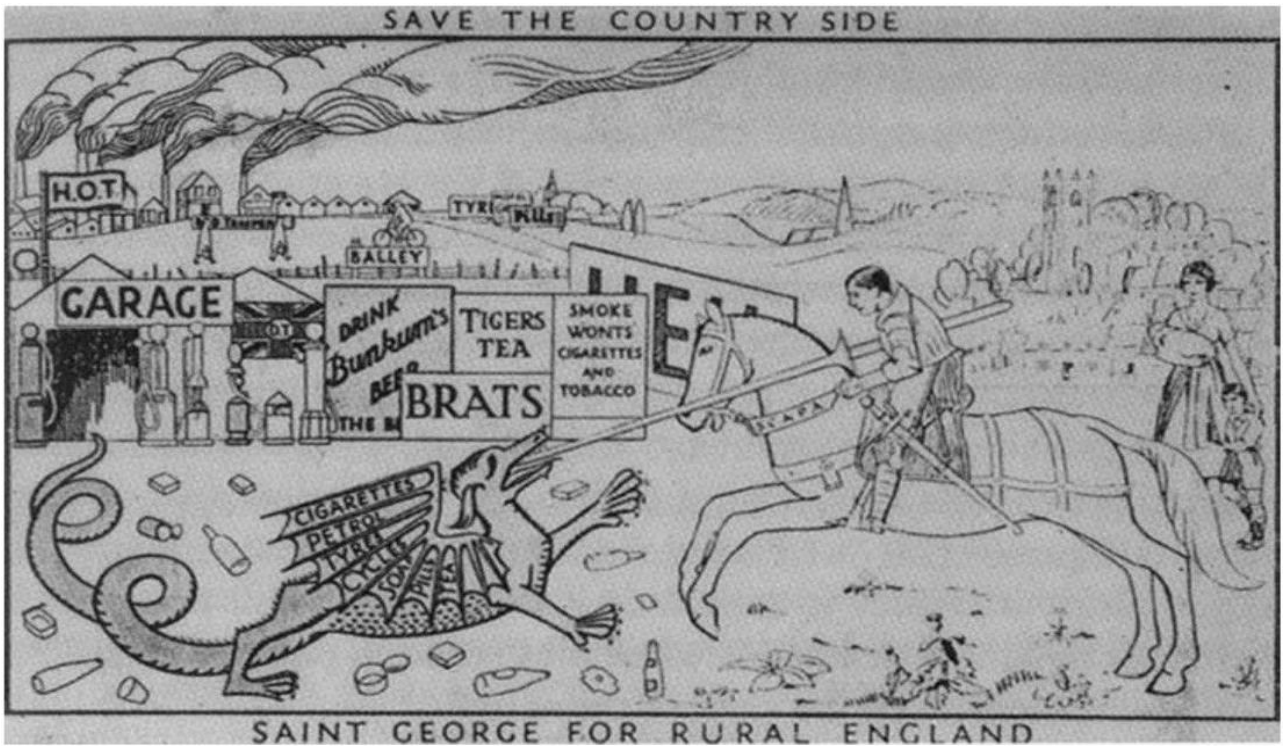
FLAGS DON'T FEED PEOPLE: NATIONALISM AND AGRI-CULTURE IN THE UK

A critical framing analysis of nationalism as it appears in British agri-cultural discourse in the context of Brexit



"Save the Countryside: Saint George for Rural England." Postcard issued by the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, 1928.

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Abstract

As Europe witnesses a rise in support of the far-right, more attention is being paid to why nationalistic sentiment is gaining popularity, particularly amongst rural populations. However, less known is how nationalism interacts with pressing ecological issues, even less so with agricultural matters. Given that a large proportion of farmers in the UK are said to have supported Brexit, it is important to better understand the relationship between the various iterations of nationalism, and how it is applied to problems affecting the future of agriculture. This is particularly salient as the UK is going through a reform in its agricultural policy after leaving the EU. This research reveals how agri-environmental issues are framed as issues of concern for the nation. Through a critical framing analysis, I unearth some nuanced contemporary frames which highlight the synergies and paradoxes of nationalism as it approaches problems in agri-cultural issues in the context of Brexit and its conjuncture with the crisis of COVID-19 in 2020. The result of this analysis reveals how patriotism is framed by a variety of actors concerned with the future of the UK's agriculture sector as a way for farmers to steward the land more sustainably. Additionally, this research elucidates a vision for conservation that depends on technology and a neoliberal approach to supporting farmers. Moreover, this thesis reveals how concepts typically associated with progressive

movements for food justice are appropriated in the discourse of more right-wing groups, such as supporting the ‘local’ and ‘food sovereignty’.

Key Words: Nationalism, agriculture, ecological patriotism, far right, neoliberal capitalism, ecomodernism

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Acronyms

AB- Agricultural Bill

BUF- British Union of Fascists

CAP- Common Agricultural Policy

CCC- Climate Change Committee

CEN- Conservative Environment Network

COVID-19- Coronavirus disease

CPRE- Campaign to Protect Rural England

DEFRA – Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs

EEG- English Environment Group

EU- European Union

LWA- Landworkers' Alliance

MPs- Members of Parliament

NFU- National Farmers Union

PA- Patriotic Alternative

UKIP- United Kingdom Independence Party

INTRODUCTION

Background

Whilst Brexit has created major societal upheaval, it has illuminated issues that were brewing far in advance of its arrival, particularly in relation to agriculture. Much like the rest of the industrialised world, the United Kingdom (UK) should face accountability for the effects that dominant agricultural practices have in disturbing the biotic strata on which global societies depend (Watts, 2019; Committee on Climate Change, 2020). Not only is Brexit presented as an opportunity to revise certain agricultural policies that facilitate ecological breakdown, but it has provoked a critical examination of neoconservative policies and their relationship with ecological discourses and practice. The UK has witnessed a growth in far-right politics which includes the creep of new groups like ethnonationalist Patriotic Alternative, which combines xenophobic politics with anti-globalisation narratives and a desire for national food self-sufficiency. Whilst support for the far right and nationalistic fervour is on the rise across the world, the environmental politics of these groups is not widely studied (The Zetkin Collective, forthcoming; Forchtner and Kølvraa, 2015; Forchtner, 2019; Lubarda, 2020). This thesis examines how, within the political parameter of the UK, nationalism collides with agri-ecological issues; a nuanced arena of political ecology yet to appear much in accessible literature.

By acknowledging that rural support for Brexit reflects a wider, more complex political landscape, this research attempts to go beyond the often lazy assumptions made in commentary around Brexit. Often, these conclude that nationalism is a cultural response from the 'left behind' to neoliberal governance. The confluence between nationalism, anti-globalisation and regressive iterations of 'localism' are, however, nuanced and deserve deeper inspection (Childs, 2016; Mamonova and Franquesa, 2019). By examining contentious issues that concern the future of agriculture, nationalism reveals itself in a plethora of, often paradoxical, formations. Some political parties that campaigned for the UK to leave the EU did so both by 'selling' Brexit to farmers, and by garnering support from those concerned with the demise of nature that has been attributed to negligent EU agricultural policy. However, although capitalising on what are considered to be typically 'rural' issues, the Brexit campaign was largely rooted in populist rhetoric that spoke and acted in the name of the 'British people', to reclaim what it is to be 'British', whilst garnering antipathy to those that threaten British 'sovereignty'; usually the 'elites' of the EU (Clarke and Newman, 2017; Iakhnis

et al., 2018). Given that over half of farmers were recorded as having voted to leave the EU, it is important to examine what and whose discourses 'spoke' to farmers, and the various ways in which the promised outcomes for rural places are unravelling (Mamonova, 2019).

It is important to note that this thesis is situated in a broader political trend observable in other countries in Europe and beyond. In the Netherlands, moves by the government to impose climate mitigation measures caused backlash from disaffected small-scale farmers (see: Farmers Defence League). Meanwhile, in Spain the extreme far-right ethnonationalist party Vox has tried to appropriate farmers' struggles in their campaign to 'Make Spain Great Again' (Martín, 2018). In the UK, nationalistic sentiments have been exercised to rally voters to see Brexit as an opportunity to repair ecological disarray caused by the European Union's agricultural policies (Woods, 2007). Despite its heavily bureaucratic structure and societal disconnection, the EU is tied to the rural places of its member states through its agricultural policies which are guided by a neoliberal economic paradigm. Such a paradigm encourages the competitive flow of food as commodities across Europe's borders propped up through a subsidy scheme of the EU Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) that rewards farmers based on the size of the land they own, rather than the food they produce. The concern about this is for the ways such governance effects farmers and influences the practices deployed on the land in respective EU member nations because the smaller-scale farmers, and those who do more to farm 'ecologically', are least rewarded and disadvantaged to larger farms with more capital (Bartz *et al.*, 2019). Some of its stronger critics claim that the CAP is inherently flawed due to the effective lobbying of industrial agricultural interests, whilst others argue it fails to support a 'real income of most farmers' and 'has produced appalling value for money for the tax payer' in EU member states (Bartz *et al.*, 2019). One major exemplification of this is the channelling of CAP subsidies into the hands of ruling elite in Hungary, agricultural mafias in Slovakia, and monarchies of several other European countries (Gebrekidan, Apuzzo and Novak, 2019).

Seeming to recognise the ecological impacts of the EU subsidy scheme, the UK government has shifted away from rewarding farmers based on land size. In part, the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in 2020 was the 'inadvertent biotic fallout' of the logic of multinational profitability being applied to ecological systems, i.e., the land-use change from industrial agriculture driven by capitalism removed nature's buffers between deadly pathogens and human societies (Wallace, 2016). In turn, the UK's change in direction could be welcomed. The UK's new Agriculture Bill replaces the EU CAP, making it so that a farmer can engage in 'environmental land management

contracts' between themself and the state. These contracts reward land owners for, amongst other things, generating 'environmentally related public benefits' (Bateman and Balmford, 2018; Harvey, 2020) to address stark issues of soil erosion, the decline and extinction of pollinator species, water pollution, amongst many others (FFCC, 2019). However, this thesis departs from the assumption that a neoliberal capitalist ideology is not a unique characteristic of EU governance, but also guides environmental policies in the UK. Thus, whilst this thesis is concerned with the way that nationalism arises in discourse relating to agri-ecological issues, I will be examining 'solutions' to agri-cultural problems within a wider political landscape that is guided by the logic of neoliberal capitalism.

Research Questions

1) How does nationalism feature in the discourse around agri-culture in the Brexit context?
    a. What key frames can be drawn from this discourse?
    b. What paradoxes exist between these discursive frames?

Thesis Outline

This thesis will take the following the structure. I will begin by outlining what motivated me to write this thesis, its purpose and aims, to elucidate why an investigation is needed into how nationalistic fervour is on the rise in Europe and how this relates to agri-ecological relations. I will then provide an overview of the key theories that form the foundations of this thesis, and which are my point of departure for investigating nationalism as it relates specifically to agriculture. This overview includes the current state of the hegemonic food system in the UK, detailing its effects on ecological systems. To do this, I set the economic scene of industrial capitalism and how it determines human-nature relations. Given that agriculture is a societal sector with immense importance, I also briefly explain different kinds of food production methods and how human-nature relations are embedded within them. Next, I introduce the concept of nationalism and its accompanying ideologies, and how they relate to the way that nature is valued and governed. Here I bring in agriculture as an iteration of these nature relations. Following that, I will present my methodology and methods, including the process of qualitatively analysing material authored by an assemblage of 22 actors. The results of this

primary analysis are then presented in the Analytical Discussion which is structured through a series of themes which act as signposts to seven different frames which host nationalistic tropes.

‘*Modern man, the world eater, respects no space and no thing green or furred as sacred.*

The march of the machines has entered his blood.

They are his seed boxes, his potential wings

and guidance systems on the far roads of the universe …’

Loren Eiseley, 1980. *The Invisible Pyramid*

Research Motivation, Purpose, and Aims

Research Motivation

Given the explosion in popularity of right-wing politics across Europe and many other parts of the world, the main purpose of this thesis is to problematise, and bring attention to, the often harmful ideologies of nationalism which appear as (false) solutions to problems faced in the UK agriculture sector (The Zetkin Collective, forthcoming). The emerging work of the Emancipatory Rural Politics Initiative highlights that far-right populism tends to have a noticeable rural following (Scoones *et al.*, 2017). In response, this research seeks to illuminate possible mystifications and paradoxes exhibited by those with a stake in the future of the UK agriculture sector not by focusing

on simple right- or left-wing cleavages, but to draw out nationalistic ideologies as and where they arise.

