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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:
Dunning, M., & Hughes, J. (2020). Power, Habitus, and National Character: The Figurational Dynamics of Brexit. *Historical Social Research*, *45*(1), 262-291. https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.262-291

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Power, Habitus, and National Character: The Figurational Dynamics of Brexit

Michael Dunning & Jason Hughes *

Abstract: *»Macht, Habitus und Nationalcharakter: Die Figurations-Dynamik des Brexits«*. Most explanations that have sought to understand the "causes" of Brexit have tended to focus on the idea of a "left-behind" white working class who were exercising a protest against a liberal elite. Other approaches have cited the roles played by a broader demographic in Britain, or have identified "cleavages" between "nationalist" and "cosmopolitan" normative codes. However, such approaches typically fail to address the complexities of longer-term social processes which have been fundamental to Brexit. The analytical models used to explain these cleavages have tended to conceptualise the relationships between the two codes as irreconcilable opposites, rather than as shifting balances in the context of changing social conditions. In this paper, we focus upon understanding Brexit as part of a set of longer-term developments in human figurations involving moves towards greater integration with concurrent countervailing disintegrative pressures. These shifting patterns of integration and disintegration involve changes of habitus, balances of power (such as functional democratisation), and expanding and retracting spans of emotional identification. The relationship these processes have to early nation-state formation in Europe are critical, exposing how the dualisms in national codes have been fundamental to the formation of national identities since the Renaissance. Our central argument is developments in these areas of human interdependence have contributed to recent centripetal shifts towards more nationalistic normative codes, and the resulting cleavages being witnessed in Europe, the United States, and indeed, across the world. We explore these shifting relational dynamics and show how a longer-term developmental approach helps to move the debate beyond present-centred and static considerations.

Keywords: Brexit, normative codes, nationalism, habitus, identity.

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Historical Social Research 45 (2020) 1, 262-291 │ published by GESIS
DOI: 10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.262-291

1. Introduction: English Public Opinion

During a lecture given in 1960 in Germany on the national peculiarities of British public opinion, the sociologist Norbert Elias contended that in trying to develop a unified European state, one of the biggest obstacles faced was that each nation involved had a highly developed sense of national identity (Elias 2008, 230). That some progress towards integration had been made was due in part to the severely shaken sense of national pride among the countries on the European mainland. He was, of course, referring to the damage to national pride incurred during and after the Second World War, and how its weakening contributed to a post-war period characterised by less fractious international relations. For Elias, however, the British were a peculiar and special case. He argued that, unlike other of the key European nations of the time, the British had emerged from the Second World War with their sense of national pride still intact; even the longer-term demise of the British Empire had left this relatively unshaken. This, he suggested, was reflected in how the British viewed the rest of Europe:

> In the national consciousness of the mass of the British people, the members of most continental European nations stand out as aliens whose differentness is tolerated patiently, but with whom one hardly identifies in terms of feelings. There are familiar turns of phrase in contemporary English which give expression to the feeling that the term "Europe" relates only to the European mainland, and that Britain itself lies outside Europe. Such self-evident truths of the national consciousness have a powerful influence on public opinion, and therefore on political decisions which depend on public opinion. (Elias 2008, 232-3)

Elias was talking about how, in a period prior to the UK joining the then precursor to the European Union, the European Economic Community (EEC), the British regarded themselves as distinct from the peoples of mainland Europe, and that this belief had major influence on political decisions. Of particular note here is Elias' observation that the British found difficulties in identifying with other Europeans "in terms of feelings": a fundamentally affective disjuncture. British national pride, he suggested, remained relatively "unbroken" and "more insular and self-isolating than ever" relative to the shaken national pride of other large European states. He noted that "rational arguments" in editorials by newspapers like the *Financial Times* were in favour of joining the EEC. But, he suggested, the public outside of "progressive circles" were not ready to join. Instead, Elias proposed, Britain's *emotional* attachments were to the English speaking world – countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States, plus the newer English speaking nations of Africa – rather than Europe. With public opinion aligned in this way, Elias suggested, the British government would not go against the tide of such an "emotive wind of

public opinion," and it would be a considerable time before the UK joined the EEC.

In making these observations, Elias adopted the analytical footing of an anthropologist observing an ethnographically separate group – he did so as a Jewish émigré scholar who was in the process of becoming established within British society, a kind of partly-established outsider. His observations bear testament to a time during which English or British public opinion about Europe was just as divided, possibly more divided, than it is in the present day. The debates during that period are noteworthy for their remarkable similarity to the more recent debates before and after the UK's vote to leave the European Union in 2016. Of course, Elias was wrong to suggest that a considerable amount of time would likely need to pass before the UK joined the EEC (the UK initially applied for membership in 1961 and finally joined in 1973), but he was only partially wrong. He was, as we shall argue, correct in identifying the existence of an enduring fault-line in British identity and habitus between, on the one hand, a we-ideal fixed on national greatness and pride, and on the other, emotional identification at broader levels – the European level, and indeed, at the level of humanity as a whole.

Elias's conviction that the UK would not join the EEC was demonstrative not only of the opposition to such integration at the time of his writing, but upon principles of his more general "figurational" sociological approach – according to which we might understand the UK's vote to leave the European Union, or Brexit, as part of a longer-term pattern, one symptomatic of a growth in disintegrative pressures and a strengthening of national identities in both the UK and other parts of the world. Accordingly, accounts that seek to explain Brexit, plus the more general rise in nationalist sentiment in the UK and elsewhere – including the election of Donald Trump in the US – through recourse principally to relatively recent developments, typically those of the past few decades, underplay the role of longer-term processes. In tandem with this tendency, such accounts encourage a simplified politicisation of analyses, through a focus on, say, specific neoliberal policies, a supposed abandonment of the white working class by all sides of the political spectrum, and so forth. Although such explanations have some utility, and are not necessarily "wrong," they tend to provide only a partial explanation for Brexit and the ascendancy of nationalist sentiment. At the same time, such accounts, help to reinforce the political values of those claiming these explanations as correct.

This paper seeks to add to our understanding of the Brexit vote and rise in nationalism by focusing on the longer-term processes that have played a part in these developments. Our aim is to expand understandings of Brexit and the growth of nationalism beyond predominantly present-centred analyses. We examine some of the social conditions that have contributed to certain groups in the United Kingdom, Europe, the United States, and elsewhere rejecting processes of integration on both the inter- and intra-state planes. Centrally, we

explore processes whereby certain groups have lost status or feel their status is threatened as part of wider processes of global integration and "functional democratisation."

Building on the analyses developed by Elias (2013, 162–3), plus his more general sociological approach, we show that the conditions for such splits were in place as part of the early structural dynamics that contributed to the formation of Western European nation states. During this earlier phase, particularly throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, dualisms and tensions associated with nationalist and egalitarian codes fomented and have in different ways remained integral to the national habitus of various "Western" nations ever since. We propose that problems of habitus, integration, and interdependence are central to the long-term processes of which the Brexit vote and the recent re-ascendancy of nationalist sentiment in Britain and certain other Western nations form part. Following the work of Elias, we present an analysis that anchors such issues within longer-term processes involving a nexus of functional democratisation, emancipation processes, and dualistic normative codes in Europe and the United States.

1.1 Immigration, the Left-Behind, a Cultural Backlash, and a Retreat to the Present

A key motif in recent political and sociological accounts of the vote for Brexit and the rise of nationalist/populist sentiments is the idea of a neglected "white working class" who have come to feel "left behind" by political elites. Winlow, Hall, and Treadwell (2017, 204), as a key example, draw attention to the economic insecurity and social position of this group as being pivotal to Brexit. They suggest that the Leave vote among this section of the UK population was rooted in feelings of being neglected by a liberal elite, feeling that the Labour party no longer represented their interests, and sharing a common perception that 45 years of membership of the European Union had done little to further their interests. For Winlow et al., the last few decades of neoliberal economic policies, globalisation, and growing economic insecurity have generated social conditions which, for members of the white working class, have engendered feelings of "loss": of the security associated with paid work, eroded through declining job opportunities; and of status, particularly in the context of endemic low-pay and widespread experience of precarious employment practices (such as zero hours contracts). However, both these senses of loss, consistent with an enduring sentiment in British popular discourse, are typically associated by members of the white working class with patterns of immigration – themselves widely understood to be compounded by the UK's membership of the EU – a sentiment that has been actively fostered by pro-Leave campaigners and the populist right more generally. Crucially, Winlow et al. suggest, it is precisely through the neglect of the white working class, the erosion of their traditional

cultural life, the demise of class-based politics, and in particular the neglect of their interests in leftist politics that the fertile ground of right-wing populism has been permitted to flourish.

