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Here, there and everywhere: nationalism after Brexit

Adrian Favell
University of Leeds

Sivamohan Valluvan's *The Clamour of Nationalism* arrives with perfect timing. After a referendum in which the defining moment one week before the vote was the "Breaking Point" — an abusive, heavily racialised poster of asylum seekers put up by UKIP leader Nigel Farage, on the same day a pro-refugee Labour MP, Jo Cox, was assassinated on the streets of West Yorkshire — it is a book which offers many of the post-Brexit keys necessary to unpicking the resurgent, apparently all encompassing nationalism that has seized British politics and largely extinguished optimistic multi-ethnic narratives of its future (Favell 2020). Building on the legacy of Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy, as well as many other related critical cultural, race and decolonial theorists, Valluvan's book is an elegant, long, and purposively sinewy diagnosis of what sociologist Satnam Virdee describes as "the snarling vine" of the nation (p.184): how a protean ideology of nationalism has successfully wound its way through the mainstream politics of the right and the left in the UK, laying the ideational foundations for Leave's victory, and the rise of Boris Johnson to power.

　　　It is worth mentioning a couple of things which this book is not. Firstly, it is not a tidy piece of REF-oriented output: the required, well practiced, packaged grind of sober "originality", "significance" and "rigour" stipulated by the

sociology-by-committee that rules the discipline in British universities today. *The Clamour of Nationalism* is, rather, a heady mix of speculative essay, intellectual journalism, political diagnosis, and deep theory, propelled by a dense gauze of wide-ranging, deep gouging, references. It is articulate, often brilliantly incisive, suggestive rather than conclusive in its evidentiary base. Personally, I find value that there are still younger scholars with the range and erudition to pull off such a work — and a visionary University Press ready to support them.

Secondly, although Valluvan frequently gestures at it, this is not an international analysis of nationalist politics, not even really a book about Western Europe, despite the many cross-national observations it drops in. As he admits in one of the book's oddly frequent moments of self-questioning, the framework does not capture much of the post-democratic "strongman" nationalism thriving in say India, China, Russia or Turkey today (even if this is the template for Boris Johnson); and I would argue the author would struggle to have very much to say in detail about contemporary nationalist populism in mainland Europe, excepting perhaps Sweden where he has done work. This need not be seen as a big criticism in a book that is already hugely ambitious in its analysis of British politics. Rather, it would be an invitation to develop a suitably reflexive comparative or comparativist methodology than might find a way of combining systematic cross-national observation, with the extraordinary rich texture of insights built out of the familiar vocabulary of British ethnic and racial theory. It has to be said, this (over-confident) theoretical and methodological insularity, is a familiar limitation of much ethnic and racial studies in Britain, where it has been bound up with reproducing Anglo-centric particularities on race and diversity, and stuck with an anti-positivist, essentially literary-theory based epistemology — the other, less fortunate, legacy of Hall, Gilroy et al.

So this is, rather, emphatically I would say, a book for and about Britain, underlined by a final chapter, which engages constructively with the politics of Corbyn's Labour Party, exploring its prospects of developing an effective counter-narrative to the all triumphant "numbing misery that is contemporary nationalist politics" (p.viii) in our benighted Island-Nation. Valluvan carefully circumscribes his analysis, so that it is not contingent on the outcome of any particular election. Rather, the nationalism he describes in British politics is resilient and ideologically malleable, the apotheosis of our modernity, no less, in that it is, as a political form, the ultimate modern expression of sovereignty and peoplehood, and therefore set fair, not to wither — certainly not in the face of globalisation or multiculturalism — but, rather, only strengthen, as it becomes "the political thesis that will be definitive of the coming and extended post-neo-liberal era" (p.183).

On this, I agree. Nationalism is here to stay. And the case Valluvan makes for racism and the racialisation of "ethnic communities, domestic or foreign" as the "common thread" (p.156) in this triumph is certainly hard to question as we pick up the pieces of Brexit. The fatal waltz of racism and nationalism he narrates in the analysis of British mainstream politics, is indeed the hallmark of insights afforded by the increasingly rich and pertinent Hall/Gilroy legacy. Valluvan spends a lot of time carefully restating the vital insights of Stuart Hall, particularly on the rise of Thatcher (especially 1979's "The Great Moving Right Show" and his "New Times" analysis of Thatcherism), as well as the knock out combination of Paul Gilroy's *'Aint no Black...* and *After Empire*, talking us through