At the time of writing, chaos and ongoing disruption have been waged by the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 and have been an undeniable motivation to write this thesis. The pandemic illuminated many previously underdiscussed cracks in the globalised neoliberal food regime. Given the lack of social justice perspectives in agri-food studies (Allen, 2010), the virus brought an impetus to focus on the inherently unequal economic system in which food production takes place. COVID-19 itself is one of many zoonotic pathogens and viruses which resemble the 'toxic residues of the capitalist production system, traceable to agribusiness commodity chains' (Bellamy Foster and Suwandi, 2020). The globalised food regime in which these chains exist is a hegemonic and socially ecologically harmful system and its weakness have been exposed during these chaotic times. However, such weaknesses are the defects of a much larger obsolete machine. There is a clear entanglement between agriculture as a nature-changing practice and its feedbacks that cultivate society. Agriculture (*agri)* is an economic activity and sector that affects nature fundamentally, i.e., it changes how ecosystems function. As well as farming being a cultural phenomenon, the ecological changes embroiled in agriculture have feedbacks in society (culture). Hence, to emphasise this relationship, I use the term *agri-culture* in this thesis to mark a distinction from agriculture as an economic activity.

Taking a long view, the neoliberalisation and capitalist production of food- and accompanying industrial processes- have taken a great toll on global ecosystems and on those which agriculture itself depends. It is an unsustainable system of self-harm and, as Ferguson (2019) argues, is contingent on social injustices which means that in order to reimagine the food system, scholars need to go to the 'frontlines' of where these injustices manifest. One does not have to go far to find these margins, and I have chosen to focus on the UK not just because it is a geography where I have the most lived experience, but because of its deeply colonial agricultural history which dispossessed the masses for the prosperity of a few, the legacies of which affect the socioecological memory and landscapes of today.

Research Purpose

Fifty three percent of farmers in the UK were reported to have voted in favour of leaving the EU (Mamonova, 2019). Whilst some broad-brushed conclusions were made about this complex trend, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed some home truths regarding agricultural practices in the UK. Namely, it is insufficient to look at agri-environmental problems in their silos as food systems are entangled with a plethora of wider societal problems and concerns. In a way, food production – like the Coronavirus – is a societal adhesive. It symbolises how connected we all are to an invisible system of relations that we may not take direct part in sustaining, but is vital to our health, wellbeing, and vitality. COVID-19 is one awful symptom of a deeper rooted issue; a globalised ideology of neoliberal, growth-oriented capitalism. In turn, I also focus on how nationalism is presented in discussions around agriculture in the context of Brexit, and how it reacts to the crisis of COVID-19. Those studying nationalism have called for more investigation into the capabilities, inadequacies, paradoxes and contradictions that exist around the 'green politics' of nationalist iterations to deal with ecological problems (Conversi, 2020). I by no means move from the assumption that nationalism is a rural phenomenon alone, but seek to investigate how nationalism in its various forms is framed to appeal to discontent in the countryside and exploits certain aspects of human and non-human restlessness in the context of neoliberal capitalist economics (Mamonova, 2019).

Research Aims

This thesis aims to contribute to existing knowledge on food regimes[1] by investigating how nationalism features in discourse around issues caused by neoliberal capitalist agriculture. I am interested in examining how nature may be being instrumentalised to rally patriotic fever and garner support in rural places by utilising nationalistic ideologies. I focus on the UK but will call upon other case studies to bolster claims that nationalistic environmental governance, specifically relating to agriculture, falls short in delivering an emancipatory ecology. This thesis ultimately seeks to show how nationalism and its iterations appear in interventions into unsustainable agri-cultural relations, but ultimately fail to critique underpinning hegemonic power structures. Instead,

[1] I utilise Friedmann's term 'food regime' for the political and economic structures which undergird the way that food is produced and consumed during a certain era (Friedmann, 2006).

nationalism proves to be a mask for business as usual and, even worse, produces dangerously prejudiced paradigms of human-nature relations.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Nature, food and capitalist ideology

As this thesis is concerned with the effects that agriculture has had on ecological systems, it is important to lay out how such impacts have materialised. Thus, I will now provide an overview of the way that power structures and ideologies are integral to the agri-environmental origins of food, and how food is valued and governed. Such value systems are often determined by the politics of the day; the praxis upholding the production, distribution, access, availability, and use of food. Agriculture has played a fundamental and oftentimes strategic role in the construction and development of the world capitalist economy, transforming the state of nature across the world (Ekers and Prudham, 2017).

The entanglement between agriculture (*agri)* as a nature-changing practice and its feedbacks that cultivate society (*culture*) mean there have been many 'genres' of political economics dominating agri-culture in contemporary European history. These genres demonstrate different hegemonic periods of agri-cultural interactions, which have largely been vertical and technocratic in their application and are what Friedmann calls 'food regimes', referring to a paradigm of food production and consumption that follows certain rules and relationships already entrenched in the economic structures of societies (McMichael, 2009; Marsden *et al.*, 1993). For example, following World War Two, one such widely adopted hegemonic regime was guided by the ideal of the 'freedom from hunger' and arose in multilateral treaties and policy agreements in and outside of Europe (Fairbairn, 2010). However, by the 1980s, a post-war 'food security' regime had developed which originally focused on supply of food through a state intervening in markets, to increase production as well as providing external food aid. Today, many commentators name the dominant food regime the 'corporate food regime' (CFR) and apply it to the current structure of the UK's agricultural system. This regime uses 'food security' as a barometer of its success guided by circuits of neoliberal economics. This measurement is typically determined by international trade and economic growth rather than the ecological underpinnings of food production; the cultural

relevance of food types, and gender or class-based issues that affect the diets of so many (Patel, 2009).

The CFR determines how nature is valued by normalising the 'cheapening of nature' and treats nature's complex existence as a resource ripe for extraction (Moore, 2014). Under capitalism, the environment is not outside of the economic system but, rather, capitalism *is* an ecological system (McMichael, 2000; Gerbeau and Avallone, 2017). 'Cheap Nature' is predicated on the assumption that nature can be taken virtually for free and turned into profitable commodities (Moore, 2015). The overall vision for agriculture has historically been to facilitate a high-input industrial agriculture geared to export (Ethical Consumer Research Association, 2016; Pickering, 2016). Such an ideology and means of approaching ecology is built into the logics of economic development which originated from the assumption that nature is a laboratory for human advancement and rural society as a residual domain (McMichael, 2000).

In terms of the cultural aspects of the UK's model of agroextractivism, food is procured through a dependence on an assemblage of people who produce food guided by market principles, not necessarily guided by the vital needs of the land (Omar Felipe-Giraldo, 2019). Citizens are understood as consumers whose ability to feed themselves is limited mostly to the commercial sphere and, moreover, the state often passes the responsibility to rectify the harm of the corporate regime onto its population and their lifestyles (or in the language of the corporate regime: 'consumption habits') (Blue, 2009). Human labour is also the subject of great suffering under the CFR, which both imports and exports harm from within and outside a geographical 'centre' and from its peripheries (*ibid*). Due to its dependency on cheap labour, this system harbours an unequal exchange whereby the price of food and the price of labour have an intimate relationship (Gerbeau and Avallone, 2017). Historically, colonial relations accrued labour from countries in the 'periphery' (not the least through enslavement) to the industrialising 'core' (Wallerstein, 2011). Today, this system is upheld, whereby a global hierarchy of so-called developed and under-developed nations remains and is sustained by core-periphery relations. This 'capitalist world-ecology' and the corporate food regime are both foundational concepts to this thesis because they help to understand how capital accumulation has penetrated agriculture and food's role in society and how the 'world's soil has been incorporated into capital' at the expense of the wellbeing of other societies (Jakobsen, 2018). Additionally, the destabilising effects of the CFR on ecological systems are wide-reaching and profound (IPBES, 2019).

In recent decades, the agricultural sector of industrialised countries has been plagued by a 'never-ending' crisis; agriculture has lost its importance in terms of national GDP contribution, less people are employed in the sector, and the incomes of farmers are waning (Moragues-Faus, 2014). This setting reveals how power structures and ideologies can communicate certain values around food production and their potentially socioecologically harmful consequences. When it comes to agri-culture, McMichael (2000) argues that the rise in the discontent of rural places across Europe are articulations of the aforementioned crises driven by the current hegemonic regime in agriculture (Scoones *et al.*, 2017; Machin and Wagener, 2019; Mamonova and Franquesa, 2019; Olech, 2020). Much of the response to this discontent has exhibited nationalistic tropes, hence this thesis examines how nationalism is used to frame human-nature relations which now brings me to provide a theoretical background of nationalism and its ideological iterations in relation to agri-culture.

Nationalism and Agri-culture

The corporate food regime and the capitalist economic logic that accompanies it have led to profound impacts on ecological systems on a global scale, the escalating climate crisis is but one manifestation (FFCC, 2019; IPBES, 2019). These effects also wreak havoc on the ecological systems that supersede the constructed borders of nations. Ecologism thus becomes embroiled in a relationship with nationalism, a tie described as 'the most important mobilising doctrine of the twentieth century' (Hamilton, 2002). Nationalism has been granted more recognition across UK media in recent years due to the Brexit campaign. Nationalistic sentiment has also been on the rise across much of Europe but is a term not always used accurately.

Nationalism is the ideology that legitimises nations; it is the glue that holds the walls together. Modern societies are territorially organised into nation states but are not indisputable natural entities. They result from social political processes of national construction (Bresser-Pereira, 2008) and the identity of a nation is contingent on 'otherness', i.e., a nation can only be regarded as different when it is compared to some 'other' place. Nationalist ideology constitutes the nation itself by referring to common traits like language, skin colour, religion, to name a few. Such traits construct an 'us' from an 'other' group or body. This process of 'othering' usually involves some kind of prejudice involving class, race, culture, gender, and numerous other differentiae. The act of 'othering' defines a 'them'- foreigners - as the antithesis to the members of the in-group- the

'us'. The in-group can belong to a community or it can extend to a nation (Maíz, 2003). It is precisely this 'us' and 'them' dichotomy which is often referred to as populism, and can lead to harmful and regressive ideas that deem other identities as inferior, threatening or otherwise undesirable. Whilst the aim of this thesis is not to debate the definitions of this terminology, the 'far right' or 'radical right' in this thesis refers to a politics mobilised around authoritarianism, anti-democracy, and exclusionary and/or holistic nationalism (Carter, 2018). The actors expressing far-right tendencies also express characteristics of racism, xenophobia, and populism (*ibid*).

In the UK this populism has materialised in a politics that reduces immigrants to simplistic, easily digestible, and degrading stereotypes which were mobilised throughout the campaign to leave the EU (Holliday, 1999; Evans and Mellon, 2019). Given that nationalism intersects with ideological 'host-vessels', e.g., conservatism or fascism, or other ideologies, I am interested in unearthing where and how nationalism is situated within frames that address environmental problems in agriculture, focusing on a time frame that extends from the announcement of the Brexit referendum until August 2020. In other words, I approach agriculture and its related ecological issues as a potential host-vessel for nationalism.

Much of the valuable research on the rise in support for both radical and moderate right-wing parties has been focused on anti-immigration rhetoric. Hence, there is far less material examining the way that such groups relate to contemporary issues of environmental crises at a national scale (Forchtner and Kølvraa, 2015), even less so to issues pertaining specifically to agriculture. More than just providing the container within which agri-ecological issues are presented, the nation has become the very rationale behind the identification or proposal of certain causes and solutions of problems. Nationalism is directly related to nature as it is predicated on the space in which a particular imagined national 'community' lies (*ibid*). These spaces are most commonly represented through material terms such as land, countryside, and soil, for example, and are often used to defend certain parts of nature seen as 'resources'. But nationalism also constructs itself on the idea that nature is a symbolic space or an aesthetic object, rooted in a Romantic idea that nature should represent pure, unspoiled beauty. For this reason, nationalist imaginations of nature often idealise landscapes in the countryside and demonise urban places (Forchtner and Kølvraa, 2015).