Similar arguments concerning the relationship between the loss of status among the white working class, their sense of betrayal and neglect by the traditional left, and their backlash against multiculturalism generally, and Islam specifically, are advanced *inter alia* by writers such as Ware (2008), Kenney (2012), Lone and Silvery (2014), Mackenzie (2016), and Pilkington (2016). To these we could add numerous others, including, for example, Gidron and Hall (2017), who analyse how the loss of status of low skilled labour had, somewhat paradoxically, become compounded by greater equality for women, eroding the sense of masculine sources of esteem and value that were associated with traditional manual work. Beyond the UK, there are parallels in this respect with Fukuyama's (2018) arguments about the perceived abandonment of the white working class in the US generating a "vacuum" that has been filled by right-wing populism. And, here echoing Gidron and Hall, such arguments chime with Hartman's (2015) observations regarding the "culture wars" in the US in which progressive and emancipatory movements of the past few decades – feminism, civil rights, gay rights, environmentalism, and so forth – have come to be seen as a "force for ill" through their purported erosion of traditional (white/heterosexual/male) sources of identity and status. Taken together, such analyses coalesce around a focus upon the interrelationship between changing socio-economic conditions, a demise of traditional sources of working class status and esteem, and the sense of abandonment by the political "establishment" that has come to be understood to have been synonymous with middle-class liberal intellectuals, all of which, it is proposed, has fostered a swing towards anti-immigration and a more general ascendancy of xenophobic and nationalist sentiments among members of the white working class.

While the decline in social status related to the economic position of the white working class is no doubt of significance in trying to understand the processes that have contributed to the Brexit vote in the UK and the rise in nationalism more generally in the West, there is a danger in according too much significance to this singular determinant. The danger stems in part from a more general tendency towards the relegation of culture, ideas, knowledge, and so forth as secondary to the primacy of political economics. It is specious to view "class" and "economic change" as primary "factors" which "determine" certain kinds of social "outcome"; problematic to do so since such modes of analysis ultimately lead towards conceiving of areas of human existence, facets of society, that are ontologically separate, albeit that they interact billiard-ball style at certain key historical "moments." Elias's approach, by contrast, sees such "factors" as interdependent aspects of a "figuration": a diachronic gestalt of social processes that cannot meaningfully be separated. At the most basic level, human groups can no more survive without knowledge than they can

survive without food or protection from physical violence (Elias 2009, 113). Accordingly, we might include, but also look beyond, the economic, political, and cultural decline of certain groups within society to understand the Brexit vote and more general growth of nationalism. In some of his key theoretical-empirical work (see, in particular, *On the Process of Civilisation* [2012], *Studies on the Germans* [2013], and *The Court Society* [2005]), Elias centrally explored the role played by shifting national codes and ideologies – themselves irreducible to political-economic processes – which developed in tandem with a series of more general inter- and intra-state processes. Elias is able to show that while the values, ideals, symbols, and ideas that come to express the self-consciousness of particular groups typically lack a high degree of reality congruence, they nonetheless are centrally formative to group identities and meaning, particularly under social conditions that engender threats, both real and imagined, to the loss of status of those groups.

In the case of the debates and political discourses mobilised before and after the UK's vote for Brexit, this sense of loss – of a group whose status is being threatened, whose once proud and glorious past is under attack – is indeed a particularly important theme. Ford and Goodwin (2014) (see also Goodwin and Heath 2016), for example, have shown how calls for the UK's independence from the EU, notably manifest in the rise of the hard-right populist UK Independence Party (UKIP) found support, typically among older[1], poorer, and poorly education white work class voters who were:

> more inclined to believe in an ethnic conception of British national identity, defined by birth and ancestry, and who have vivid memories of a country that once stood independent and proudly apart from Europe […] today these voters look out at a fundamentally different Britain: ethnically and culturally diverse; cosmopolitan; integrated into a transnational, European political network; and dominated by a university-educated and more prosperous middle class that holds a radically different set of values, all of which is embraced and celebrated by those who rule over them. (2014, 270)

Of particular importance, in this respect, is Ford and Goodwin's observation that the perceived threat posed by European integration was not understood simply as a threat to working class interests, but as a threat to Britishness – to all that once made Britain special, great, distinctive, in a word, better than the rest of Europe. Indeed, the EU came to be mobilised as a symbol for all that has eroded traditional British identity and with it all that has fostered the conditions for "rampant" immigration (Ford and Goodwin 2014; Goodwin and Milazzo

[1] The widespread idea, highlighted by Ford and Goodwin above, that there is generational division between "Leavers" and "Remainers" in the UK could be a fruitful line of enquiry if framed within a context of generational established–outsider figurations. Unfortunately, there is not space in this paper to develop this argument further, suffice to say such intergenerational relations are likely to be closely related to some of the processes to be discussed, including functional democratisation and dualistic normative codes.

2017). As Ford and Goodwin acknowledge, such sentiments are by no means confined to economically disadvantaged working glass groups. Middle class social conservatives are another key section of UKIP's support. In fact, some research suggests that the white working class demographic comprises only a part of the Leave vote. For example, Dorling (2016, 354), has suggested 59% of Leave voters were middle class (see also Becker, Fetzer, and Novy, 2017). Similarly, Swales (2016, 2) and Eatwell and Goodwin (2018, 21) together present us with a more nuanced and complex picture of "typical" Leave voters: i) affluent Eurosceptics, ii) the older working class, and iii) a smaller group of economically disadvantaged, anti-immigration voters.

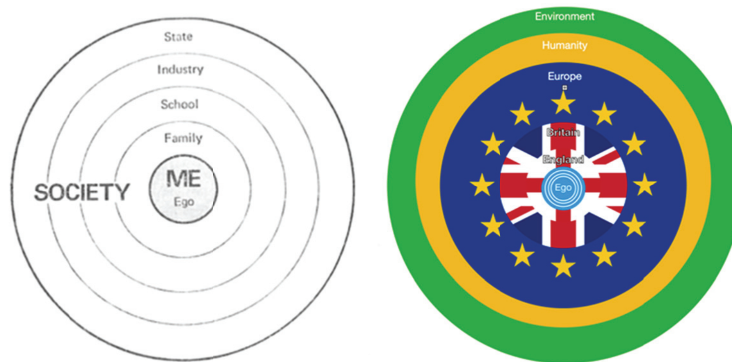
Evidently, then, the "left behind working class" thesis, at best, can only partially account for some of the support for the Brexit vote and resurgence of nationalism. Indeed, such ideas have been significantly contested by a range of social commentators. For example, Bhambra (2017) has argued that the "left-behind" assumption of Leave voters fails to take into account how members of ethnic minorities tend to be among those who have fared the worst economically in Britain yet a majority of whom voted to Remain. Central to her argument is that the "category of class" has come to be used in an increasingly "racialised" sense to refer to the so-called "white working class," and so the argument that the Leave vote was simply that of the "left-behind" is at least in part spurious. Citing research by Arnorssson and Zoega (2016) who have focused on the perception of immigration as central to the Brexit vote, Bhambra suggests that opposition to immigration by those who voted Leave was influenced more by cultural differences than by economic disadvantage, and that both white working and middle class groups played a pivotal role in the UK's vote to leave the EU.