the nostalgic delusions of "post-colonial melancholy" about class and race in Britain. Valluvan draws strength from a plethora of other, related thinkers, stretching from Césaire on colonialism and Grosrichard on orientalism, to — among many others playing a vital walk-on part — David Theo Goldberg, Gargi Bhattacharrya, Gurminder Bhambra, Sharon Zukin, Michael Keith, and Alana Lentin. He keeps the theory light touch, which sits mostly just as a structural undergirding in the heavily referenced background, although the turn to Hannah Arendt at one point is particularly telling. Arendt — especially her *Origins of Totalitarianism* — has rightly enjoyed a resurrection in recent years, and here is used to suggest why so many Marxisms and Post-Marxisms are never quite adequate in capturing the dynamic of cultural closure and exclusion inherent in nationalism as an ideology, revealed in its necessary categorisation of the "foreigner" as an outsider. For sure, in the European colonial context, this is inevitably along the lines of race and ethnicity. But this does not exhaust fascism's ability to combine national populism and cross-class and potentially cross-ethnic appeal, underlining where the contemporary rightward move finds its greatest strength. It is also why nationalism as modernity's perfected form, is not just about revived or "retrotopian" nostalgia for lost *gemeinschaft* or ethno-cultural purity, but can perfectly well take forms compatible with a globalising neo-liberalism, or even a high minded universalist liberalism in its more muscular secular varieties. Civic nationalism certainly became an ascendant ideology in the 2000s, under nominally left wing governments. Multiculturalism was eclipsed long before the present Conservative roll back, but not multi-racial diversity as such. This suggests why nationalism will continue to be resilient, even as post-Brexit, the nation juggles its little Englander impulses with the necessary reality of a highly globalised multi-ethnic diversity. The clue is what has happened to "immigration" amidst all this. Valluvan like others identifies the production of an exclusionary bordering around "immigrants" and "immigration" as the defining common feature of the still racialised neo-nationalisms, right or left, that now fill British politics.

The substantive central chapters offer a cumulative analysis of the various dimensions of this nationalism as it has metamorphosised across the political spectrum. On the right, Valluvan very usefully parses traditional conservatism from all-encompassing, crude critiques of "neo-liberalism". In a sense, revealing the white English agenda of Churchillian nostalgia and sloganeering, or the gung-ho globalist Empire 2:0 pretentious of the right wing of the Conservative Party, is all too easy meat. There would not be so much to add to legacy of Hill and Gilroy if the book stopped there. Later chapters however extend the critique to centrist liberals and the left.

"Neo-liberalism" was of course as much a hallmark of New Labour as the Coalition that followed. In this sense, the "hostile environment" coined by Theresa May, was well established in the selective immigration policies and national integrationist cant of New Labour before it. The state-sanctioned "roll out" neo-liberalism identified by Jamie Peck and practiced in Britain for two decades is correctly identified as built on the (usually racial) stratification and differentiation of "good" and "bad" or "wanted" and "unwanted" immigrants, selected by a performative and confident national economy. In pages quite close to the hybrid Marxist Foucauldianism of Mezzadra and Neilson's *Border as Method, or, The Multiplication of Labor* (2013), Valluvan diagnoses this common

thread in British immigration politics post-2000. On this, a highly productive and sympathetic discussion might be had with Bridget Anderson, whose *Us and Them: The Dangerous Politics of Immigration Control* (2013) offers many similar, but technically better grounded, insights. Here, however, one might well ask where the sources of the "conviviality" and "everyday multiculture" Valluvan turns to in the conclusion might lie, if they are to be linked in some ways to Britain's remarkably porous migrant diversity in recent years, particular the irregularity and (apparent) lack of control of (some) of these mobilities. Marxists, of course, have an answer: de Genova's (2010) withering insight after Negri and Agamben, that irregular migration is sustained by the system as a "deportation regime", in which irregulars are all the better exploitable if they are stuck in precarious, irregular statuses. But here, more liberal cosmopolitan writers would object, suggesting that migration and mobilities often exceed the encompassing powers of the state or nation to bind their unruly, bottom up, transformation of society. In fact, the everyday multiculture that Valluvan eventually identifies as the one line of de-nationalising hope in a multi-ethnic Britain, is in fact given its hybrid transformational power not by the (allegedly unique) British context, but by the self-evidently transnational and diasporic dimensions of the communities found (mostly) in its larger cities. Discussion of transnationalism and diaspora is absent from the book: an oddity, given its debt to Stuart Hall. This was the de-nationalising power first identified in policy terms by the 2000 *Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* (Parekh 2000), the landmark progressive policy reflection in which Hall was a key thinker — a report first trashed as treacherous by the Tory press, and then dumped by New Labour, as it changed tack towards the new muscular neo-nationalism of later years. Britain may, despite Brexit, remain a fertile space for everyday multiculture, but will we need more than carnival-like, multi-racial Olympics opening ceremony celebrations, if we are to see the de-nationalisation of the planet, or do anything about the massive global inequalities inscribed by (British) nationality because of the birthright lottery. As it is, Valluvan makes the disappointing choice in an almost wholly negative work to only devote about 5-6 pages to positive antidotes to nationalism in the UK, associated hopefully with the rise of Jeremy Corbyn and Momentum. Evoking the potential of young voters, the Grenfell tragedy, and grime — that 2017 moment — all now sounds a little idealistic. A couple of other sections, which might have been edited out, also fail to sustain the case. The sections on the rise of social media, and on Scottish and Catalan nationalism as (illusory) counter narratives, are too fleeting. And, in another human geography inspired excursus into the dubious fetishisation of the inner city by hipster gentrification, we get the clear point about its racialised nature (bell hooks describing ethnic gourmet food as "eating the Other"), but not what it has to do with nationalism. Its a flippant point, for sure, but didn't the hipsters in multi-racial Hackney and Lambeth vote overwhelmingly to Remain?