This thesis seeks to draw out possible paradoxes in the way that nationalism relates to agri-culture. One of the main ways I do this is by focusing on the notion of scale. For example, a persistent binary lingers in food systems' scholarship which situates the scale of the 'local' as an inherent site of resistance to the destructive global capitalist logic (Park, 2013; Latour, 2018). However, an

essentialisation of 'local' can facilitate abstract ideas of the 'land' and who belongs there. The land is often treated as a 'nuanced object of patriotic devotion', and symbolic landscapes are often seen as a common part of memories and emotions that a population can have. Such sentiments can become radicalised and feature in the discourse of far-right groups across Europe, which elucidates that attempts to offer alternatives to current harmful practices must be approached with caution (Carruthers, Winter and Evans, 2013). The symbolism of nature often leads to the belief that particular sections of the Earth's surface are the exclusive possession of a nation; and that cultural differences are bound to the soil of a nation (Andersson, 2020). Protecting the environment can, therefore, become an act of nationalistic defence. In France, for example, one right-wing politician has claimed that 'the best friend of ecology is the border' (The Zetkin Collective, forthcoming). In this sense, the land can be used to express feelings of patriotism, community, and rootedness and given that agriculture is an activity that fundamentally depends and alters the state of ecological systems, agri-culture can also be a subject of concern in nationalistic discourse.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Theoretical Framework

Political Food Ecology (PFE)

Political Food Ecology (PFE) is a disciplinary fusion between geography, anthropology, sociology, environmental history and ecological economics (Bryant and Bailey, 1997). PE is defined by Robbins (2012) as an empirical, research-based exploration of changes to the physical world that finds linkages between environmental change and the social processes that shape(d) these changes. More critically though, Political Food Ecology provides a lens to examine how inequalities, exclusion and injustice are (re)produced in agriculture, and how the so-called 'winners' and 'losers' of agri-environmental transformations are created. Influenced by PE's assumption that the environment is 'an arena of contested entitlements' where 'conflicts or claims over property, assets, labour, and politics of recognition play themselves out', PFE calls for a political awareness in scientific knowledge to consider the role of political power. The focus is on

politics as conditioning human-nature relations, specifically in relation to food. PFE goes beyond the scope of conventional sustainability studies and opens up discussion around uncomfortable legacies of dispossession, colonialism and harm often hidden in the stability of food circuits and ecosystemic relations through agriextraction (Moragues-Faus and Marsden, 2017). In this thesis, such (often uncomfortable) realities will be revealed in the context of nationalism, the countryside, and agricultural politics. Such realities are only just emerging in mainstream scholarship (Allen, 2010; Park, 2013; Moragues-Faus and Marsden, 2017).

Social Justice Framework

Taking a social justice framework to this study is important in order to extend out of the purely ecological dimensions of agri-cultural struggles to better gauge how nationalism in its various forms may exist in, shape and justify socially problematic features of the UK's current archetype of food production. Ferguson (2019) argues that to engage with the hegemonic features of food systems, scholars need to go to the 'frontlines' of the struggle where people are reimagining the food system. Such frontlines can be conceptualised as 'frontiers of capital accumulation', or in the case of this thesis, production of agri-capital (Bellamy Foster and Suwandi, 2020). Only when these are acknowledged can a truly equitable food system be established. This thesis aims to find out which frames in the discourse around agri-cultural struggles in the UK reproduce pre-existing inequalities in wealth, power and privilege within food systems, and how nationalism and its paradoxes are discursively presented within these.

This thesis will take a broadened conceptualisation of power by looking at hegemonic food regimes and 'everyday' mobilisations of power (Wajcman, 2010) such as those between humans and non-humans which upholds the metabolic rift in nature.[2] This is a particularly valuable dimension for this thesis as it seeks to unearth the concealed socioecological impacts and trade-offs of what are otherwise considered 'sustainable solutions' to challenges in UK agri-cultures (Moragues-Faus and Marsden, 2017).

[2] The 'metabolic rift' relates to the double separation of agriculture from its biological foundations due to both industrialisation and capitalism. The rift refers to the rupture between town and country (which prevents the cycling of nutrients back to the land) and of humans from nature (Schneider and McMichael, 2010).

Philosophical standpoint

Critical Realism

This research applies a philosophical framework of 'critical realism' (CR) which helps to understand how the manufacturing of ideas based on nationalistic sentiments can aggravate and catalyse widespread harm of both a social and ecological kind. To better understand social and political constructions of agri-cultural problems, I apply a CR perspective by acknowledging the difference between physical realities and the social constructions made around these realities. Physical realities are, for example, the wetness of a river, the spherical shape of Earth, or the decline in the diversity of pollinator species. These can be referred to as 'empirical realities' and can be measured and exist regardless of whether people believe they are true or not (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). However, humans live in a 'reality' that is not shaped or limited solely by empirical data. These 'realities' are termed 'ontologies' and some societal systems are more attuned with empirical environmental realities than others, and respond to ecological problems as such (Forsyth, 2001). This thesis departs from the basis of critical realism and applies it to a framing analysis by recognising that the way certain actors 'frame' a problem is based not necessarily on empirical reality, but guided by certain political agendas, ideologies, and other societal norms and systemic prejudices (Fairclough, 2005; Wilson, 2016). One example of a dominant ontological system that does not function in accordance with the realities of ecological systems is neoliberal capitalism, which treats finite nature as an infinite pool of resources (Foster, 2002; Swyngedouw, 2010). Without interrogating the places where such ontologies appear and are reproduced, they can continue shaping the empirical realities of agri-culture of tomorrow uninterrupted. In the case of nationalism, the 'nation' – whilst having definite consequences – is a construct that can be discursively used and applied to constrain and obscure certain empirical realities which relate to and sustain ecologically destructive and socially oppressive relations in agriculture (Soper, 1995; Park, 2013; Fairclough, 2013).

Analytical framework

Ecological Linguistical (ecolinguistical) Analysis

Ecolinguistics engage with social justice elements of food systems by looking at power relations and the erasure of certain realities and how this erasure discursively manifests a version of society and human-nature relations (Stibbe, 2014). This thesis is concerned with the way that nationalism features in frames around agri-culture in the UK, and thus will examine how certain aspects of nature are manipulated to suit certain agendas. For example, the statement that 'agriculture is a key driver of climate change' erases the reality that certain kinds of agricultural models have more effect on land-use change than others, as well as the role of certain farm operators – namely large, industrial agri-corporations – being the most responsible for farm-induced greenhouse gas emissions (Kremen and Miles, 2012; FFCC, 2019; IPBES, 2019; Sustain Alliance, 2020). Such narratives mis-locate the source of a problem by failing to critically examine specific forms of human activity that are behind ecological collapse (Soper, 1995). Discourse is characteristically exclusionary because it represents and constructs social life in line with the worldviews, agendas, and priorities of the person communicating it (Park, 2013). Therefore, whilst ecolinguistics does not presume that there can ever be an omniscient objective perspective, it works as an analytical tool to illuminate potentially exclusionary outcomes of communicated discourse.

As this thesis searches for the ways that socioecological realities are manipulated and/or misrepresented to reach certain agendas, ecolinguistics helps to guide this research in its approach to examining discourse around agri-culture, to look for occurrences of exclusion and erasure to better understand how themes of nationalism can communicate and attempt to resolve issues in agri-culture. This thesis embarks on a discursive struggle between the hegemonic and more marginalised discourses around the future of food production in the UK to bring to attention the forgotten, denied, overlooked, and neglected ideologies and values that exhibit themes of nationalism.

Critical Framing Analysis (CFA)

To better understand how nationalism features in the diagnosis, conceptualisation and responses of different actors to agri-cultural problems, this thesis uses the qualitative analytical tool of a critical framing analysis, a division of the wider field of discourse analysis, as detailed below.

The point of entry to study nationalism for this thesis, in the context of agri-culture, will largely revolve around written or spoken texts as they can be analysed to identify topical frames. Nationalism, as an ideological tool, can assign meaning to and interpret relevant events and conditions to mobilise support and to construct certain groups or people as antagonists (Snow, 2004). Framing analysis is a useful tool for studying this, especially in the context of ecolinguistics because it can draw focus to the persistent selection, emphasis, and exclusion of certain issues in discourse around agri-culture (Gitlin, 1980; Childs, 2016). Another way of defining a frame is to think of it as a kind of paradigm (Entman, 1993). It is critical to understand how nationalistic iterations and their associated ideologies 'in concert with power' can be used to legitimise relations of inequality and domination (Fairclough, 2010).The 'critical' element of the framing methodology is that critical scholars attend to taken-for-granted rationalities and underlying ideologies (Creed et al., 2002).

I will focus on 'topical frames', as they are content-related and issue-specific. I will be collecting different frames to construct a 'landscape' of how nationalism features in different actors' interpretations of 'problems' in agri-culture post-Brexit (Van Gorp, 2009). Specifically, I use Entman's (1999) application of framing to look for the ways that nationalism is used in either: Defining a problem, why is it a problem and for whom, interpreting a problem's cause, a moral evaluation of a problem, and/or suggesting remedies (Kuypers, 2009; Entman, 1993). The answers to these questions are the brick and mortar of the frame as a paradigm and can be found in discourse. Although commonly used as a method for studying social movements, the highly dynamic and changing political landscape of Brexit makes the framing analysis method helpful for ascertaining how certain dominant frames can name and rename problems in agri-culture (Friedmann, 2006). To give an example, 'food localism' can be considered a progressive alternative to the mainstream way of producing and distributing food in a society (Park, 2013). But when this localism is reframed as being 'patriotic', the way that localism is perceived or valued by society shifts. Hence, nationalism can focus attention on certain things whilst excluding others; conveying what is or is not important (Benford, 1997).

This framing analysis also follows Fairclough's interpretation of ideology as a 'modality of power' which constitutes and sustains relations of power through hegemony to produce consent or at least acquiescence, rather than power through violence or force (Fairclough, 2010). In this way, frames help to draw out the counter-frames or 'reframes' of certain, otherwise accepted, hegemonic visions in agri-cultural struggles (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Martin, 2002).

What is discourse?

The semiotic entry used to examine nationalism and how it features in agri-cultural problems will be 'discourse'. Discourse refers to 'communicative practices' (Van Dijk, 1993) or what Scoville-Simonds (2014) calls 'language in use'; language is never used alone but enacted in social practice. The relationship between frames and discourse is dynamic; discourse is what frames are comprised of, and frames create discourse. Communicative practices can manifest under the parameter of 'language', including verbal language, written texts, and visual discourse (including videos and advertisements). Whilst discourse analysis often discusses the structural elements of language, such as a far-right group's use of Twitter as a low cost, rapid-dissemination communication platform, this thesis is more concerned with how linguistic choices relate to nationalism and the (often subtle) ideological meanings and emotional manipulations manifest in frames (Elder-Vass, 2012). However, discourse is not limited to language alone and thus I also consider the broader definition of discourse as 'systems of meaningful practices' including performative 'actions' such as the outcome of a referendum or the decision by Members of Parliament to vote against a bill (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000). For this thesis, I am influenced by a critical realist perspective of discourse which follows the premise that there is a pre-constituted reality and a constitutive process of discourse (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). While a 'presocial' reality exists outside of human reflection, i.e., whether or not one believes in climate change, it *is* happening, the human imaginary is connected to the presocial environment and can thus interpret it in a variety of ways which can then become mainstreamed understandings of how the world is or should be, for example (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997).

Methods

The Case Sample

The actors who provide the core discursive focus of this research were chosen because they express concern over the future of rural places in the UK and are 'stakeholders' in agri-culture. This criteria was loosely based on a review of the secondary literature relating to food geographies, largely looking to recent research done by the Emancipatory Rural Politics Initiative on rural populism in Europe (Scoones *et al.*, 2017). I do not necessarily agree with the social constructions around the term 'countryside' but use this term to navigate the discourse to encompass a range of views relating to 'non-urban' areas of the UK (Woods, 2007). As this thesis will be examining discourse to unearth where nationalism interacts with agri-culture, the 'countryside' will work as an organising concept for recruiting actors that will make up the study sample. As detailed in Table 1, the 'subject actor' variable contains six categories (e.g., pressure groups, farmer unions). There are twenty-two 'actors' in total (e.g., Sustain Alliance UK) distributed across those categories. Some of the actors chosen for the framing analysis came later in the analysis process as my engagement with the thesis topic deepened.

To answer the research questions, the data collected in this thesis was less centred on individually examining the discourse of certain actors, and more to do with placing their discourses in conversation with one another to distinguish overarching themes. I have referred to the 'UK' or 'Britain' in this thesis because these are the administrative borders that most of the examined discourse used to signify the political terrain of agri-cultural concern. Whilst most actors in the sample are based largely in the political administrative border of England, unless stipulated by the actors themselves in the discourse, this thesis does not limit itself to only being concerned with matters based in England.

The primary research part of this thesis involved exploring discourse dated from 2015, when the announcement of the Brexit referendum took place, until the time of submitting this thesis (Benford, 1997).