Such "cultural differences" – differences in orientation, differences in values – indeed appear to be at the core of a divide that elides reduction to standard logics of social distribution based around class, ethnicity, and even traditional forms of politics. Here, we might envisage a primary axial tension between cosmopolitanism and nationalism, and at that, different imaginaries of British "nationalism." For instance, Calhoun (2016) has suggested that Brexit was an English nationalist vote against London, globalisation, and multiculturalism, as much as it was against Europe. He suggests that the Brexit vote was an "expressive" vote of frustration, rage, resentment, and insult, and at the same time one of hope that a proud national identity could be saved (2017, 58). He points out that a cosmopolitan British national identity emerged during the 1990s, one encapsulated by New Labour and the idea of "Cool Britannia." The rise in nationalism is, says Calhoun, a reaction against this form of cosmopolitan identity that, it was felt, failed to include those who did not share in the benefits of the 1990s economic boom. This view is shared by Crouch (2017, 105) who suggests a major cleavage has opened up in British society between those who subscribe to a relatively new cosmopolitanism on the one hand and an exclu-

sionary nationalism on the other. These are, in his view, two sets of deeply held attitudes. Delanty (2017, 112) suggests that this dichotomy between "nationals" and "cosmopolitans" is Europe-wide, but that these are new cleavages.

Central to these ostensibly new cleavages – between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, between more restrictive (traditionalist, conservative) or more expansive (cosmopolitan, multicultural) models of nationalism – are competing senses of the tension between different spans of mutual identification (De Swaan 1995), in which the range and scope of "moral concern" for (often socially and geographically distant) others can expand or recede. It is helpful, in this respect, to invoke the distinction between two pieces of conceptual imagery used by Elias to contrast different ways of conceiving of society. In the first, (known by some as the "dartboard" model of society, individuals, groups, associations, various social institutions, and society itself is conceived of as a series of concentric circles with an individual ego at the centre, and with the family, education system, workplace, etc. radiating out from this individual centre (see Figure 1).

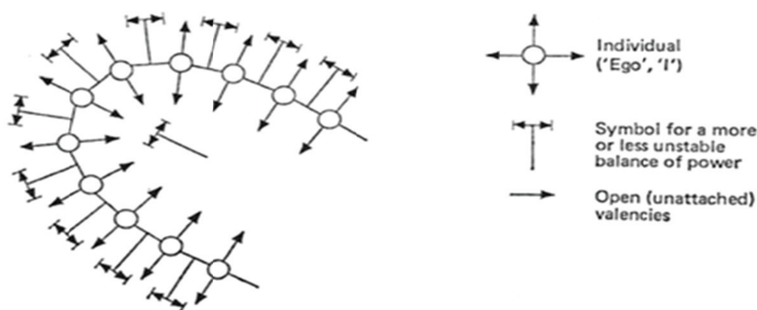
Figure 1: The Ego-Centric View of Society, The "Dartboard" Model



Elias (2012) is highly critical of this way of conceiving of society, as a cognitive platform to guide orientations towards human societies, and as an imaginary from which to construct various theoretical architecture. His argument is that this way of thinking and conceiving of "the" social world corresponds to a *Homo clausus* self-experience – to oversimplify somewhat, a closed-self model of humans with "me" "in here" and "society" "out there" – that has arisen within figurations of sociogenetic and psychogenetic processes that have become particularly dominant since the renaissance, and which finds expression in much Western philosophy and social theory. We might, in this connection, refer back to Ford and Goodwin's (2014, 270) conceptual rendering of members of the white working class "looking *out*" at a Britain transnationally and culturally integrated into Europe – as though such individuals were somehow

separate from these other entities "Britain" and "Europe." In its place, Elias posits a *Homines aperti* model of human societies – of open, pluralities of people in the plural, forming interdependent webs that stretch across time and space – as can be seen in Figure 2 (also known as "the false teeth" diagram). Here Elias's emphasis is on the overlapping, interweaving, fundamentally, and radically relational and processual character of social reality. In this model, everyone is connected to everyone else, sometimes directly, sometimes less so, or to use a more adequate formulation: sometimes through shorter, and sometimes through longer "chains of interdependence." In this formulation, such simplistic distinctions collapse: "you" *are* "other" people, "they" *are* "us," "I" is *part and parcel* of "we," and *vice versa*, because what such terms always invoke is *relationships* – there can be no "I" without a "we," no "us" without a "them," no "individual" without "society," and so forth – albeit that these terms invoke complex *webs* and *nexuses* of relationships unfolding and developing over time. What varies, of course, is people's position within the webs of relationships they collectively form and, in "relation" to that, the relational nexuses (whether local, national, global, or otherwise) from which the economy and balance of sources of identity are drawn and developed.

Figure 2: The "The False Teeth" Model of Human Figurations



For the purposes of our discussion, this distinction is particularly pertinent to distinguishing between different forms of nationalism. On the one hand is an understanding of nationalism that is based around a variant of the ego-centric "dartboard" model of society, where we might view concentric dividing lines between individual, state, and supra-state organisations (such as the EU) containing one another, and separating at key boundary points (see again Figure 1). This kind of thinking finds its clearest expression in classical models of American libertarianism – where everything beyond the level of the individual and family is seen as a kind of "impositional superstructure," albeit sometimes a politically necessary one, which sits in potential conflict with the levels contained within it. Even the term "Britain" itself becomes problematic from the standpoint of dartboard nationalism. As Rojek (2007) has suggested, as succes-

sive findings from the British Social Attitudes survey serve to demonstrate, fewer and fewer Britons see fit to describe themselves as "British": a term which implies a common source of nationality for citizens of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland – a tendency lampooned in the popular cultural notion of "Little Britain" (2007, 7-8).

Another, more "figurational" model of nationalism, stresses the overlapping, inter-meshing, inter-relating complexities engendered by belonging to multiple groups simultaneously. In the former, "restrictive" model of nationalism the tensions between being, say, British and European are oppositional – akin to competing sides of a divide; they are inherently conflictual, perhaps even polar opposites; they are irreconcilable. Conversely, the more "expansive" "cosmopolitan" version of nationalism stresses the interdependence and interrelationship between different spans of emotional identification, between different identities, different "we" images – the impossibility of, for instance, ontologically separating "Britain" from Europe in anything other than a notional, discursive sense given the inevitable fundamental inter-dependence between Britain and other parts of Europe, indeed global society, in all domains: whether economic, cultural, or political.[2]

Such cleavages and divides are themselves compounded by a political climate that has fostered a focus on the polarisation of imagery, viewpoints, normative codes, involving divides such as: either Britain or Europe; either Leave or Remain; either pro- or anti-immigration; and so forth. In such a climate, proponents of either "side" of an increasingly polarised axis have developed

[2] There are, however, limitations to this comparison. A frequent misunderstanding of Elias's model of figurations of interdependent Homines aperti is that it implies groups of humans who are mutually dependent in a harmonious, egalitarian manner. Indeed, similar connotations are expressed by the term "cosmopolitanism." Elias's terms "interdependence" and "interdependency chains" actually refers to power balances, ratios – asymmetries that develop and change over time and rarely imply harmonious or perfectly equal balances. These terms are intended to orientate thinking towards the relational character of power, and of how through their interlacing, human relationships form a kind of "tissue" that has "its" (though it is problematic to think of them as an "it") own immanent and emergent dynamics that cannot be reduced to any of the single individuals or relationships that comprise it. Another limitation is rather more obvious, to the extent that we can demarcate political and geographical territories in a formal sense – e.g., where there are lines on a map, or areas of political jurisdiction demarcated by law – we can of course think of separations that, while they are often contested, and they shift and are redrawn over time, endure sufficiently to be "real in their consequences." The danger, of course, is to treat such formal boundaries, territories, borders, and distributions as somehow the direct empirical correlates of the "borders" to human interdependencies, nexuses of social relationships, "figurations" to use Elias's term. Whether or not Britain is a member of the European Union, it remains, nonetheless, economically, socially, politically, etc. interdependent with "Europe," or perhaps better, part of a "European" nexus of social figurations, albeit that its power chances and ratios within this figurational nexus will likely have been significantly altered after the Brexit process has run its full course.

collective fantasies of the other. Such fantasies follow the classical contours of what Elias elsewhere has described as the blame and praise gossip (or group charisma and group disgrace) of established-outsider figurations (Elias and Scotson 2008). On the one hand is depicted a group of uneducated, unenlightened, anti-immigration nationalists who have succumbed to a wave of nostalgia based on an entirely manufactured version of British history perpetuated by a self-serving elite group who have intentionally stoked up such sentiments in traditional and digital media. On the other is a putative group of predominantly middle class liberals who are only looking out for themselves, and who have been duped by the media into believing a fear-mongering discourse – that Britain will collapse once it leaves the EU – perpetuated by powerful economic interests so as to prevent the country from taking back control of its own affairs and borders: a situation in which those powerful interests will finally lose their hold over the levers of power.

