left party led by Sahra Wagenknecht that intends to more formally assert an anti-immigration position.<sup>54</sup>

This nationalist frame has obtained particular ubiquity in Britain in the wake of the Brexit referendum, whereby numerous public intellectuals have centred their analysis on the notion of a ‘left behind’.<sup>55</sup> This constituency is made to figure prominently across many of the above ideological frames, not least the populist left platform. The left behind alludes to a white working class that is understood as uniquely marginalised, and looks, accordingly, to rehabilitate certain anti-migrant and anti-minority attitudes that

are discursively attributed to this constituency. An extensive matrix of populist left-wing motifs – for example, anti-establishment, anti-metropolitan elite, anti-globalisation – is in turn folded into a much broader, symbolically aggressive nationalist attachment to a notion of authentic white working-class consciousness and history. Herein, in unpacking the left formations that have become susceptible to contemporary nationalist articulation, particular critical attentiveness must be given to how this ‘left behind’ framing of the white working class manifests itself, and the ideological work it is called upon to perform.

My conclusion advances a few notes on how resistance to the new nationalist wave would in part involve prising open these ideological contradictions as they sit within the nationalist position. The chapter reserves its primary attention, however, for the alternative sociocultural energies coursing through Britain that, if formally harnessed, offer a ready-made platform to check and subvert the long march of nationalism. A particular emphasis is inevitably devoted here to the Corbyn left position, warts and all. This concluding chapter is accordingly where this book’s own political orientation is worn most publicly. It is an orientation that believes, as a point of departure but also of faith, that it is the organised left that is best-placed, of the respective ideological traditions discussed, to put a more forceful anti-nationalist political project into play.

Complementary attention will be given to the theme of ‘everyday multicultural’ as an important reference point: an interactive and expressive circuit that, if properly harnessed, can do much of the symbolic but also practical work relevant to the shaping of a popular but substantially anti-nationalist popular collectivism. ‘Everyday multicultural’ refers to the highly casual, nigh banal, interactive practices that emerge in spaces characterised by ethnic and other diversities, practices that undemonstratively cultivate dispositions less prone to nationalisms and other forms of overtly communitarian claim-making on space, culture and politics. It is not that the people living in such areas, generally working- or lower middle-class, are any less likely to assert identifications as premised on ethnic and racial difference. It is only that such myriad identifications alongside the complementary iterations of migration in and out of a particular space become normalised as being a given and natural feature of social life. In the habituation of such features of shared space and interaction, many people, including the many white

people who call such places home, increasingly find the political appeal to nation to be summarily anachronistic, uninteresting and, frankly, wrong. The cultural and political energies that flow accordingly from such everyday practices offer a very useful and underappreciated indication of how an alternative, post-national popular politics might be envisaged as well as pursued.

This conclusion will also engage certain empirical themes relevant to an account of nationalism's rise that this book has otherwise not addressed at any great length – not least, the role of social media and the related phenomena of what is called the alt-right, the particular parallel role of a male resentment culture, and also the more explicitly *global* dimensions of nationalism's newfound confidence.

### A note on style and method

I aspire here for a mostly generalist and perhaps even lively mode of writing and argument – one that might invite the general reader disposed to critical cultural commentary on the one hand, while still being worthwhile for the academic specialist of nation, race and ideology on the other. This might ultimately prove to be a hopeless ambition for which I lack the required skill, but it is an ambition that I have nonetheless tried to pursue. There are certainly moments when a slightly heavier theoretical style does prove necessary – for this, I apologise. But such moments are, I believe, mercifully infrequent. My penchant for long sentences is, however, an affliction that I cannot shake off and for which there is seemingly no cure. But to quote from the ever-wonderful mission statement of the ever-giving magazine *Salvage*: '[We] do not believe the first, last and only word with regard to prose style was passed down on a stone tablet by Orwell in one overrated essay.' To always eschew complex language in the interests of clarity and simplicity is not necessarily a virtue and not necessarily consistent with the aspiration to provide sufficiently searching argumentation.

Relatedly, in order to ensure a more engaging style that might elicit enough moments of interest to the reader, because moments are all that really happen in text, I wish to position this work within a more avowedly essayistic tradition. Easier said than done, yes, but it is a tradition that I find, if done well, to be the most generative of the approaches available to

an academic writer. One implication of this approach is that I will not be engaging this wider discursive field and political commentary in a *systematic* manner. I will instead be *folding in* select instances of popular discursive output in the course of mapping and commenting on the respective ideological forms that simultaneously comprise the contemporary nationalist position. This 'folding in' is certainly impressionistic, whereby such output will not be intricately weighted or neatly tabulated. My discussion throughout the following chapters will instead centre on various pieces of public commentary as well as political and cultural events that are noteworthy by their prominence, influence, novelty and/or ideological complexity.

It is ultimately up to the reader to find the ideological impressions that I put forth here to be a reliable and familiar account of the world of ideas that they too encounter. Sadly though, this is not a given. Some will likely find in this book an unrecognisable, all too distorted reading of the broader public conversation that currently prevails. Put differently, this book is primarily argumentative, not descriptive. That is not to say that it is the work of a polemicist. But it is an argument that will trade on summoning a realm of ideas that I believe to be apparent; I therefore cannot guarantee that everybody else will be in agreement that this is in fact the world that we currently share.