Sample information

Subject Actor	**Actor**	**Actor Description**	**Type of Material(s) analysed**
Political parties			
	Conservative Party	Government of the UK (in 2020); centre-right; favouring liberal free-market economics	Web articles, speeches, policy briefs, parliamentary discussions, open letter responses, legislative bills, House of Commons debate
	United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)	Eurosceptic; right-wing; nationalist; free-market economics	Web Articles, manifesto
Farmer Unions			
	National Farmers Union	Largest member organisation/industry association for farmers in England and Wales	Web articles, Tweets, interviews, campaigns
	The Landworkers' Alliance	Union of farmers, growers, foresters and land-based workers; member of La Via Campesina; advocates for agroecology	Policy briefs, web articles, reports, campaigns

Pressure Groups			
	Conservative Environmental Network	Forum, MP caucus, and membership organisation for Conservatives; supports environmental conservation and decarbonisation.	Web articles, manifesto, blogs
	Campaign to Protect Rural England	Pressure group; advocates for matters concerning the countryside in England	Reports
	English Environment Group	Facebook page for ‘all those opposed to the destruction of England's countryside’	Blogs, Facebook posts
	Sustain Alliance UK	Umbrella group of 100 food-related national public interest organisations	Policy briefs, web articles
	Migration Watch UK	Think-tank campaigning for decreased immigration	Campaign video
	Patriotic Alternative	Extreme far-right ultranationalist campaign group	Web articles, blogs

	Countryside Alliance	Campaign organisation; promotes 'rural way of life in Parliament, in the media and on the ground'	Reports, web articles, campaign videos
Farming Media			
	Farmers Weekly	Magazine aimed at the farming industry in Britain	Web articles
	Farming UK	""	Web articles
	Farmer's Guardian	Weekly newspaper aimed at farming industry in Britain	Web articles, email newsletters
Farming organisations			
	Soil Association	Charity that certifies organic food in the UK	Reports
	Riverford Organics	Organic farm and vegetable box delivery company	Newsletters

Table 1: *Information of sample: actor category, actor, actor description; type of materials in which the discourse was found.*

Empirical Material

Finding discourse to apply framing analysis; the 'communicative events'

I will be examining a wide range of places where discourse containing sentiments referring to agriculture after Brexit can be found. These 'places' will hereafter be referred to as 'communicative

events'. By this, I am talking about material that represents a form of communication; something that a person or people has or have intended to be communicated to more than just themselves. These 'communicative events' reside across a mass of multi-media platforms and for this thesis will include: online news articles, websites, blogs, petitions, policy briefs, commercial advertisements, campaign videos, reports, Twitter posts, manifestos, speeches at demonstrations, conference speeches, parliamentary sessions, media interviews, legislative bills, leaked emails, slogans, and Facebook. Whilst the materials engaged with for the analysis involved examining platforms established by the actors detailed in Table 1 themselves (e.g., web articles, tweets), I also examined a wider range of material which contained the discourse of the actors in Table 1 but were produced by other sources (e.g., online news platforms containing interviews with NFU representatives). The assortment of communicative events settled on for this thesis is by no means exhaustive, nor are the choice of actors included in the sample.

However, in all their diversities, the aforementioned 'communicative events' were selected for being helpful for identifying the various ways in which nationalism features in contemporary framing or interpretations of issues in UK agri-culture. These materials can present discursive messages through language to those exposed to them (recipients). It is these messages that I will be examining critically to draw out themes of nationalism which are presented in the Analytical Discussion section of this thesis.

I found the materials (communicative events) to examine by carrying out a series of internet searches relating to agri-cultural issues in the context of Brexit. These included: agricultural technology, payments for environmental public goods, food security, migrant agricultural labour, food trade deals, local food, and sustainable farming. This was an iterative process involving back and forth between analysis and data collection because each informs and advances the other. i.e., I was exploring how nationalistic sentiments and their derivatives occur within and between other communication forms. Even when I began the analysis process, I was continually sourcing more communicate events that enabled me to add depth to the claims being developed in the framing analysis. This was particularly important to answer research question 1a which involves demanding more analytic questions from the data as paradoxes arose.

Coding

The analysis of the discourse to understand the ways that certain actors frame agri-cultural problems featuring nationalism involved an inductive process of coding to identify frames. After I found the materials to analyse, and I became accustomed with what the original communicate event was communicating, I commenced the first stage of the Framing Analysis. This involved the implementation of a thematic coding process which involved looking through the 'communicative events' to identify and record the discursive trends that appear in relation to the key questions of a framing process; what is the problem of concern?, why is it a problem and for whom?, how is the problem's cause presented?, how is the problem morally evaluated?, what are the suggested remedies? (Kuypers, 2009; Entman, 1993).

The coding stage is a process of 'abstraction' whereby I converted the original communicative event into a series of codes that are accompanied by quotes from the original communicate event (Vaismoradi *et al.*, 2016). This process disintegrates the mass of data into more manageable sections (the communicative events collected) by condensing the material to the parts most related to the research questions. Codes act as a common point of reference across all of the materials examined and are important for identifying commonalities and contrasts between the discourse of various actors (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). Some examples of the codes I found included 'stewardship', 'patriotism', 'rural identity', 'self-sufficiency', 'foreign food' etc. These codes were the result of several re-coding phases whereby the tropes in the communicate events were synergised and increasingly condensed and were recorded using the variables 'subject actor', 'problem field', 'key codes'. The construction of the clusters of codes generated nuanced frames which guided the content structure of the Analytical Discussion.

As I searched through the communicative events, I looked out for the tropes to record them as they emerged. After several phases of recoding, I then began the process of identifying themes under which codes could be clustered; these clusters became the backbone of what would eventually be defined as 'topical frames'; the overarching discursive focus of the Analytical Discussion. Despite some actors expressing apparently different ideologies, they may be in what Wagner and Payne (2017) call 'discourse coalitions'. To identify such coalitions, I examined the codes across the various communicate events to find links, narratives, juxtapositions, contradictions, paradoxes etc. in their use of nationalism and the way they employed nationalistic ideologies to frame problems. This initial process drew loosely upon the wider theoretical literature on nationalism that I reviewed in the Introduction of this thesis. However, these frames are not discrete units of analysis, but build upon one another; featuring similarities and juxtapositions with some having an interdependent relationship as they bolster and supplement claims (Creed et al., 2002). To answer

the second research question: once I had determined the key topical frames, I then returned to the codes to identify where paradoxes exist in the framing process of the same actors. These paradoxes would then be discussed within the frame analysis in the Analytical Discussion.

Scholar activism, subjectivity and limitations

It is important that I reiterate the subjective nature of the critical examination of discourse that is carried out in this thesis. I will admit now that I abandon the notion of neutral objectivity as I am politically and emotionally engaged with these 'communicative events' as I analyse them (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). In turn, this research can be interpreted as limited primarily due to the interpretation process of a framing analysis method. Fundamentally, this method is an interaction between myself as an interpreter and the material I am interpreting. Hence, the results are always closely tied to my personal beliefs about the world, what I consider to be injustice, and my personal understandings of context (Wagenaar, 2014). Because of the various biases I have relating to my experiences and privilege, there may be certain aspects of the discourse examined which I overlooked but are equally important to consider. Moreover, due to the scope of this project, I was unable to review the discourse of more actors, which perhaps compromises the depth of the study. Nevertheless, this study stands as a learning curve for me as a researcher, and although the aim of this thesis is not to make any essentialised conclusions, I hope that it provides some nuanced insights into the topic and scope for further investigation.

ANALYTICAL DISCUSSION

Introduction

For this discussion, I will introduce and explore how various iterations of nationalism are used to frame agri-cultural issues in conjunction with Brexit, calling upon discourse from 2015 until August 2020, how they appear in the discourse, and their paradoxes. The key frames that guide this discussion are presented thematically, starting with *patriotic agri-environmentalism* and *agri-nationalism,* followed by *green nationalism,* all of which are thematically grouped as defensive responses to environmental conservation of the countryside. Then I introduce the frame of *stewardship* which is used by several actors to portray farmers and those living in the countryside as caretakers of land as a national symbol. After that, the theme of technology emerges as a way of addressing ecological breakdown caused by agriculture, and *technological nationalism* frames the future of UK agri-tech development. This frame preludes an investigation of ecomodernist ideas about a 'farm-free' countryside and its associated trade-offs and paradoxes. The discussion then reveals how iterations of nationalism, including concepts often associated with progressive movements, emerge in a *patriotic localism* frame, showing that certain applications of nationalism can incubate far right discourse. Lastly, I explore what happens when nationalism meets crisis as *corporate nationalism* emerges in the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. None of these frames exist exclusively of each other, and I endeavour to show how the discourse within frames converge into one another and, at times, contradict themselves.

In defence of the countryside

Patriotic agri-environmentalism

A key discursive point of contention in the agri-cultural politics surrounding Brexit is the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) which has been presented by several actors as having

detrimental effects on 'the British countryside'. The Conservative Party (also referred to as 'the Tories') blamed the degradation of the 'natural environment' on the EU CAP throughout the Brexit campaign, labelling it as 'discredited' (The Conservatives, 2019). The Tories created the slogan: 'Get Brexit done to support British Farmers' (*ibid*), and have developed a new Agriculture Bill to replace the EU CAP. This Bill is caught up in the *patriotic agri-environmentalism* frame which presents 'countryside' as an entity around which people can be patriotic. Such discourse is entangled with motives to garner voter support, demonstrated by the Conservative Environment Network (CEN): '[What] makes people proud to be British? The NHS – and then our countryside. Environmental protection is not simply the morally correct thing to do for future generations; it is not only the future economic model for our nation – it's the path to a Conservative majority' (Richards, 2019).

A breakdown of the *patriotic agri-environmentalism* frame requires interrogating patriotism; defined by Billig (1995) as an attachment to a geographically specific place in which one resides and can be a positive force that provides stability for an 'in-group'. In the case of the Conservative Party, Brexit has been sold to much of the public as an opportunity to 'take back power' and 'reverse the decline of nature'. Whilst for the CEN, Brexit can bring stability by addressing the environmental degradation wrought by the CAP; a 'unifying project' for a 'divided country' (CEN, 2019a, 2019b; The Conservatives, 2019). These features of the *patriotic agri-environmentalism* frame also combine green politics and nationalism into a kind of 'green populism'. This takes the essence of populism, which constructs an identity of 'the people', and applies it to the unifying symbol of the British 'countryside' or 'nature', which is depicted as part of 'the peoples'' rights, heritage and identity (Conversi, 2020). Moreover, like populism and its opposition to the suffering of the 'people', the green populism element of the *patriotic agri-environmentalism* frame seeks to protect the peoples' 'nature' against 'the other' who threatens it. In this case, the 'other' is the liberal elites of the EU and the CAP (Machin and Wagener, 2019). It seems that nationalism becomes attached to an 'ideological host-vessel' to provide answers to problems. Here, nationalism seems to have found a suitable home in agri-environmental struggles.

The 'countryside' is a signifier used by several actors in framing agri-environmental issues and refers to a construction of rurality, saturated with a variety of interpretations (or ontologies) of nature and its relation to the nation. This is demonstrated by a variety of actors concerned with the future of agriculture post-Brexit, including the Countryside Alliance which argues that the British countryside is 'iconic' and 'famous around the world' because of its farming (Countryside

Alliance, 2018). As the majority of the land in the UK is occupied as farmland (Committee on Climate Change, 2018), the *patriotic agri-environmentalism* frame commonly includes references to 'protecting' and 'nurturing' these revered places through agriculture. Such matters have been an important talking point by Conservative MPs focused on environmental conservation (Owen, 2017). Even insects are given nationality, with the CEN wanting to see 'British Bees' 'flourishing' after Brexit (Bradley Ben, 2018). In turn, framing patriotism as a means to achieve such aims comes as no surprise if one considers the words of Merry (2018): 'only religion can rival patriotism in its ability to stoke and nourish the allegiance of millions'. The President of the National Farmers Union (NFU) stated that 'When people buy British food' they are protecting 'our natural resources and iconic landscapes' (FarmingUK, 2019), building a frame which honours farming with the power to maintain a memorialised image of the countryside; the rural component of the nation that many are attached to. Consequentially, the *patriotic agri-environmentalism* frame includes a repeated critique of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), with several Tory Parliamentary Members (MPs) claiming that Brexit will help to revive the countryside as a national symbol by reviving 'British soil' and to 'defend' the farmers who are the 'lifeblood' of British communities (Gove, 2018; Villiers, 2020; De Bellaigue, 2020; Kearns, 2020).