Some accounts of Brexit, and of the resurgence of nationalism by extension or association, have suggested that this tendency towards polarisation is peculiar to these specific historical episodes: a tendency that has been fostered by the "echo chamber" of social media where double-bind figurations are formed between proponents and opponents who, inadvertently, become mutually supporting and sustaining engines of information and disinformation, accusations and refutations, claims and counter-claims that spiral onwards through a seemingly endless feedback loop (see Sunstein 2002; Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Iyengar and Westwood 2015). Indeed, an analysis of how new media, particularly against the backdrop of recent waves of global migration, have in some ways mediated the character of debates about Brexit, nationalism, and the US presidency (as key cases in point), is no doubt of considerable value to understanding some aspects of these developments.

However, notwithstanding such forms and sources of influence, there is another possibility: namely that this tendency towards polarisation is itself rooted in the dualistic character of normative codes. This is not to suggest that such codes are indeed, factually speaking, inevitably irreconcilable, but rather, that acute tensions between different sets of normative codes are perceived and experienced under particular social conditions that serve to exacerbate them; these conditions characteristically pivot on specific figurations of emotion and national habitus. As suggested above, such conditions include those in which certain members of social groups – in this case those that align to particular nations or localities – come to fear that the values, symbols, and more general way of life that they have come to see as theirs are under threat whether this is partly as a consequence of social, economic, or cultural change or warfare threatened by, say, economic insecurity, a perception, whether real or imagined. Under such conditions, a historically recurrent tendency is for some, but by no means all, members of such groups to "retreat" to narrower spans of emotional identification and, ultimately, to a focus on primary "survival units"

– a centripetal slide, so to speak, to the perceived inner rings of the normative dartboard. Such examples run counter to a much longer-term trend towards widening spheres of emotional identification in which the anchors of group identity have, at a very general level, moved from smaller to larger survival units (see De Swaan's [1995] discussion of widening circles of identification and later [1997] follow-up on dis-identification. See also, for example, Mennell's [1993] account of the Yugoslavian conflict of the early 1990s as another counter-example).

As such, this tendency towards a polarisation in debates, particularly those centring on the real or imagined sense of threat to a particular way of life with all the values and sources of group identification and status that go with it, is not a specific peculiarity of recent debates about Brexit, nationalism, and so forth but is common to historical episodes of a particular character, and is rooted in a much longer-term set of social processes. In order, then, to properly account for such developments it is necessary to consider such processes in some detail. Here, again, the work of Elias is particularly instructive.

2. Problems of Habitus, Integration, and Interdependence

According to Elias, members of social groups share through their common associations and embodied social learning, to a greater or lesser extent, particular characteristics, orientations, mannerisms, values, and normative standards – a kind of "second nature" – which finds expression in certain aspects of personality, dress, mannerisms, language, and so forth. In relation to the members of national groups, such commonalities are sometimes referred to as "national character." While there are particular issues with this term, not least the idea that there are sufficient stable and enduring commonalities between people of nation states to make meaningful generalisations in this respect, such characteristics, or better, such aspects of national group habitus are frequently invoked (both consciously and unconsciously) as anchors of *identity*. In as much as people regard themselves as French, American, Canadian, British, Chinese, Moroccan, and so on, they invoke a particular kind of association, a "we-image," to use Elias's term, that inevitably stands in (a stronger or weaker) relation to an "I-image." Elias suggests such "we" and "I" images are in a kind of "balance" that shifts and develops in particular ways and intermeshes with the "we-images" drawn from the sense of belonging to other social groups (e.g., neighbourhoods, demographic groups, subcultural groups, and so forth). The degree to which "we-images" drawn from the nation are prominent and significant varies from society to society, over time within any particular society, and under different social conditions. As Elias proposes:

> In less differentiated societies, such as the Stone Age hunter-gatherer groups, the social habitus may have had a single layer. In more complex societies it

> has many layers. Someone may, for example, have the peculiarities of a Liverpool-English or a Black Forest-German European. It depends on the number of interlocking planes in his [or her] society how many layers are interwoven in the social habitus of a person. Among them, a particular layer usually has special prominence. It is the layer characteristic of membership of a particular social survival group, for example, a tribe or state [...] in the German Federal Republic or the Netherlands or France, despite strong countervailing movements, the regional differences between people are fading in relation to national ones as integration advances. (Elias, 2010, 164)

It is these "strong countervailing movements" mentioned by Elias that appear to be central to Britain's vote to leave the EU and the growth in nationalist sentiment in many other parts of the world. These movements appear to have slowed down processes of integration at the supranational level, including the nascent development of a "mass European identity" (see Hermann, Risse, and Brewer 2004; Bruter 2005; Fligstein 2008). But what has contributed to this shift (or partial shift) is a much more complex question to answer. Accordingly, key to this problem is the dynamism and variability of people's interdependence. Chains of interdependence, as Elias points out, manifest as all kinds of disparate functions. As part of these chains, people identify themselves as members of particular we-groups and as individuals within those we-groups – the degree of prominence to the "we" or the "I" is dependent in part on the sociogenetic conditions of any particular society. For example, as suggested above, in most Western societies the self-consciousness of individuals corresponds to a *homo clausus* or dartboard model of being, with the self-experience of multiple, overlapping but by no means equipotent sources of emotional identification. These sources of "we" always stand in tensile balance with a sense of "I," such we-I balances fluctuate within the lifetime of any particular individual, and in tandem with more general social developments. It is the complex inter-relationship of we-identities and I-identities as part of integration and disintegration processes at the national, supra-national and global levels that are central to the dynamics of Brexit and the growing prominence of nationalism across the world. That is, whether people identify more with a particular group, the nation state, some supranational entitle such as the EU, or indeed humanity as a whole, is dependent on the particular configuration of their interdependence with each other, and the extent to which they are able to derive meaning and status as part of the specific constraints of these interdependencies.[3]

[3] It is important to note that when we talk of interdependence we are not referring to the way the concept was initially conceptualised by Durkheim. Dunning and Sheard (2005, 237) suggest that Durkheim's understanding of interdependence was utopian because it only considered bonds of interdependence, under conditions of organic solidarity, as harmonious and cooperative. Durkheim failed, they say, to understand that bonds of interdependence and integration can also be problematic. Interdependencies both at the national and inter-

Elias's central argument is that as chains of interdependence lengthen and become more complex, groups become more functionally interdependent: dependent upon one another, not mutually dependent, but interdependent, often in asymmetrical ways and modalities. Such interdependencies can, over time, contribute to a relative evening-up in the balance of power between groups. However, rather than marking a progressive march towards increasing social harmony and emancipation, this process (referred to as functional democratisation by Elias) typically engenders an increase in the prospects for conflict and violence as certain groups gain status at the expense of others. Elias (2008, 136) used the term "integration conflicts" (see also Wouters 2007, 196; 2019; Mennell 2007, 214-47; and Linklater 2016, 420) to describe the social and political conflicts that occur as people are drawn into these more complex webs of interconnectedness. As human groups become more closely integrated, then once relatively independent groups become more entwined with others within webs of increasingly complex interdependence, and in which these different groups constrain one another in various ways. As suggested, this change in interdependence can contribute to one or more groups in this integration process losing functions and status, or feeling threatened by such a loss. Invariably, such groups often struggle against their reduction (or perceived reduction) in power potential as they are drawn into larger human groups.

