

# Breakfast Revolution!

***By Dr Jacob Salder, Alliance Manchester Business School,  
University of Manchester***

Since moving to Manchester last year, I have developed something of a routine. After cycling to work (can't you just feel those liberal metropolitan credentials), I briefly bypass the office to get some breakfast from one of a nearby, European-influenced eateries. Think places with foreign words in their title, applying vowels with accents. Once there, I pick myself up either a (French) croissant, a (Danish) pastry, or on a more rustic day some hearty (Scots) porridge.

Now, until last week – and another escalating episode of 'peak Brexit' – it hadn't even occurred to me such actions were unpatriotic verging on treasonous. But now the Full English has been proclaimed fuel of the British negotiating team, my breakfast choices appear to have nailed my colours to the mast. I am siding with the EU, with Continentals, and perhaps worse, with upstart Celts over decent, hard-working English folk.

Since the denouement that was last year's General Election, meaningless platitudes have abounded regarding healing the rifts of the past few years. Actions associated with this healing are of course irrelevant, instead the expectation that – like resolution of the February floods or Coronavirus outbreak – osmosis is the most effective policy response. Instead, expectation of reparations is forced not onto leaders culpable for this great English farce, but communities continually battered by a succession of poor policy choices and blind jingoistic rhetoric.

The problem with these reparations is we are in uncharted territory. As the architects of Brexit enjoy their hubris running celebratory events, replenishing their coffers charging the gaslit for the privilege of their esteemed company, it is the goodwill of social liberals in the public, social, and voluntary sector who pick up the pieces. Many of these – the majority even – will be Remainers demonised for simply daring consistency.

One response amongst this demographic has been a call for compassion. We must move forward through inclusive and considerate action, supporting the ‘places that don’t matter’ and suchlike rather than holding them to account. These places will be further hit by continued funding reductions, with 5% spending cuts demanded by the new Government<sup>[i]</sup> despite claims austerity was over in their election campaign. Yet this compassion is expected – and exploited – with values demonised, opinions pilloried, and false witness demanded as the right to directly abuse pro-EU sentiment, liberal values, and certain social groups is normalised.

I recently saw the poet Luke Wright’s Brexit polemic ‘The Remains of Logan Dankworth’. At one point in the show, which documents the run up and aftermath to the referendum, as the results roll in he recalls Farage claiming a victory for ‘the normal, hard-working British’. “Am I not a normal, hard-working Brit?”, his character appeals.

The actor and rapper Riz Ahmed in a recent interview claimed he was ‘breaking up with Britain’<sup>[ii]</sup>. The child of a child of Empire, the point he makes is that on an island whose global reputation was founded on a historic influence extending east to west, the current narrowing of the concept of ‘Britishness’ has sought to exclude from this group large parties for whom this identity is not only essential, but earned.

This marginalisation of identity extends into values. And as the steamroller of Brexit continues apace to carve out an ambiguous and exclusionary interpretation of British identity and values, the left behind takes on a whole new meaning. This is no longer about place, about culture rooted in historic industry. Instead it is about the capacity of Britishness to embrace the diverse values and interests which underpinned some of the nation’s most significant social and cultural achievements.

So, in what has become a culture war, how do you stand against this tide? Ahmed and Wright illustrate one form of resistance, one form of response to this demonisation, which is to express it through art. The problem here is the exclusivity of both medium and audience; you are largely talking to your own constituents.

No, a more encompassing response is required. I have previously written on the need for social liberals to be more ruthless<sup>[iii]</sup>. And for

this we should turn to our arch-nemesis, Margaret Thatcher. As the architect of neo-liberal Britain, despite the explicit rhetoric of traditional values adorned by Thatcher, her policies and premiership transformed us from communities and citizens into consumers. To quote Morpheus from The Matrix, fate, it seems, is not without a sense of irony.

Compassion in this environment is not the answer. Because this compassion is what has slowed the hand of the burgeoning return of Victorian England overseen by the Government this past decade. It is built in a goodwill embedded in liberal values, from community activists and overstretched public employees to ethical consumers and social entrepreneurs. A goodwill, a spirit of intervention too easily and cynically appropriated by a cruel lobby of politicians with the audacity to celebrate 'plucky, everyday Brits'.

Instead, we exert our influence in the everyday. We reduce community activism, we withdraw unpaid overtime in the hospital, we withhold our expenditure. And we accept the effect this will have, as it's necessary collateral damage. This language sits uneasy with the social liberal, but without its efforts to allay the effects of unconscionable government will be casually assimilated as part of their mantra of reduced state and withdrawn intervention.

We exert our power as a community of consumers. I can only imagine how this breakfast revolution would sit with Marx...

[i] <https://www.ft.com/content/2d13dcb0-42c2-11ea-a43a-c4b328d9061c>

[ii] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-51697553>

[iii] <https://centreforbexitstudiesblog.wordpress.com/2019/12/16/progressive-but-strategically-naive-how-the-left-threw-away-another-general-election/>

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