Without doubt, the most potent chapter is the deep and disturbing take down of pseudo-Marxist style romanticisations of the "left behind" "white working class", that have led far too many on the Left — one thinks especially of the hapless Ed Miliband, whose head was turned by the dubious "Blue Labour" philosophy of Maurice Glasman — to embrace anti-immigrant and retro-communitarian rhetoric, not much more palatable in its racialised nationalism than the muscular liberalism of the centre or neo-colonialism on the right.

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Valluvan echoes Gilroy in showing how these tendencies among "English" socialists are rooted in the romanticism of E.P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawn, and before them (of course) the ubiquitous George Orwell. Boris Johnson and his Mephistophelean advisor Dominic Cummings, have made great use of Orwell's "'opeless fantasy" that "if there is hope, it lies with the Proles". Valluvan digs deeply into historical sociology of the colonial origins of the British welfare state — the source of protecting white British worker/soldiers from the indolence of non-white colonial subjects — and into the complexities of Marxist theory coming to terms with culture through the Frankfurt School. In passing, he nails why the likes of pseudo-left public intellectuals like David Goodhart and Paul Collier are wolves in union leader sheepskin coats, offering the foundations for how part of the Brexit-voting Labour party was captured (something which actually included Corbyn), only to then deliver Britain and many "working class" votes to the Churchillian pastiche of Boris Johnson. Corbyn's internationalist credentials are undoubted, but it is does need to be recognised that he was quite substantially responsible for the mess the UK got into with EU membership, willing to appease the fictitious white working class vote, in order to pursue a (nationalist) socialist utopia. The chapter is a splendid primer on the thoroughly mixed up "race and class" origins of Brexit, although a lot more thinking in this line can now be cited (see especially Benson 2019).

One kind of nationalism in Britain, however, is largely missing in Valluvan's otherwise exhaustive sweep — the most difficult, most deeply rooted and pervasive one, one that will no doubt return again some sunny day. It is of course, the one celebrated at the Olympics opening in 2012, the multi-ethnic, post-colonial fantasy of a truly multi-racial Great Britain — that sounds a little like Valluvan's everyday rhapsody of the final pages — and was at least half of the message of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain in 2000, that was itself unsure whether it came to bury the nation or celebrate its future (largely due to the influence of the staunchly nationalist Tariq Modood). A unionist multiculturalism-in-one-nation, as Modood defended, was in fact the dominant cross-party philosophy until the eventual break up of this unitary, but diverse, Britain heralded by the new migrations, super-diversity and European free movements of the 1990s and 2000s. Back on the Island-Nation, sailing out somewhere to mid-Atlantic, there will be a post-Brexit hard sell of this vision again, however inappropriate or desperate: the marketing, *ad nauseum*, of how "great" Cool Britannia still is. It is not at all clear the Left are immune to this — especially since they invented it. After all, the Blonde Bombshell Boris Johnson claims Turkish ancestry, and two of the key figures of his loud and gaudy restoration, have been the Pakistani-British Sajid Javid and Anglo-Indian Priti Patel. Less blatant colonial versions than theirs could be imagined. One thinks of the "national conversation" on "integration" by Sunder Katwala's very successful British Future organisation, promoting a nationalism no more benign on closer examination. As Theresa May might say, Brexit means Brexit, and nationalism is nationalism, even when it has a grime soundtrack.

A less sanguine Foucauldian insight, therefore, might be that the most powerful nationalism will be the one *most* emancipated from its colonial and colonising conditioning: a *multi-racial* nationalism, wrapped in a de-colonial Union Jack — perhaps something like the famous blackened Union Jack cover of Gilroy's most famous book. To move forward, I would suggest, critical cultural

and race theory needs to also think critically about the limitations of the post-colonial theory and its heroes/heroines whom it venerates and reproduces almost uncritically (from Fanon and Césaire, via Hall and Gilroy, to Mbembe, Spivak and Hill Collins). It also needs to be noted somewhere that it is very likely those ostensibly "white" though still potentially racialised British residents — the fastest growing demographic in the country , "White-Other", many of whom are unlucky EU nationals forced to become part of the "British future" after Brexit — who may play the most vital role in the de-nationalising aspiration of the "everyday multiculture" in Britain we all want to celebrate. On this point, there remain real limitations with the familiar critical race studies canon that Valluvan builds upon, notably the challenge of these aspects of super-diversity in Britain to well worn theoretical tropes of "Black" and post-colonial politics. The pointlessly internecine critique of super-diversity by many of Valluvan's colleagues in British critical race studies is yet one (more) hatchet on the Left that needs to buried.

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