The processes associated with Brexit, especially the processes of integration in Europe (and globally), have contributed to the generation of such integration conflicts. That is, if we take a very long-term perspective we can see that human groups, on the balance, are becoming more integrated and more densely interwoven with one another, but that this process almost never goes without conflict and resistance. To give examples of this, integration conflicts are apparent when formerly outsider groups gain in power potential, including the former European colonies (and their descendants) in relation to their former European colonisers, women in relation to men, and homosexuals in relation to heterosexuals. In other words, these integration processes are very much tied up with the emancipation of former "outsider" groups.

Elias (2010, 189) used the term "drag effect" to refer to the process described above, in which "national habitus" lags behind the "dynamic of unplanned social processes" of increasingly longer and more complex chains of interdependence and integration. It is this drag effect that has and is acting as a brake on the formation of a strong European identity. How such drag effects influence integration processes is dependent on the force of the social shift and the "deep-rootedness" and "resistance of the social habitus." As part of these processes of integration, there is a constant friction between the dynamics of social processes and the "more or less radical restructuring of this habitus"

national levels, including those associated with Brexit and nationalism, are conducive to conflict and antagonisms.

versus the social habitus of individuals successfully opposing these social dynamics, and potentially blocking higher levels of integration.

In other words, these opposing dynamics are in constant flux in relation to different planes of integration. For example, there are integration tensions between the constituent countries in the United Kingdom, which was highlighted by the Scottish independence referendum in 2014 when nearly 45% of Scottish voters voted in favour of leaving the UK. There are similar examples across Europe and the rest of the world[4]. In this respect, there are disintegrative pressures within the United Kingdom as part of attempts to establish greater prominence for the Scottish national identity. None of these processes are new in Europe, and are apparent in the unevenness in the development of people's social habitus. That is, there are those whose habitus and identity is more securely fixed on the nation state as a level of integration than others who are adapting to new levels of integration at the supra-national level. It is perhaps not a step too far to suggest that groups that are able to obtain status and meaning at higher levels of integration are less likely to be a "drag" on integration processes, whereas those who feel they will lose status or do actually lose status as part of integration processes are more likely to cling onto habitus and identity associated with lower levels of integration. It is the positioning of each individual within these complex webs of interdependence that is central to contributing to whether or not they will or will not be a "drag" on integration processes. Such a position is not necessarily determined by class, gender, or ethnicity, but rather the shifting balances of power with the complex nexus of interdependence, and whether individuals fear their group's status, culture, and identity is under threat.

It is important, in this connection, to distinguish between the role of "fears" and "dangers." While actual "dangers" in the form of threats to the status, traditions, and ways of life of particular social groups presented by particular social processes – continued membership of the EU, successive waves of immigration, increasing social and cultural integration, etc. – may be partly or even wholly imaginary, the rising and falling levels of "fear" surrounding such perceived threats nonetheless play a decisive role. A notable characteristic of the campaign surrounding Brexit was the tendency to transmute fears into dangers and *vice versa*. It is noteworthy that both sides of the Brexit debate quite consciously recognised the affective character of divisions in opinion. Indeed, a key tactic of the "Leave" campaign was to recast any commentary or diagnosis of the likely detrimental consequences, the possible "dangers," of Britain's departure from the European Union as part of "Project Fear." Nigel Farage, the former leader of UKIP and a principal advocate of Brexit, for example, famously dismissed the British Medical Association's projection that

[4] These examples include Spain, Belgium, the United States, and especially in relation new nation states that were once the subject of colonial rule.

Brexit would, amongst other consequences, disrupt the pharmaceutical supply chain leading to significant delays in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer, and affecting the ongoing treatment of over a million patients in the UK as "the most extreme form of Project Fear yet" adding that "these people" (British doctors) are "an absolute disgrace" (*The Guardian*, 21 August 2018)[5]. It was also Farage who, at the height of the Leave campaign in 2016, stood in front of an anti-immigration poster which employed imagery depicting a long curling queue of predominantly young, male, non-white refugees over which was printed the slogan: "Breaking Point: The EU has failed us all." The Remain campaign were quick to highlight how the poster played on the basest of fears about British people becoming "swamped" by predominantly middle-eastern (and, through Farage's subsequent inferences, Moslem) migrants, and how it was redolent of imagery employed in Nazi propaganda in the 1930s. Farage later claimed that it was this poster that proved to be decisive to the successful vote to Leave the EU. In the speech he gave at the unveiling of the "Breaking Point" poster, Farage claimed the picture was taken shortly after the German Chancellor Angela Merkel's call the previous summer to European nations to ameliorate the humanitarian crisis in Syria (the actual photograph used was from 2015 and was of migrants crossing the Croatia-Slovenia border), and went so far as to say

> *as you can see* from this picture, most of the people coming are young males and, yes, they may be coming from countries that are not in a very happy state, they may be coming from places that are poorer than us, but the EU has made a fundamental error that *risks the security of everybody.* (*The Guardian* 16 June 2016, emphasis added)

Viewers could, of course, also *see* that almost all of those depicted were non-white. Farage went on to draw links between the imagery behind him and the then recent "Dusseldorf bomb plot" and former terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels. Within the span of a few sentences, and through the employ of some carefully selected imagery, Farage had successfully conveyed the impression that all migration to Europe was the migration of non-whites, and was, moreover, the migration of potential terrorists to European soil, threatening the security of "everybody." In doing so, he effectively conflated fears about terrorism, about unchecked immigration, about "other" ethnicities, and, of course, about people "over there" (Merkel, etc.) making decisions over which "we" have no control, but which nonetheless profoundly affect "us" "over here," converging

[5] At the time of writing (2019), exactly the same charge was made by the Brexiteer Jacob Rees Mogg when confronted with a consultant neurologist who was personally involved in drafting "Operation Yellowhammer" – the contingency plans for a no deal Brexit, who himself suggested that the provisions contained therein would be insufficient to protect patients.

them to the single focal point of Britain's membership of the EU, and rendering such fears as an imminent "danger" to national security.

3. Functional Democratisation and the Development of Nationalist and Egalitarian Normative Codes

The origins of the duality of normative codes that, we have argued, helps partly explain the success of the tactics adopted by Farage and other Leave campaigners has, as we have suggested, a much longer-term sociogenesis. Elias (2008, 111) traces the processes in Europe of the 11th and 12th centuries by which many small and loosely integrated dynastic states, came through both integration and disintegration "spurts" to expand and become more densely integrated in the form of larger dynastic states, and most recently in the form of highly integrated nation states. Crucially, it was not, suggests Elias, until this later stage that nationalism and national identity came to take hold across the span of social strata in European societies. This developmental approach involves the notion of different planes of integration and a "filo pastry" (see Mennell in this HSR Special Issue) idea of habitus and identity. It helps to expose the myth promulgated by some nationalists (and social scientists) that national identity is seemingly eternal. Accordingly, English or British national identity is historically speaking relatively new. This development, as suggested above, involves changes in interdependence, in which once relatively disparate groups become more functionally interdependent. Elias suggests the following:

> Societies assume the characteristics of nations if the functional interdependence between their regions and their social strata as well as their hierarchic levels of authority and subordination become sufficiently great and sufficiently reciprocal for none of them to be able to disregard completely what the others think, feel or wish. (2008, 117)

This process of functional democratisation is in part driven by competition between ruling elites, who became more dependent on lower social strata in the context of inter-state tensions. One of the dominant processes of nation-state formation in Europe in the 19th century involved middle class groups gaining in power potential relative to the formerly dominant elites, predominantly the aristocracy (and gentry in England). This process was central to changing the institutions and dominant codes of behaviour in British (as well as in other European) society/ies, which increasingly began "to reflect bourgeois interests and bourgeois values" (Dunning and Sheard 2005, 61). The shift towards bourgeois codes, suggests Elias (2013, 57-158), involved a change in identification by ruling groups with those in the same social class in Europe (which was the dominant form of identification among Europe's aristocracy) to identification with people in one's own emerging nation-state. Identification shifted to national symbols from identification with individuals. Later this change incorpo-

rated the industrial working classes, as ruling elites became more functionally dependent upon them, and integrated them into the developing nationalist codes. However, the shift in dominant codes from aristocratic codes to bourgeois codes, did not involve a complete eclipse of the former, but rather a mixing of various levels of dilution of these codes depending on the specific figurational dynamics of each emergent nation-state.