Agri-nationalism

There are other actors, however, which build on the aforementioned framing of 'rural' issues as something of concern to the patriot, but go further by claiming that it is in the interest of the British nation-state and its 'indigenous population' to increase its agricultural 'self-sufficiency'. The newly emerged extreme ethnonationalist far-right group Patriotic Alternative (PA) frame what they see as weakened national sovereignty as remediable through *agri-nationalism*; a frame which focuses less on environmental issues and more on agriculture as a concern for the nation. PA have written that, 'when half your nation's foodstuff is foreign, your power is very vulnerable to an angry, starving mob', using defensive populist rhetoric to frame the issue of food import dependency. *Agri-nationalism* also addresses the issue of scale in agri-culture and presents the 'foreign farm' as a threat to British farms. PA, which pedals the prophecy that the 'white Briton' population will be a 'minority by 2066', frame globalisation as having transformed the food system and, in so doing, transformed British culture (Poulter, 2020). PA recentre agriculture according to an 'in-group' identity and wish to 'de-globalise the nation' which they describe as having enabled COVID-19 to reach British shores, and erode British food 'self-sufficiency' (Womack, 2020). The

way that PA frames the 'self' in 'self-sufficiency' signifies concern for a particular imagined community; an implicit 'we' that authorises exclusion to take place to benefit a desirable ethnicity; white Britons (Gorostiza, 2019). They assert that the nation must release itself from the dependency on 'far-flung foreign farms to put food on its tables' (Heritage and Destiny, 2020). *Agri-nationalism's* preoccupation with the 'foreign' for both people and food-as-commodities reflects a racist economic localism that promotes ethnic exclusion to achieve a 'resilient economy'.

A key theme in the *agri-nationalism* frame is 'self-sufficiency', which is a concept linked to 'food sovereignty', is both a politicised ethic and movement galvanised by farming and advocacy groups in the UK (read: The People's Food Policy, 2020). However, when self-sufficiency is imagined under the frame of *agri-nationalism* it is expressed as a masculine opposition to dependence and vulnerability; typical of historical fascist self-sufficiency narratives (Gorostiza, 2019). PA attack globalised food systems and the UK's dependency on the ethnic 'other' for food production, seeing domestic food production and consumption as a precondition in their campaign to rebirth an 'ethnic homeland' (Womack, 2020).

Green nationalism

Additionally, but perhaps more innocuously, the English Environment Group (EEG) frame patriotism as a necessary facet of environmental conservation but utilise a populist rhetoric to present the issue of a degraded countryside to the migrant 'other'. The EEG culminate this rhetoric in a *green nationalism* frame which discursively appropriates the countryside to further its political agenda. The EEG have promoted a video produced by Migration Watch UK (the founder of which is an Oxford University professor who predicted that the white Briton will be a minority by 2066 (Coleman, 2010)) claiming that the government has failed to prevent the 'gobbling up of green belt' areas around cities which they attribute to the 'growing immigrant population'. The discursive tool of populism is visible here as the countryside is portrayed as threatened by a 'foreign' force. Migration Watch UK build up the *green nationalism* frame by insisting that 'Instead of choosing how many trees to cut down… the government should be planning on how to reduce immigration… to protect our countryside' (Migration Watch UK, 2020). Such a portrayal of the countryside as a nationalistic symbol and a possession reflects the same 'us' and 'them' discourse of populism, exhibiting the countryside as a 'paradise' in need of defence against the antagonist migrant. PA claim that urban places 'run like acne on the kingdom's fair skin' and

define the countryside as a ‘factory’ for ‘Asian yobs’ and ‘Rasta gangtas’ (Solere, 2020). The *green nationalism* frame is contingent on a ‘defensive localism’; a conservative response to place attachment where the local scale can easily become a platform for insular, exclusionary practices, rather than ‘an accessible arena in which to build effective social justice strategies’ (Winter, 2003). Moreover, this belief is attached to a history of Malthusianism – the notion that ecological ills are a problem of human numbers – and morally evaluates certain individuals as being entitled to access the privileges of economically wealthier countries, privileges such as the ‘paradise’ of the countryside (The Zetkin Collective, forthcoming).

Green nationalism is a frame that depicts ‘industrialisation’ as eroding the countryside, a sentiment echoed in the ‘deep ecology’ philosophy which maintains that industrial societies undermine the inherent worth of the very ecosystems on which they depend and are a part of (Zimmerman, 2004). One renowned member of the UK’s ‘deep ecologist’ movement and writer, Paul Kingsnorth (2017) illustrates how a *patriotic environmentalism* frame blends into *green nationalism*; ‘[what] might a benevolent green nationalism sound like? You want to protect and nurture your homeland – well, then, you’ll want to nurture its forests and its streams too… What could be more patriotic?’. Kingsnorth also perceives nationalism and the concept of the border as evidence of ‘a community asserting its values’ (Kingsnorth, 2017). Migration Watch UK’s campaign video makes no reference to how the industrialisation of agriculture has fundamentally disturbed their constructed image of ‘paradise’ in the countryside, thus the focus is less on the erosion of nature and more about who is deemed worthy of the right to exploit it.

Contemporary green nationalism is not yet widely studied nor theorised, but it aligns ecological deterioration with anti-immigration sentiment, which echoes what Naomi Klein terms as ‘ecofascism’; the confluence between fascism’s propensity to take very strong measures to save ‘the people’ from alleged dangers to ‘ecology’ (Zimmerman, 2004; Klein, 2019; Conversi, 2020). The actors examined defend the countryside from immigrants which pits ecology against an ‘out-group’; a sentiment entrained in the politics of hate emboldened during the Brexit campaign. Ecofascism, at its most extreme, has been enacted by the likes of Brendon Tarrant, a white man who murdered fifty people in a mosque in New Zealand in 2018 with the conviction that ‘The Europe of the future is not one of concrete and steel, smog and wires but a place of forests, lakes, mountains and meadows’ (The Zetkin Collective, forthcoming). Such acts of ecofascism are something that Klein (*ibid*) warns will occur with much greater frequency if ‘societies do not rise to the ecological crisis’.

The custodians of the countryside and erasing the migrant worker

Stewardship

A commonality in the way that nationalism is presented in the aforementioned frames is that the environment is often framed as a national 'asset' and caring for this 'asset' is often framed as *stewardship*. Welchman (2016) defines environmental stewardship as a type of management of human activities to protect the integrity of ecological systems, resources, and values for the sake of present and future generations. However, the nationalist ontology of stewardship as demonstrated by the far right is framed in a way that recognizes a certain type of citizen playing the stewardship role, at a certain scale.

In England, the British Union of Fascists (BUF) in the early 1900s exhibited a *stewardship* frame by presenting independent family-run and self-sufficient farms as the upholders of the tradition of people being 'tied' to the land in rural areas (Warren, 2017). This 20th century fascist rhetoric employed a *stewardship* discourse that framed urban elites as responsible for the erasure of the traditional rural 'culture'. More recently in the UK, a 'rural nationalism' rhetoric is presented by UKIP: 'British farmers are custodians of the countryside and that on the EU's watch, vast subsidies have been paid to wealthy landowners'. This fits the wider trend in European populist nationalist movements which frames the 'rural' citizen, often a farmer, as being disenfranchised by the elite (Mamonova and Franquesa, 2019; Sale, 1991). In Spain, some farmers have called out 'the urbanites' who 'write regulations from their offices in the cities without having set foot in the countryside' (Berberana, 2019). UKIP frame the elite as the unelected officials who determine EU agricultural policies, and failing to support family owned and tenant farmers (Hamilton, 2019). However, these applications of the *stewardship* frame appear less concerned with the soil's ecology and more with the threats to the land in the form of a nationalistic symbol.

However, when *stewardship* collides with a neoliberal economic agenda, a paradox emerges which pushes the cultural importance of farmers out of the frame. Whilst UKIP frame the EU CAP as favouring wealthier farms, their commitment to smaller scale farmers is weakened as the party also supports trade deals which would undermine small-scale farms. While in France, the

agricultural minister directly called for the public to practice agricultural patriotism to increase the country's 'agricultural sovereignty' (Calvi, 2020), any superficial references UKIP make in their Manifesto to promote the British farmer is overridden by their aim to facilitate cheap food imports (UKIP, 2019). UKIP frame new trade deals as key to reinvigorating 'our rural economy' and 'putting British produce back on the map of the world' (Ashcroft, 2012; Brooks, 2019; Hamilton, 2019), this frame reflects the Party's desire to reclaim its liberties to unfettered trade, prioritising the freedom to tap into new international markets and continue the exploitation of cheap labour overseas (Kalb, 2011; Reck and Paudel, 2017). The Conservative Party also betray their commitment to British farmers which I discuss in the frame of *patriotic agri-environmentalism*, revered for putting the needs of the land first. However, the Tories wish to strike a trade deal with the United States which would oversee the import of food produce which have environmental standards lower than those legal in the UK (Payne, 2020; Swift, 2020). The majority of Tory MPs voted in favour of bringing cheaper food into the UK, which reveals the thin ground that populist campaigns tread on when expecting farmers to work in the best interests of nature whilst simultaneously negotiating better terms for the global elite (Mamonova and Franquesa, 2019).

Another paradox of the *stewardship* frame is its exclusion of migrant labourers who are not featured in the discourse around farmers as custodians; representing an erasure of those the horticultural[3] sector are greatly dependent upon, and who have enabled neoliberal capitalism to subsidise the true price of agriculture for decades (Marsden *et al.*, 1986; Rotz *et al.*, 2019). Despite the Farmers Guardian constructing the image that 'Farmers and food producers are of critical importance to the lifeblood of the nation', as written in a newsletter at the outset of the Coronavirus pandemic in the UK in 2020 (Briggs, 2020), they discursively erase migrant labourers from this narrative. In the majority of the reviewed discourse, the NFU constructs 'farmers' as those with land and capital; not the migrant or land-less labourers who work to make many farms productive. Although the role of the migrant 'other' has been defended by some, this has been on the grounds of maintaining 'competitiveness' and the need for the flow of cheap labour (NFU, 2020; Langford, 2020). This is the nature of nationalist agri-capitalism at work (Hamilton, 2002); while the native population or land is framed as the 'culture' of agriculture (or the steward of the land), the 'other' – whether that be places or people – is framed as less important. In the case of migrant agricultural workers in the UK, they are revered as anything but stewards by the Tories, who have established a new points-based immigration system which erases seasonal agricultural workers from the

[3] Horticulture refers to the production of fresh fruit, vegetables and salad crops

desirable list of immigrants, labelling them as 'unskilled' or 'low-skilled' (Byrne, 2018). UKIP have targeted them for taking away 'low-skilled' jobs (UKIP, 2019; Langford, 2020). Similarly, in Spain, the far-right party Vox frame farming as a patriotic duty, but their political praxis frames agricultural workers as un-Spanish. Marginalising migrant farm workers from the identity of the desirable 'farmer' reinforces the ludicrous way that nationalist discourse frames immigration as a threat to a country, when it actually often refers in reality to the movement of people who provide labour in inhumane conditions to feed countries like the UK and Spain (Pitarch, 2018).

Nationalism in crisis

Feeding the nation

The *stewardship* frame elucidates other iterations of nationalism which frame the production and consumption of food as being embedded with patriotism and national identity. As Brexit collided with COVID-19 in 2020, agri-culture became a brewing pot for nationalist rhetoric, particularly in defence of the role of domestic farmers. Domestic food production became a suggested remedy for food insecurity during the chaos of COVID-19. The Agriculture Bill of 2019-2021 included a requirement for Ministers of Parliament to encourage the production of food in England (Finlay *et al.*, 2020). Boosting domestic food production was framed as a way to feed the nation as the COVID-19 pandemic triggered fears of labour shortages and began to worry agribusinesses who needed hands for harvesting (see figure 1). 'Feeding the Nation' became a repeated media headline, while the government quickly rustled up a patriotically-induced plea for people to 'Pick for Britain', which was endorsed by a member of the Monarchy, Prince Charles (Chapman, 2020; Pick For Britain, 2020; Sainsbury's, 2020). G's Fresh, the country's biggest salad producer, ran a recruitment campaign targeting anyone from students, self-employed workers, to laid-off hospitality staff to gather close-to ruin vegetables and fruit. Interestingly, this was a method endorsed by UKIP in their 2019 Manifesto which presented the country's reliance on 'foreign

labour' as a reason to 'incentivise more British students and young people to pick the harvest during their summer holidays' (UKIP, 2019).