Accordingly, Elias (2013, 155-7) suggests that these emergent national identities and habitudes[6] involved blends of these different codes. These, however, differed from one European state to another based on the emergent but differing structures of interdependence in each nation state. Elias points out that when the middle classes rose in power potential to become part of the ruling elites, they brought with them traditions associated with egalitarian and humanist codes which had a greater focus on human beings beyond the confines of the emergent nation states. This is evident in Kant's assertion that as human groups become more interconnected, a unique human capacity for cooperation over large areas develops, which seeks to make human suffering a moral problem for the whole world (Kant cited in Linklater 2010, 156). It is also apparent in Elias's examination of the sociogenesis of the concept of civilisation in France, which during the late 17th and early 18th centuries came to express the national self-image of France, following the French Revolution and the rise to ruling positions by the bourgeoisie (see Elias 2012, 55-7).

Middle class elites, in the context of inter-state relations, were constrained in their ability to apply egalitarian humanist codes because of the specifics of inter-state competition and had to draw on the Machiavellian princely codes of the former ruling elites. By contrast, this code, suggests Elias, involved:

> the pursuit of unrestrained self-interest as the leading principle of conduct, checked only by the fear of the greater power or the greater skill of potential opponents, which had dominated the politics of the leading dynasties and the leading aristocratic groups of different states in their relations with each other; [and] had left a heritage of mutual fears and suspicions in inter-state relations. (2013, 155-6)

The unrestrained self-interest on the inter-state plane, and the Machiavellian code from which it is derived, can be traced to the warrior codes of conduct that Elias discusses in *On the Process of Civilisation.* Elias (2012, 190) sets out how warriors, although increasingly restrained in their actions as the centuries unfolded, from the 9th to the 15th century lived for and loved battle. This, says Elias, was their only function. During the Middle Ages, the willingness and joy in fighting was a necessity for almost all people including the warrior class of knights and the burghers in the towns. "The structure and tensions of this society made this an inescapable condition for individuals" (Elias 2012, 192). In

[6] We have adopted the term "habitudes" to refer to habitus in the plural. We have done so in favour of the rather inelegant habituses.

more recent times, it is the structure and tensions between states that has contributed to a set of international relations based more on the Machiavellian pursuit of self-interest than on egalitarian codes. And it is in this context in which hostility to outsiders – that is, those who do not share an "accepted" form of national identity – is generated.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, the period in which nation states were forming, the dualistic normative code developed further. This, as Linklater (2016, 77) suggests, is one of the "basic features of the social habitus of citizens of 'civilised' nation states". Similarly, Elias contends that the duality of normative codes is a defining feature of 20th (and by extension 21st) century nation states. It is the tensions within this dualistic code and a rising of fears that in recent years in Europe and the United States have contributed to a shift towards nationalism and a Machiavellian self-interest as opposed to the more egalitarian humanist code. It is the tensions inherent in this dualistic code that have been recognised in the works of Delanty, Crouch, Calhoun, and Ford and Goodwin, when they talk of dichotomies or cleavages between cosmopolitanism and exclusionary nationalism. But as we have suggested, their work fails to locate these cleavages as part of long-term social processes that are closely related to the formation of nation states and national identities, as Elias has done.

Instead the ascendance of the middle classes to ruling positions in 19th century Europe involved changes in identification, and changes in the patterns of "we-and-they-feelings" (Elias 2013, 158). As they came to replace aristocratic elites, these changes in identification among the new ruling middle class elites, on balance, became stronger towards their compatriots, and weaker towards people of the same social standing in other countries. The opposite had been the case in an earlier period when aristocratic elites identified more closely with elites in other European societies. This change in identification, says Elias, was central to the development of nationalist sentiment, first among the middle classes in Europe and later the working classes. This involved a shift from the personal power politics of princes to an impersonal power politics of nations. But there was a continuity of the Machiavellian pursuit of self-interest from firstly aristocratic elites and later by nations. One of the consequences of this shift in identification, says Elias (2013, 159), was people began to form emotional bonds and symbolic attachments to the nation, rather than just to individuals, as was the case when princes were at the centre of power relations. Verbal symbols tended to hold the most special role, he says, and worked as a focal point for individuals to bond to the collectivity. This collectivity became endowed with special qualities not dissimilar to those given to gods, and the names of nation states came to be used with "overtones of sanctity and awe" (2013, 160). This deifying of national symbols is clear today. For example, the UK's former prime minister, Theresa May, announced during her premiership a "Festival of Great Britain" to strengthen "our precious union," to "showcase

what makes our country great today" (Devenport 2018). The same can be seen elsewhere. For example, in a speech to the United Nations, American president, Donald Trump stated that: "America will always act in our national interest […] America is governed by Americans. We reject the ideology of globalism, and we embrace the doctrine of patriotism" (Ward, 2018).

The development of dualistic national codes, as suggested above, has not in recent years simply manifested in two opposing groups tying themselves to either the mast of nationalism or the mast of cosmopolitanism (the "dartboard" model versus "figurational" model of nationalism). The habitudes of different individuals involve various blends of the dualistic code and related behavioural standards with one aspect of the code tending to dominate over the other. The blends, in certain respects, tend to be relative to the specific processes of nation-state formation in each individual state, and the dynamics of integration and civilising processes that each state has been through and continues to go through. To oversimplify, a state may at any particular historical juncture be dominated by people for whom the dartboard model of nationalism dominates or the cosmopolitan model dominates. In the United Kingdom, the development of particular national habitudes have most recently contributed to the near even split between "Remainers" and "Leavers" over the UK's relationship with the EU. An important point to make here is that this split does not follow the somewhat simplistic notion of a "left behind" white working class, or middle class southerners, or indeed a rump of anti-immigrant racists as being central to the Brexit vote. The problem is much more opaque, and involves a far more complex interplay of relational ties. That is, we-groups overlap within and between nation states, they are interdependent with one another, as part of a complex web in which shifting power dynamics are integral to the development of habitudes and identities, and have played a role in some seemingly disparate groups wanting to "Leave" the EU. It is the apparent "unrelatedness" of the different groups that voted for Brexit that helps to demonstrate this overlap and intermeshing of we-groups and identities, which for example might include a well-educated middle class, middle-aged British South Asian woman from London voting in favour of Brexit, or a white working class twenty-something man from Bradford doing the same. Demographically they appear to share little in common. Indeed, *pace* Bhambra, analysis of Brexit voting data by the BBC has suggested that a high number of educated British South Asians from London voted to leave the EU (BBC 2017). This is despite a pattern that suggests low educational attainment was the single most significant contributor to voting to leave. However, this trend is not borne out when ethnicity is taken into account. Counter to the idea of low education as central to vote Leave is evidence that areas with poorly educated people, but with a high BAME population, tended to vote remain. Even the contention that BAME populations voted Remain is problematic, with the BBC analysis suggesting that a third of British Asians voted leave, compared to roughly a quarter of black African and Carib-

bean, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi; whereas in some London wards with high BAME concentrations, a majority voted to Leave (BBC 2017).

This complexity – the wide and varying reasons for why different groups voted to leave or remain – is beyond the scope of this paper. However, in keeping with the discussion so far, we are able to focus on the specific development of British normative codes and civilising processes that have been significant in this respect, and may begin to shed some light onto the problem. Accordingly, an important aspect in the development of the British national habitus came about through the development of the British Parliament or what Elias and Dunning (2008) referred to as "Parliamentarisation," which involved a shift towards non-violent conflict in Britain in the 18th century between the two major landowning groups, represented in the legislature as the Whigs and the Tories. The competing political groups (who, compared to their French counterparts, had much greater power potential in relation to the monarch) shifted from engaging in violent conflict with one another to non-violent forms, in what Elias refers to as a "civilising spurt." This change was "reflected in the social habitus of individuals," and played a major part in the "development of English society" (Elias and Dunning 2008, 17-8). A sense of compromise and the skill of persuasion were central to conflicts, rather than violence, and became central to "social survival" (Elias and Dunning 2008, 20).