Similar discourse was espoused by many other actors who tried to employ nationalist rhetoric by morally framing British food production as *feeding the nation.* This frame, however, leaves out certain actors involved in the production of food. Prince Charles failed to mention in the promotional video for the Pick For Britain campaign that 'our remarkable farmers and growers' involved in the hard 'graft' of producing the nation's food are people of the kind who have been targeted by the immigration-centred Brexit campaign. Drastic cuts to the number of visas permitted for agricultural labourers have left the country with tens of thousands less people to work the fields

Figure 1: Student Land Army campaign advertisement, Greater Lincolnshire

of farm operators (Salyga, 2020). The wave of agricultural populism that the Tories rode on in the Brexit campaign for 'Getting Brexit Done for Farmers' has collided with capitalism's dependency on the flow of foreign labour; weakening the Tories' nationalist argument for leaving the EU to aid domestic farming. Despite the nationalistic fervour of the 'land army' rhetoric, and the patriotic discourse of Britain's farmers being producers of 'Great British Food', trying to recruit enough

people to pull up vegetables by framing the job as contributing to *feeding the nation* struggled to succeed in its mission.

The *feeding the nation* frame shifted the way that the government portrayed migrant agricultural workers when, during the spring 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, the government awarded farm workers 'key worker' status. This enabled businesses to circumvent international COVID-19 regulations and organise charter flights to bring in Romanian people to work the fields – an event that would seem to conform to 'flexible capitalism' (Gonzalez-Vicente and Carroll, 2017). The director of the corporation employed to fly these people to the UK called it a 'completely new line of business' for airlines and demonstrated crisis capitalism in action (Ziady, 2020; Evans, 2020). In this crisis, the protectors of agri-capital might have given farm workers 'key' status to bypass borders and framed it as *feeding the nation*, but in the grander picture of the UK government's draconian immigration laws, this frame further highlights the paradoxes of the nationalist project of Brexit demonising the migrant 'other'. The paradox of the nationalistic fervour employed in the *feeding the nation* frame was illuminated in other countries across Europe, particularly in Spain where one farm worker who had migrated from sub-Saharan Africa asked, 'Where are Vox's three million voters now? Spain needs you. Now farmers need 300,000 [day laborers] and there are none. We're going to pick up all the fruits. In the middle of the pandemic we will stand up for you, we will feed you, lords of Vox. Now you need us. Long live emigration' (González, 2020).

Looking into the paradoxes of nationalist discourse in rhetoric of domestic food production brings deserved attention to the thin ground that right-wing nationalism stands on when crisis strikes. It seems that when nationalist discourse collides with capitalism's pulsating to urge continue unfettered economic growth, erecting borders and pedalling a nationalistic politics of hate only goes so far; it will not feed a nation on its own. The Confederation of British Industry noted that with the end of free movement after Brexit, any new system will 'need to support trade' by facilitating the import of labour from outside of the EU for companies to continue production (Confederation of British Industry, 2018). Agri-capitalism currently depends on neoliberal globalisation and the flows of foreign labour to do the hard 'graft' on its behalf.

Corporate agri-nationalism

When agri-capitalism revealed its inherent vulnerability to crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, supermarkets as corporations stepped up to the plate and curated sentiments that

reinforced a sense of British identity in food origins. Although this is not so surprising when one considers that a key characteristic of economic nationalism is revolved around consumption habits, the state framed supermarkets as being able to care for the nation, and promoted them as capable of generating 'unity' amongst food consumers during times of crisis (Hancox, 2020). The Environment Secretary stated that the government had listened to the 'powerful arguments' of the UK's biggest supermarkets and 'will do whatever it takes to help them feed the nation', reflecting the character of the current corporate food regime (McMichael and McMichael, 2013). One agri-food scholar, Tim Lang, remarked that there is a tradition in the British establishment of believing that 'the Empire will provide'. In crisis, the corporate regime shifts this role onto supermarkets and makes nationalism appear as an instrument of capitalism and that capitalism in this context needs the organisational structure of the nation to accumulate profit.

The main tool that the state-corporation partnership deployed during COVID-19 was the discursive encouragement of patriotic consumption habits. When *agri-nationalism* meets the corporation, it appears to frame the need for people to consume British produce via paternalistic messages of farmers working hard to feed the nation, rationing customers, campaigning to support British farmers by supplying more British produce, as well as plastering stores with Union Jacks and signage that herald the 'British farmer' (Hancox, 2020; Jahshan, 2020; Sainsbury's, 2020). Although perhaps driven by the impulse of attachment to local place, the *corporate agri-nationalism* frame involves supermarkets banging the drum of patriotic consumption through 'Buying British'. This highlights supermarket's pivotal role in the corporate food regime, reinforcing people's roles as consumers and alluding to their patriotic duties to support British farmers. Whilst states and their subjects are often the leading characters in the academic material on nationalism, an examination of production and consumption systems draws attention to the economic nature of nationalism and how it can manifest as consumable, both metaphorically and literally in the way of food. Peel back the flag, and the corporate take-over of agri-nationalism reveals supermarkets as the gatekeepers of a largely white, patriarchal, capitalist food production system (Soper, 2020; Andersson, 2020).

Ecomodernist agri-cultures progressing to an imperial past

Technological nationalism

A particularly significant matter of controversy in agricultural politics as the UK leaves the EU has been agricultural technology (agri-tech). The EU has been labelled by the Conservative Party as a 'straight jacket' that stopped the UK from accessing agricultural technology which could solve the country's ecological problems (Gove, 2018). Technology is poised, according to the CEN, to amend the ills of agri-extractivism and produce a triple win: grow the economy, enhance the environment and bring unity to a 'divided country' (CEN, 2019b). This discourse not only is definitive of an ecomodernist ideology but it frames agri-culture through a *technological nationalist* frame; presenting technology as part of a nation-building project (Dee Kord, 2011). Getting out of the EU's straight-jacket is supposed to benefit the country's ecosystems by deploying on-farm robots (see Figure 2) to reduce agriculture's 'imprint' on the land (Gove, 2019; Fairlie, 2014). This frame also positions agri-tech as a way to protect 'our precious national

Figure 2: 'Gummiarm' robot in brassica field, Cornwall, England (Vergnault and Channon, 2018)

inheritance', i.e., the 'natural environment' (Courts, 2018). However, there is an overriding factor driving the Tories' technophilia; Brexit and new immigration laws having drastically reduced work permits for seasonal agricultural labour (Kay, 2018) and thus the Environment Secretary has presented the long-term solution to decreased labour as 'a more capital-intensive approach' to farming (McCarthy, 2018). This focuses on giving 'Mother Nature a helping hand' by speeding up evolutionary processes through plant gene-editing technology (FarmingUK, 2018).

The enthusiastic embrace of technology endorsed in the discourse of *techno-nationalism* distracts from the way that technology is 'rescripting' society and its agri-cultures by altering land-society relations (Gunton *et al.*, 2016). The Environment Ministry declared that the country stands on the verge of the 'fourth agricultural revolution' (Gove, 2018); moving the country further away from its agri-cultural history of horses pulling ploughs across 'green and pleasant lands' (Chakraborti and Garland, 2004) and towards herds of machines on 'automated pastures'. Here, the important cultural connections between the 'countryside', or the often synonymised 'farmland', that were promoted under the *patriotic agri-environmentalism* frame are now contradicted by the discursive visions contained in *technological nationalism.* The 'fourth agricultural revolution' jeopardises Patriotic Alternative's ideal that white Britons are the 'guardians of a living landscape of hop picking sylvan beauty with heavy horses, gun dogs and tractors working side by side' (Solere, 2020). If one considers the hegemonic favouritism for an ecomodernist agri-future, such romantic rural imagery may become a relic visible only on the back of cereal packets (Case, 2020).

Despite UKIP arguing that the 'small-scale and family farm' was under attack by the EU CAP, and Prime Minister Boris Johnson's statement of the importance of 'taking back control of our agricultural policy', the Tories' framing of technology as the primary means to increase food production (Johnson, 2020) is to spend public subsidies on industrial technologies to ramp up productivity aimed at export to avoid the British countryside turning into a 'Museum of World Farming' at whatever social cost (Owen, 2017). The *technological nationalism* frame exposes the populist campaign to leave the EU on ecological grounds as a neoliberal trojan horse to revive an imperial trading past – reincarnated as an 'empire of capital' – and to maintain a view of nature that sees it as a store for extraction (Reck and Paudel, 2017).

There are many that are discontent with the fetish of technology that frames technology as a nationalist project, as not all farmers will be able to equally access new technologies as means of production. As British history has shown, the way capitalism facilitates technology's advance into agriculture can render farm operators dependent on industry and its methods. This all too often ends with an elite monopolisation over agriculture (Marsden *et al.*, 1986). The Landworkers' Alliance (LWA) warns that agri-tech should be freely available, low-tech, and reduce work burdens but not reduce the number of jobs (Landworkers' Alliance, 2017). Moreover, the Campaign to Protect Rural England fear that the lack of self-reflection by those promoting agri-tech as the future of agri-culture in the UK fails to prevent the widespread neoliberal closure of

small-scale farms who cannot keep up with technological advancements (CPRE, 2017). This discursive critique does not seem so far-fetched when viewed in conjunction with one economist's desire for the government to use Brexit as an opportunity to cease support for 'unproductive, unprofitable farms' (Shanker, 2019) and when trends in historical agri-technological 'revolutions' are considered; the politics that governs them often surrendered to the 'competition of the giant farm' (Fidler, 2012). The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Michael Gove, reminisced positively over the three previous agricultural revolutions making no reference to the farmers they disenfranchised. The *technological nationalism* framing process seems to depend on what Dee Kord (2011) refers to as 'elite memory' (Gove, 2019; DBEI and DEFRA, 2019) and implies an individualisation of risk which prioritises corporate farms over small-scale ones. Hence, the LWA call attention the discursive erasure of small and family farms and community enterprises in the discourse around new subsidy schemes. The LWA move the frame away from Brexit being a techno-nationalist project and, instead, reframe it as an opportunity to revive agroecological[4] farming to rescale food systems with the aim of phasing out the hegemony of monoculture farming (Landworkers' Alliance, 2020; Fairlie, 2007; Labar, 2018; Laughton *et al.*, 2017; A People's Food Policy & The Landworkers' Alliance, 2020).

The NFU frame new technological techniques as key to addressing the problem of productivity, whilst pursuing a desire to put farming at the heart of Britain's 'resurgence as a great trading nation' (IEA, 2019; van der Ploeg, 2020). The NFU's 'Back British Farming' campaign presented a banal nationalism that is less about the Union Jack flag itself, which Merry (2018) describes as a 'crass tool' of patriotism, and more focused on the dogma of economic growth which risks repeating the very sins that it blames the EU CAP for, by focusing on innovations mainly for boosting productivity (Gunton *et al.*, 2016; Billig, 1995). The NFU have been criticised for being a political mouthpiece for some of the UK's biggest land holdings, which prioritise high-input export-based industrial agriculture (Ethical Consumer Research Association, 2016; Pickering, 2016). Nostalgia for a colonial past of trade relations ultimately keeps *technological nationalism* at odds with ecological realities, as it fails to fully address the ill state of the nation's biotic substrate underpinning agriculture (Schneider and McMichael, 2010; Crook, Short and South, 2018). The *technological nationalism* frame rarely focuses on the lack of biodiversity in crop types, the illogical imports of manure onto farms, the distance food produce travels once harvested,

[4] Agroecological approaches involve practices such as using composted manure instead of artificial fertilisers, pasture feeding livestock, longer crop rotations with better provision of seeds for birds, integrated pest management, agroforestry, maintaining hedgerows, and selling directly to local communities (Lampkin *et al.*, 2015)

etc. Instead, the Tories frame technology as a means of managing the failures of current modes of food production, rather than seeking to transform agriculture's rift with ecological systems. As Marx already noted: 'progress in capitalist agriculture' is 'progress in the art, not only of robbing the laborer, but of robbing the soil' (quoted in Fidler, 2012). Many of the flashy gadgets and digital farming methods may come with labels of 'sustainability' or 'increased efficiency', but they comprise a future where artificial intelligence (AI) and a dependency on robotics provides farmers with a greater understanding of technology than of ecological systems (Gove, 2019, DBEI and DEFRA, 2019, Bell, 2019). This contradicts how farmers are framed under *patriotic agri-environmentalism* and exhibits a trend in far-right politics that presents patriotic environmentalism as a solution for the masses and neoliberalism for the elites.

In the UK, Bayer, the agri-business-cum-pharmaceutical megacorporation, decries that technologies have become too heavily politicised, and susceptible to 'populist activism' (Little, 2019), while some Tory MPs argue that EU restrictions to technology have been due to emotional activists rather than scientific 'reason' (Owen, 2017). But this de-politicisation reflects a 'fetishism' of technology; privileging technology in a way that overlooks the aforementioned trade-offs that incur due to their very development, deployment and use (Harvey, 2003; Hornborg, 2012). The Climate Change Commission has attributed the decline in biodiversity and soil health experienced in the UK to the monoculture encouraged under the EU CAP (Timperley, 2018). Their recommendation is to drastically alter the industrial farming methods of monocultures and to address the meat-based diets of the public (*ibid*). However, *technological nationalism* is mostly geared around 'growth' and productivity increases by framing the nation as a temporary vehicle for innovation, with little to say for transforming agriculture's relationship with the rest of nature, other than to push it as far away from society's gaze as possible (Gunton *et al.*, 2016).

Restoring nature

Consultants to the government advise that, under the new Agriculture Bill, technology should be publicly funded on the condition that technology will generate 'spared land' that produces substantial 'environmental improvement' (Bateman and Balmford, 2018). Despite many Conservatives identifying as the 'original conservationists' (Goldsmith, 2018), the Bill does not prescribe farmers to necessarily move away from ecologically harmful farming practices, the kind which make industrial agriculture responsible for ecological breakdown in the UK (IPBES, 2019;

Sustain Alliance, 2020). Instead, it outlines how payments for farmers will be based on the 'public goods' they are producing; a kind of 'accumulation via conservation' if you will. However, according to the new subsidy scheme, food will be produced through a more intensive kind of agroextractivism – enabled by the 'modern approach' to food production favoured by DEFRA, i.e., the aforementioned ecomodernism (Landworkers' Alliance, 2020; DEFRA, 2020). However, the *nature restoration* frame seems to judge agriculture as incompatible with biodiversity as the former is an extractive industry that functions to produce commercial goods. In the eyes of agri-capitalism, agriculture is not nature. However, this hegemonic view fails to act on the burgeoning evidence that diversified agriculture can generate greater biodiversity, soil quality, carbon sequestration and so on (Kremen and Miles, 2012; Fischer *et al.*, 2017). Not only this, but it contradicts the populist defence of the countryside which positions farmers as the caretakers of rural places (national symbols) that have been degraded by EU agricultural policies.

Many farmers have taken issue with this juncture in the discourse and have critiqued the new Agricultural Bill for presenting agriculture as out-of-nature, arguing that Brexit reforms are geared more towards ecological health than domestic food production (Reynolds, 2020). The money that farmers receive is given irrespectively of whether they are actually farming the land or not, which brings the Sustain Alliance, a cohort of food-related campaign groups, to argue that, rather than rewarding farmers for 'managing land or water in a way that protects or improves the environment', 'nature-friendly' practice should happen across the whole farm not just at the margins (Sustain Alliance, 2020). However, the *restoring nature* frame does not capture conventional monocultures as a problem, but maintains that farmers should be praised for setting aside 'nature' on their land to a certain extent and, as per the discourse of the Tory Party and CEN, even better if they do it whilst applying the newest agri-technologies to their cultivated or grazed land. Conservation is thus dominated by the pulsating undertones of *technological nationalism*.

Whilst the populist movement to leave the EU and the establishment of a new set of agriculture policies to prevent the largest farmers from being rewarded based on land size (Chambers, 2020), it falls short in reshaping the ontological basis on which production practices of farming work. When ruled by the doctrine of agri-capitalism, *nature restoration* conceives of farms not as wildlife habitats but sites of productivity (Smaje, 2020). Some farmers have decried the suggestion that farming is incompatible with conservation (Boyd, 2020; Tasker, 2020), and that the interests of the voting masses who like to birdwatch and count butterflies may be prioritised over the farmer (Reynolds, 2020). In fact, rather than revitalising farms, the *nature restoration* frame paints a 'farm-free' future in response to agriculture's degradation of the countryside (Timperley, 2018).

The concept of a 'livestock-less' landscape is imagined and explored in a documentary aired on a UK television channel in 2020, *Channel 4*, titled *Apocalypse Cow: How Meat Killed the Planet* (Apocalpyse Cow, 2020). The film is narrated by fervent Extinction Rebellion activist and environmental journalist, George Monbiot who applies the *restoring nature* frame to justify a future where meat and cereals are made in laboratories to eradicate food production's contribution to climate breakdown and the ecocide of the British countryside. George Monbiot wrote a piece in The Guardian newspaper directly relating to the film: 'Farm free production promises a far more stable and reliable food supply that can be grown anywhere, even in countries without farmland', and 'Every hectare of land used by farming is a hectare not used for wildlife and complex living systems.' The latter quote infers that the countryside is wasted unless it hosts biodiversity, and revolves around the notion that, rather than farms symbolising the British countryside, they are decimating it (Monbiot, 2020). Given that 70% of the British countryside is occupied by farmland (DEFRA, 2015) and the *nature restoration* frame envisions farms as keeping nature at the margin of food production, such rhetoric undermines the nationalist imagery of the countryside which is characterised by farms.

Monbiot's critique of agriculture homogenises farming and stymies the potential of alternative food production scenarios in the same way that the Conservative Party does through its farming-out-of-nature narrative. However, with further examination, the *nature restoration* discourse seems contingent on the ecomodernist agenda of *technological nationalism*. Farm-free futures depend on the development of lab-grown food, which the Environment Secretary already posited directly to farmers in 2019 could become a reality in the much-awaited 'fourth agricultural revolution' (Gove, 2019). The only drawback mentioned by the minister was that it is currently rather expensive. However, this technology will inevitably concentrate food production to industrial zones of mechanised technologically-dependent practices, and has similar outcomes to the Conservative Party's technophilic desire for a 'fourth agricultural revolution'; it will make food production even more peripheral and push food production further towards the margins of society's consciousness. This presents rather a complex and paradoxical scenario where, to 'recover' nature, food production is disconnected from its pedospheric roots (*pedos*: soil). Not only does this vision of 'nature recovery' pit techno-efficiency against farming as a practice, but it implies two necessary trade-offs. First, that such a transition will inevitably dispose of farmer's jobs (Monbiot, 2020), and second that a reliance on imports are inevitable. Whilst the former was perhaps already anticipated in a speech given to farmers' post-Brexit when the chief minister of DEFRA announced that the 'fourth agricultural revolution' will entail some 'tough choices' to be

made (Gove, 2019), the latter vision for a farm-less nation is emboldening expert advisors to the Treasury to disregard food security or sovereignty and continue the historic trend of Britain's dependency on world markets (Smaje and Rowlatt, 2014; Barling et al., 2008). Although not absolute, if one explores the trade-offs presented by DEFRA and George Monbiot, they worryingly present traces of what Zimmerman (2004) defines as ecofascism; a 'totalitarian government that requires individuals to sacrifice their interests to the well-being of the 'land''.

One counter-frame to this has been presented by farmers and members of the LWA who have demanded a revision to the ideologies contained in the AB; advocating for a complete revision of farming practices across the UK to make a reality the UK's capability to supply the demand cereals, dairy, fruit, vegetables and 85% of meat from domestic production (A People's Food Policy & The Landworkers' Alliance, 2020). However, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Agroecology state that 'it's ultimately difficult to identify anything that would realistically foster a thriving agroecological economy within the contemporary economic paradigm' (Smaje and Rowlatt, 2014). Thus, perhaps one can adapt Jameson's (Jameson, 1997) old adage that the end of the world is easier to imagine than the end of capitalism to: is it easier to imagine the end of farming altogether than to imagine that a different way of feeding a country is possible?

The key themes in the *nature restoration* discourse – land-sparing enabled by lab-grown food and the intensification and consolidation of food production – imply an inevitable amputation of agriculture, which could result in widespread reduction in endogenous food supply. This is warned against by the Committee on Climate Change (CCC), relying on imports from elsewhere often entails 'carbon leakage' (Gabbatiss, 2020); i.e., shifting ecological harm onto the periphery and not addressing the ecological breakdown from a scale of global solidarity. Such an outcome shares key tenets of *green nationalism*, i.e., an inward-looking iteration of environmentalism, perpetuating the idea that caring for the 'nature' of the British countryside and meeting emission reduction targets to achieve climate change goals is to defend the nature within the borders of a nation and care less about global solidarity.

In order to continue feeding the population within the frame of *nature restoration* there is an implied dependency on 'ghost acres', where land outside the nation to grow export crops to feed the population. The LWA resist this discursive vision as it simply shifts the socioecological burden of agroextractivism elsewhere, thus perpetuating a historical legacy of imperialism which outsources harm to the periphery (A People's Food Policy & The Landworkers' Alliance, 2020).

This is not just a method of conservation, however, but reflects what Zimmerman refers to as a trait of nationalist ideology which puts the protection of the countryside as a national asset of a particular 'in-group' as priority. The *nature restoration* frame in this context then is based on a system of late imperial complacency that depends on exploiting 'Cheap Nature' outside of the resource base of the nation (Hancox, 2020; Bellamy Foster and Suwandi, 2020; Moore, 2015). By framing nature as 'people's' sovereign asset, environmental risks of a global scale that require an outward looking solidarity are negated (Forchtner and Kølvraa, 2015; Smaje and Rowlatt, 2014). The LWA warns that focusing on globalised food circuits to feed the country furthers the vulnerability of the UK's food system and critiques the new Agriculture Bill for not doing enough to increase production of food within the nation's borders (LWA, 2020). This leads to another framing process that argues for agri-cultural policy to focus more on boosting domestic food production rather than pushing it to the margins of farms and society

Patriotic consumption and the whiteness of farming

Localism

This discourse became more urgent during the pandemic of COVID-19 in the Spring of 2020 when the LWA called the Government to address the fact that 47% of the UK's total food supply comes from outside the nation (LWA, 2020). The LWA frame this issue under a progressive iteration of *agri-nationalism* as they position increasing endogenous food production as key in the struggle against socioecological injustice. In this sense, trade is not perceived to be inherently wrong, but trade policies and practices must transform to serve the rights of peoples to have control over markets, modes of production, and ecological contexts (Wittman et al., 2010; Wald and Hill, 2016). Despite the vulnerabilities built into the UK's neoliberal, highly centralised and globalised food supply chain having existed before COVID-19, the crisis exposed them and led to a rise in the advocation of buying 'local' and buying 'British' (Hird, 2020; FarmingUK, 2020). This led to certain actors framing the instabilities in food procurement as being an issue of scale, with 'local' food being promoted as a means to rectify such issues. However, whilst localism can offer progressive emancipatory rural politics, it can also manifest as a 'breeding ground for regressive political forces' which is what I will now explore (Mamonova and Franquesa, 2019).

In the context of Brexit, one can observe how *agri-nationalism* is reframed as *localism*. Underpinning localism are tenets of patriotism that drive nationalism; sentiments of belonging, community, tradition, and/or loyalty (Merry, 2018). The LWA attribute ecological issues in industrial farming systems to the eroded 'trust, reciprocity and cohesion' of rural areas and frame localised food circuits, agroecology, and down-scaled farming practices as being able to re-weave 'the fabric of rural areas' (Laughton *et al.*, 2017). However, this framing of the 'rural' evaluates the 'local' as being 'cohesive' and reflects similar affiliations to a geographical space that patriotism exhibits. Whilst not necessarily reflecting a patriotism to the country in which one resides, framing the need for localism as patriotic can exhibit conservative ideologies (Skallerud and Wien, 2019). This is exhibited by EEG in the way that *localism* frames globalisation as having effects on the unity of the 'local' identity. In its blog Local Matters, several articles detail a disdain for globalisation and its impact on democracy and the environment. Its authors write of memories of farming, when 'local shops' were run by 'local people'; all of which has changed due to the behemoth of neoliberal globalisation. They describe farming through a history of 'symbiosis' where business was the 'backbone for social cohesion in local areas' (Blythe, 2020). Although food justice movements can frame 'localisation' as a progressive prognosis for the ills of globalisation, the locus of such movements is often the neighbourhood, the town, and the municipality (Vining et al., 2008). Because of this, Park (2013) advises careful scrutiny of diagnostic frames that justify localism when deployed by the far right. For example, in Greece the ethnonationalist far-right group Golden Dawn frames the rural 'village' as the 'frontier outpost' in reviving traditional customs of a 'true' Greek identity, placing great importance on the 'local' in environmental stewardship. In this case, while globalisation can be posed as a root cause of ecological and economic crises, the structural prejudices embedded in the 'local' are anything but idyllic and the elements left out of certain framing processes are important to investigate.