As the industrial revolution in the United Kingdom gathered pace from around 1830, the balance of power began shifting in favour of the industrial bourgeoisie – a process Dunning and Sheard (2005, 60) have referred to as *embourgeoisement.* This process involved an integration of landowners and bourgeoisie, who became more functionally interdependent with one another, with neither group (over the short-term) becoming totally dominant. However, since much of the power chances of the bourgeoisie lay in industrial production, over the longer-term this group tended to dominate, while the landowning classes had to adapt to these new dynamics (Dunning and Sheard 2005, 61). As processes of functional democratisation developed and different groups within the United Kingdom became more functionally interdependent, dominant social codes became diffused into wider sections of British society. This included, in the 19th century, the integration of landed elites with bourgeois elites, which resulted in the specific blend of manners (from the upper classes) and morals (from the middle classes) (Elias 1994a, 506; Fletcher 1997, 94).

Between the mid-19th and mid-20th century, a broader range of groups, but principally members of the industrial working classes, were drawn into the orbit of an emergent British national habitus and identity, which involved blends of the dualistic normative code, and specifically British habitudes based on a mixing of social codes. Those codes relating to conflict resolution and pacification, in turn, involving the development of more even emotional controls (Elias 2012, 412). What are often regarded as distinctly British codes and civilisational behavioural standards include the concept of fair play, decency,

humility, the rule of law, gentlemanly conduct, pragmatism, and so on. Combined with Britain's status in the second half of the 19th century and early 20th century as the world's largest empire, these behavioural standards combined with a belief among the British (and some of their colonial subjects) that they were civilising the rest of the world by spreading the rule of law, democracy, modernising "backward" parts of the world, and giving the rest of the world modern sport.

More recently, social codes and behavioural standards have continued to combine and develop. For example, other social groups, including those who have immigrated to the United Kingdom over the course of the past century have contributed to and taken on aspects of British habitudes. What this means in terms of the development of British habitudes is that as *contrasts* in conduct between different groups in the United Kingdom (and elsewhere) diminishes, in the context of increasing functional interdependence, then *varieties* of conduct, habitudes, and identities increase (see Elias 2012, 426). Therefore, such variety can help to account for the complexity and diversity of the Leave vote. For example, this may help us to explain why there was a high South Asian Leave vote in London. Accordingly, the diversity of different groups take on different shades of European dualistic normative codes, which have a specific national nuance, in the case of the United Kingdom, associated with the pacification of the landed classes and a specific mixing of middle class and upper class, which was further developed through an increase in the functional interdependence between these higher status groups, the working classes, immigrants, and so on.

With regard to Brexit, the peculiarities of the British case are such that they do not, as we proposed earlier in this paper, involve a straightforward divide between those who adopt British, nationalist, normative codes, on the one hand, and on the other, those who are oriented towards more cosmopolitan European codes. Indeed, on both sides of the debate, and across the political spectrum, the stamp of enduring we-images, of distinctively British civilisational codes, is apparent in the debates playing out over conventional and digital media. An exemplar in this respect is a post by a London-based copyeditor, an opponent of Brexit, and a left-leading writer, whose answer to the question of "Why do some British people not like Donald Trump" became, within a few hours of its drafting, extensively shared and disseminated over social media. Nate White's response is worth quoting at length:

> A few things spring to mind. Trump lacks certain qualities which the British traditionally esteem. For instance, he has no class, no charm, no coolness, no credibility, no compassion, no wit, no warmth, no wisdom, no subtlety, no sensitivity, no self-awareness, no humility, no honour and no grace – all qualities, funnily enough, with which his predecessor Mr. Obama was generously blessed. So for us, the stark contrast does rather throw Trump's limitations into embarrassingly sharp relief.

> Plus, we like a laugh. And while Trump may be laughable, he has never once said anything wry, witty or even faintly amusing – not once, ever. I don't say that rhetorically, I mean it quite literally: not once, not ever. And that fact is particularly disturbing to the British sensibility – for us, to lack humour is almost inhuman. But with Trump, it's a fact. He doesn't even seem to understand what a joke is – his idea of a joke is a crass comment, an illiterate insult, a casual act of cruelty […]. There is never any under-layer of irony, complexity, nuance or depth. It's all surface […]
>
> And worse, he is that most unforgivable of all things to the British: a bully. That is, except when he is among bullies; then he suddenly transforms into a snivelling sidekick instead. There are unspoken rules to this stuff – the Queensberry rules of basic decency – and he breaks them all. He punches downwards – which a gentleman should, would, could never do – and every blow he aims is below the belt. He particularly likes to kick the vulnerable or voiceless – and he kicks them when they are down […]. (White 2019)

White's response reads like a checklist of British civilisational codes: coolness, self-awareness, humility, wit and humour, fair play, decency, and so forth. The mention of "Queensbury Rules" (the rules developed around Boxing originally developed in the 19th century) is particularly noteworthy: the rules are a more general (and generally accepted) metaphor for the rules of acceptable, polite, "civilised" behaviour. The post, somewhat inadvertently, is expressive of an enduring British sense of civilisational superiority with regard to understanding such norms, and of looking down upon those ("embarrassingly" brash, vulgar Americans, not just Trump) who neither understand nor adhere to them. Most significant is that this sense of superiority is shared, to varying degrees, across the political spectrum, and in both sides of the debate surrounding Brexit. On the one side, as is the case in White's response, such normative codes have been channelled towards a sense of "fair play," towards the "vulnerable or voiceless"; on the other, the interpretation is more one of needing to separate those who do not share "our" values from "us," and also the need to separate "us" from "them." For those now wishing to leave Europe, this superiority was perhaps once rather more reconcilable with the idea of Britain's membership of the European Union, but only to the extent that Britain could understand itself to be adopting a kind of paternalistic role, effectively working to "civilise" other European nations – a stance adopted by Thatcher in the 1980s in her often condescending orientation towards European partner states (Parekh 2018). As we have suggested above, such a sense of superiority can be understood to be founded in part on the early parliamentarisation and industrialisation of Britain and its once considerable global empire – and in this respect, its self-understanding of having provided tutelage to other parts of the world about democracy, technology, civilisation, plus, through its role in the Second World War, of having prevented Europe from falling under the dominance of a single power (Parekh 2018).

Somewhat paradoxically, Britain did indeed previously belong to a much larger survival unit than it did today – its former empire, the remnants of which persist in the form of the Commonwealth. This lineage appears to be particularly significant: it is not so much that those oppose Europe, who advocate Brexit, are opposed to belonging to a larger survival unit, but rather, it is the sense of belonging to a survival unit in which the balance of interdependencies has shifted such that it, Britain, is no longer the centre, the key player, the dominant moral, political, and normative authority. That, it would seem, is decisively unpalatable; that is understood to be the basis for British capitulation and the undoing of centuries of history. Indeed, before he became the UK's (Brexiteer) Prime Minister, Boris Johnson (then a backbencher) said in 2018 of the Chequers Agreement (a White Paper outlining the UK's withdrawal plans) whose development was led by his predecessor, Theresa May, that such plans constituted a "humiliation for the country," a missed opportunity to reclaim the dynamism of Britain's golden past, "to use every ounce of Britain's power, hard and soft, to go back out into the world in a way that we had perhaps forgotten over the past 45 years: to find friends, to open markets, to promote our culture and our values" (Johnson 2018).[7]

Accordingly, nationalist views of Europe have shifted away from the notion of an adventure in which Britain could understand itself as being *in* Europe, but not *of it* – an idea sustainable to the extent that the recognition of Britain's distinctiveness, its superiority, by other member states could be taken for granted (and the benefits of its membership could be reaped). Here, Britain could imagine itself as serving as a model for others to follow, to be continuing to "bail out" Europe, to prevent other nations from collapsing. In populist imaginaries, such a notion has come gradually to be replaced by one in which Europe is understood as a kind of federalist plot, a Franco-Saxon alliance that has continued the unfinished agenda of the Second World War (Parekh 2018). These different interpretations, as we have argued, have been present even before Britain's original joining of the EEC many decades ago, however, crucially, at that time, its victory in the Second World War was still a relatively recent memory, and the empire, while greatly depleted, still substantial. Its subsequent demise on the global stage, the further decline of its empire, its eclipse by the ascendancy of the US, China, and Russia as global powers, have, again paradoxically, weakened not strengthened its will to integrate with Europe; here again the enduring sense of decline, of post-colonial impotence, of

[7] Here, we might contrast the development of British collective symbolisations, representations, and orientations towards Europe with those of Spain. As Jáuregui (2001) proposes, "while in Britain the idea of 'Europe' became widely associated with a decline of national status after the loss of 'world power,' in Spain, on the contrary, this concept symbolized a crucial enhancement of national prestige following the collapse of a 'backward dictatorship.'"

growing insignificance, of nostalgia for a once glorious past, appear to have played a particularly decisive role.

3.1 Brexit and Nationalism as Part Processes of Functional Democratisation

As we have argued, nationalist creeds developed in the course of competition between nation states, including the need for nation states to defend themselves against one another. Following Elias, we can understand how the competition and mutual suspicions inherited from the Machiavellian code of princes and the groundswell of nationalism in 19th century Europe were major contributors to the two world wars during the first half of the 20th century. The weakened national pride among many European countries, following the Second World War, together with a structural realignment of international relations based on the antagonisms between the Soviet Union and the United States, and a reduction in power potential among European states, contributed to a shift in the balance in the dualistic normative code in Europe towards greater egalitarianism relative to militaristic nationalist codes and narrower spans of emotional identification. This manifested in the shifting political structures in Europe in a centrifugal direction, and a lengthening and greater interweaving of interdependency chains contributing to the formation of the EEC and later the EU. That balance in the dualistic normative codes fluctuated in recent years, with nationalist we-feelings again gaining ground. The ascendance of egalitarian and humanist codes following the world wars as part of a "civilising spurt" that involved processes of functional democratisation, integration, and a flourishing of emancipatory movements relating to members of working classes, women, members of former European colonies, etc. But the unevenness of integration and emancipation processes and the shifts in power balances that they entail contributed to other groups fearing a loss of status. As in the 19th century, these processes of functional democratisation involved a loss of power potential for certain elites and at times other groups, including those that had increased their power chances previously. In particular, some working class groups that since the beginning of the 19th century had been among a selection of rising strata, began to lose power potential and were being less integrated into a society dominated by "values of the 'hegemonic' upper and middle classes" (Dunning, Murphy, and Williams 1988, 120). It is this disintegrative pressure that some of the theorists mention at the beginning of this article that relates to the idea of a "left behind" group of people.

In the context of the losses and fears that groups have experienced in the face of integration, functional democratisation and lengthening chains of interdependence, in the United Kingdom, Europe, and the United States fearful that elite groups (Brexiteers and sections of the Republican Party, for example)

have been able to appeal to nationalist sentiments and loyalties of wider sections of society in order to foster their own sectional interests. Accordingly:

> Nationalist belief and value systems in highly developed countries with relatively high standards of living are usually backward looking creeds. They are used in societies of this type with the aim of preserving the established order, even if the social movement rallied in the name of the national heritage and its virtues in fact aims at overthrowing the existing order. If that is done, it is usually in the name of the restoration of the past, of the unchanging heritage of the nation. (Elias 2013, 163)

We can see these processes unfolding in both the United Kingdom and the United States. For example a small section of the elite in the UK, including prominent right-wing politicians like Prime Minister Boris Johnson, and former UKIP leader Nigel Farage, as the examples above show, have used nationalist sentiment and the idea of national heritage to garner support to leave the EU among larger sections of the UK population. They have, at least in the short-term, been able to significantly disrupt the existing order which had a consensus across political parties for remaining in the EU. The process is not dissimilar in the United States. Donald Trump's administration has used American nationalism to appeal to a core of constituents, who portrayed themselves as "overthrowing" a liberal elite embodied by Hilary Clinton – a woman, a Democrat, and, as they depicted it, a member of the political "establishment." This is not to say that the Brexiteers and Donald Trump's circle have harnessed nationalism simply to gain power, although there are elements of this. Instead, they have enjoyed considerable success in invoking the nationalist rhetoric of a restoration of a lost golden past, and the ideals embedded in the ideas of nationhood, and to help foster the collective fear that these are being "lost" as processes of global integration and functional democratisation threaten the status, identity, the means of orientation of "true" (and here, specific notions of indigeneity and authenticity are pivotal) Americans, or "The British People." The arguments about a loss of status made by Winlow, Hall, and Treadwell, Ford and Goodwin, and Treadwell and Fukuyama, therefore, have some weight. Although, as has been suggested above, this loss of status is related to longer-term trends of global integration and functional democratisation, rather than simply political policies, failures of the left, or economics.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, it is important to be clear that the research cited at the beginning of this paper is understood to be supplemented rather more than negated by the analysis we have presented. Taken by itself, the left behind thesis, for example, leads to the belief that groups who have lost status are voting against the status quo. However, a longer-term sociogenetic approach to this aspect of Brexit and

nationalism suggests to us that the “left behind” have lost status as part of processes of functional democratisation and related global integration processes, much more complex and long-term social processes than have been suggested in the literature on Brexit so far. Without an appreciation of such longer-term developments, such analyses face the danger of playing into the hands of those who, for political gain, wish to identify singular “causes” or assign historical blame. Relatedly, approaches that have identified cleavages in Britain and other Western nations have identified axial tensions and divides that do not in any simple ways follow standard logics of social distribution (based, say, around social class or political orientation). However, such approaches have arguably not done enough to identify the longer-term developments of which such cleavages form part. Through the employ of Elias’s approach, we have suggested that these developments are in fact related very closely to the formation of national identities, which have come about through processes of functional democratisation and integration, and accordingly, are likely to endure irrespective of the full course of the Brexit political process.

We have argued that a figurational approach also helps to show a more reality congruent picture of the relational dynamics between the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe. That is despite the Brexit vote, the United Kingdom will continue to be tied to the EU in a highly complex web of interdependencies. What people have actually voted for, was not to leave the EU in any tangible sense of becoming independent, or “taking back control,” even though they may have thought that is what they were doing. The actual change will be a reconfiguration of the United Kingdom’s already dynamic and fluctuating interdependencies with the European Union and other parts of the world. It is a change in the structure of relations. It is perhaps appropriate, therefore, to speculate that those changes will be concerned with the power potential of the United Kingdom, the European Union, and other countries around the world. Accordingly, it may well be the case that leaving the EU may contribute to a loss of power potential for the United Kingdom relative to other European countries and other countries around the world. Speculation in the British press over a post-Brexit trade deal with the United States is already suggesting that the United Kingdom will be at a significant disadvantage in negotiations. That is, by seeking to act alone, rather than as part of a more integrated and interdependent whole, in the form of the EU, the United Kingdom has less potential to influence other states in the crucible of inter-state relations – there may well be something in Barrack Obama’s threat about the United Kingdom moving to the back of the queue when it comes to trade deals. The fantasy image of a buccaneering Britain leading the “Anglosphere” and the countries from its former empire is just that – a fantasy, and one that involves, for some, identifying with an idealised lost golden past. The following quote from Elias helps to capture this position:

A striking example of our time is that of the we-image and we-ideal of once-powerful nations whose superiority in relation to others has declined. Their members may suffer for centuries because the group charismatic we-ideal, modelled on an idealized image of themselves in the days of their greatness, lingers on for many generations as a model they feel they ought to live up to, without being able to do so. The radiance of their collective life as a nation has gone; their power superiority in relation to other groups, emotionally understood as a sign of their own higher human value in relation to the inferior value of these others, is irretrievably lost. Yet the dream of their special charisma is kept alive in a variety of ways […]. But the discrepancy between the actual and the imagined position of one's group among others can also entail a mistaken assessment of one's power resources and, as a consequence, suggest a group strategy in pursuit of a fantasy image of one's own greatness that may lead to self-destruction as well as to destruction of other interdependent groups. The dreams of nations (as of other groups) are dangerous. An overdeveloped we-ideal is a sign of a collective illness. (2008, 28-9)

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