For example, the imagined 'cohesiveness' contained within the *localism* frame is predicated on a white countryside which shapes the imaginary of the 'farmer' (Solere, 2020; Willis, 2017; NFU Political, 2020). One farm enterprise, Riverford Organics, focused their monthly newsletter to their customers on the experiences of several farmers marginalised by the UK's racially hegemonic agricultural industry (Jesudason, 2020). One account came from a black Zimbabwe-born white maize farmer who described his experience of farm work in the English countryside as; 'somewhere where they never thought that a black person's supposed to be' (*ibid*). Such experiences of systemic racism reflects what Neal and Agyeman (2006) refer to as 'rural

citizenship'; a component of nationalism that legitimises certain groups to rights and entitlements to the land. As shown in the *patriotic agri-environmentalism* frame, the countryside is a nationalistic symbol situated in a deeply uncomfortable colonial history (Löwy and Sayre, 2018) and those who produce food on it take on a particularly white-washed identity. More than 96 percent of all British farmers are white, and many of the case studies of 'good farming practices' that break away from conventional intensive farming practices were initiated by aristocrats or those from elite backgrounds (Barkham, 2020; Knight, 2020). Not only does this further push the image of agri-cultural conservation and the countryside into the hands of the wealthy few but it also calls into question who is excluded in the term 'local'.

Patriotic Localism

Not only does *localism* frame food circuits from the production end of the system but also is applied to the arena of consumption and this is where *patriotic localism* emerges as a way of framing 'local' consumption. *Patriotic localism* tends to be cut from the right-wing cloth and, as will be shown, can appropriate food localism discourse by framing food consumption as a way to achieve regressive ends. One example of this is how the ethnonationalist and extreme far-right group Patriotic Alternative appropriate food sovereignty discourse. PA frame a sovereign food system as able to reduce the demand for food imports by decreasing the amount of 'non-white British people' in the country. Other actors, albeit less explicitly extremist, blend features of the *agri-nationalist* frame with *patriotic localism* discourse to mobilise a fear of 'foreign' food. Such fear has rebirthed during the contested trade debates following Brexit, which are framed as a threat to British food producers and has culminated in unrest concerning the import of foreign meat. Some particularly disgruntled cattle farmers, like members of the Vale of Lune Young Farmers' Club (YFC), have applied a patriotic iteration of the *localism* frame by sharing a video on social media which frames the selling of Polish mince by some supermarkets as a threat to local food production. Meanwhile, the NFU referred to its on- and off-line campaign to encourage the public to buy local and buy British as a 'call to arms' (NFU, 2020b), and orient its campaign to #BackBritishFarming mostly around livestock farming and meat consumption (Case, 2019; Veganuary, 2019). This discourse also promotes patriotic consumption as a way of achieving ecological benefits: one cattle farmer tweeted that his cows are grazed on 'traditional pasture land, not on burnt out rainforest' and to 'Buy British: Be Sustainable' (Case, 2020). This frame process

also reflects the notion that a good patriot buys with their nation in mind; what Lekakis (2017) calls economic nationalism which also harbours a historical tendency to foster xenophobia and nurture national sentiment.

As mentioned, the Tory Party and UKIP support trade deals which threaten to undermine the way that the British farmer is valued in the *stewardship* and *patriotic agri-environmentalism* frames. These paradoxes are fuel for the emotional sentiments played upon by the right-wing group Patriotic Alternative which frame the 'globalised system that commodifies everything to units of production or consumption' as a reason for needing to stop importing food from 'foreign farms' (Solere, 2020). This reflects what Griffin (2007) refers to as a desire to recover a certain idealisation of culture by rejecting various 'degenerative' threats brought on by modernity which can manifest into fascism. PA's critique of unfettered globalised capitalism not only highlights that such discourse is not inherently 'progressive', but the determination to pass trade deals with the United States by the majority of the Conservative Party could further strengthen the right-wing populism's already 'strong rural constituency' (Mamonova and Franquesa, 2019).

Additionally, the NFU frames those who oppose British livestock farming as threatening the 'lifeblood of Britain's rural heritage' (NFU, 2020a). The NFU does not record the ethnicity of their members which fails to intervene in the invisibility of structural racism in rural landscapes. One of the very few black farmers in England has challenged organisations 'that represent rural Britain', asking: 'what are you doing for diversity?' (Jesudason, 2020; Organic Growers Alliance, 2020). In this sense, the discourse of NFU frames farmers as 'stewards' of the countryside, but whilst hiding behind such rhetoric fails to administer to the aspects of patriotism that proliferates racism in 'local' places. The 'local' producers and 'local' food presented within a *patriotic localism* frame can reveal a fascist creep, for example PA warn that, 'when half your nation's foodstuff is foreign, your power is very vulnerable to an angry, starving mob' focus of the 'foreign' for both people and food-as-commodity is not just a feature of far-right political discourse but is also included in the way that some farmers frame the lack of support for British farmers. This can regress into a racist localism and has done so in the discourse of the PA who reveal an ethnonationalist agenda to achieve a 'resilient economy' by framing dependency on the ethnic 'other' as an obstacle to the end goal of reviving an 'ethnic homeland'. PA present food self-sufficiency as a means to achieve a white Britain (Womack, 2020). Although 'self-sufficiency', localised economies and 'food sovereignty' are terms grounded in agrarian movements galvanised by many farming and advocacy groups in the UK (read: The People's Food Policy, 2020), the UK

far right appropriates this rhetoric to reflect what Gorostiza (2019) describes as a masculine opposition to dependence and vulnerability typical of historical fascist self-sufficiency narratives

Conclusion

Whilst there has been widespread attention paid to the surge in nationalism led by far-right political groups, less illuminated is how nationalism encounters agri-environmental politics. This thesis sought to illuminate how nationalism makes an appearance in the discourse around agri-culture in the context of Brexit. To do this, I utilised the qualitative analytical tool of a critical framing analysis and focused on how nationalism is used in the diagnosis, conceptualisation and response to agri-cultural problems by a variety of actors in the UK. In answer to this thesis' research questions I identified key frames, including *patriotic agri-environmentalism, agri-nationalism,* and *green nationalism* which concern environmental degradation in the British countryside and exhibit populist narratives whereby the 'people' are portrayed as custodians of the nation's 'natural' assets. I then showed how the frame of *stewardship* binds farmers to the identity of custodian of the nation's 'natural' assets. Next, I navigated how nationalism responds to crisis by exhibiting the conjuncture between Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic in the frame of *feeding the nation* and *corporate agri-nationalism.* The thesis then moved onto the role of technology, nature and nationalism, exploring frames of *technological nationalism* and *restoring nature.* Lastly, this critical framing analysis unveiled how nationalism features in frames of *localism* and *patriotic localism* whereby patriotic consumption becomes a prominent theme.

This thesis reveals how nationalism appears in the defence of 'the countryside'; 'the green-belt'; 'the farm', and the 'rural' which appear as both the frontline and the defensive rationale used to approach agri-ecological issues. Several actors blame the decimation of the British countryside on the EU CAP, affecting British farmers and eroding the health of a 'world-renowned' national symbol. When actors incorporate nationalistic ideology into their framing of ecological issues they often portray the countryside as the biotic nucleus around which people of a certain identity can be mobilised to care for. However, when the countryside is framed as a national symbol in need of defending, it falls into the territory of ethnonationalist discourse whereby the countryside proves to be more than just a symbol of the nation but becomes the nation's 'body'. Aside from the EU CAP being blamed for degrading the environment, some actors frame it as the fault of the migrant 'other' for polluting the green spaces of the country and causing urbanisation of British countryside. Some pedal these frames in conjunction with an anti-globalisation rhetoric. When environmental concerns are framed as being a matter of patriotic concern, and when farmers are presented as the custodians of the land, this inward-looking politics is less about the environment,

per se, and more guided by an agenda that constructs the heritage of a 'people' in need of defence against the 'other'.

To answer this study's second sub-question about which paradoxes exist amongst the nationalist frames, one of the most visible is that populist rhetoric used in the patriotic agri-environmentalism discourse is contingent on the erasure of agri-capitalism's dependency on migrant agricultural workers. This is enabled via prejudices of systemic racism and colonial rural heritage. As far as this thesis has found, nationalism continues to make invisible non-white labour and differentially values the lives of the subaltern (Danewid, 2018; Salyga, 2020). This paradox revealed itself when the recently established draconian immigration laws of the UK collided with the crisis of COVID-19. Both agri-capitalism and nationalism are dependent on the cheapened labour of the migrant 'other' to put food on the tables of the nation's citizens revealing the thin ground that populist nationalist ideology stands on.

Both the *stewardship* frame and technology-related frames also reveal several paradoxes as technology is framed as a silver bullet to agri-ecological problems. Despite farmers being framed as stewards for environmental conservation, the government's plans for a fourth agricultural revolution contradicts previous frames that claim national cultural importance of farmers in the UK. As history has shown, agricultural revolutions are not without collateral damage - which is usually inflicted upon land-less labour and the smallest of farm operators. Moreover, technology is presented as a solution to ecological problems in tandem with the perception that farms are incompatible with nature and biodiversity conservation. Whilst conservation measures are more explicitly contained in the reformed agricultural policy post-Brexit, and framed as *restoring nature,* these policies reward farmers for performing their agricultural activities at the margins of nature – focusing more on biodiversity gains than food production itself. Whilst leaving the EU was framed as a means to liberate the UK to embrace new agri-tech, this seems to be a trojan horse which rode on the wave of populist nationalism. *Technological nationalism's* commitment to farmers appears to be limited to a wealthy, industrial model of farming; the very model which the EU was criticised for facilitating. The commitment to ecology in *technological nationalism* extends as far as previous technological revolutions have done in agriculture; to make the exploitation of nature as cheap as possible (Bresser-Pereira, 2008; Wallerstein, 2011). Despite encouraging people to 'Buy British', supporting the 'flourishing' of the British countryside, and even attributing British nationality to bees, this way of framing ecological problems in agriculture is not emancipatory.

Land-sparing discourse in the *restoring nature* frame entertains a vision of agriculture as an activity marginalised to the corners of nature or confined to laboratories monopolised by corporations. Though the unsustainable practice of monoculture and industrial models of high-input agri-extractivism need to change, the land-sparing initiatives of the new Agriculture Bill is contingent on the application of intensive agri-technology and thus paradoxically distracts from the need to administer to the way that food production is valued and imagined in society. It thus appears that a commonality throughout all themes presented is that nationalism as a legitimising rationale is used to address agri-cultural challenges. Paradoxically though, nationalism conceals an agenda to continue protecting neoliberal capitalism (Gonzalez-Vicente and Carroll, 2017). If nationalism is being used to legitimise actions to address ecological breakdown in agriculture- as has been shown- then any false solutions that fail to fully address the root cause of ecocide must be confronted (Kremen and Miles, 2012; Laughton *et al.*, 2017; Bartz *et al.*, 2019; IPBES, 2019). Additionally, such 'false solutions' presented in populist politics can lead to further support for more radical politics (Mamonova and Franquesa, 2019) as neither the flag nor the ideologies that defend its existence will remedy ecological breakdown, nor feed a country. This research shows that when nationalism encounters crisis, as it did with COVID-19 pandemic, it relies on corporations to *feed the nation.* The conjuncture between Brexit and the pandemic highlights the gross paradoxes in the prejudice against 'unskilled' labour and the general political landscape that encourages a politics of hate against immigrants. Beyond these regressive responses, the crisis illuminated how the very economic system, which facilitates the need for cheap labour and highly centralised and industrialised farming operations, is at the root of socioecological struggles in agri-culture.

As the COVID-19 pandemic revealed, the vulnerability of the UK's food supply is problematic and a reliance on imports is an iteration of colonial dependencies that are kept systemically out of sight. But the way some actors frame the need to boost endogenous food production has converged with the alarming ideologies of the extreme right and ethnonationalism. One vision paints globalisation as a tainted brush and uses the frame of *agri-nationalism* to justify plans to eliminate those not deemed 'indigenous' Britons to reduce import demand. Meanwhile, others believe food from 'foreign' farms must be taken off of supermarket shelves in order to support a patriotic localism and 'back British farming'. Clearly, there is a spectrum of nationalist iterations that promote a boost in domestic food production via patriotic consumption and localism. The fascist turn in the 'localism' discourse concerning food systems, however, presents a rising trend across

the world (The Zetkin Collective, forthcoming) and shows the critical importance of cautioning against any essentialisation of the 'local', either economically or culturally, as an inherently progressive response to ecological problems (Park, 2013).

Whilst this thesis has focused on the ways that nationalism features in agri-cultural struggles, I by no means wish to provide an assumption or conclusion that the countryside is a 'natural fit' for right-wing populism and that the rise of such discourse is inevitable in such places (Mamonova and Franquesa, 2019). History has also shown how working people in the countryside – that is peasants, landless labourers, and many others – joined forces to rise against feudal powers, in leading socialist revolutions and anticolonial national liberation struggles (Borras, 2020). Instead, I hope that I have provided an understanding of the contexts in which a variety of actors, not necessarily limited to the conventional left- or right-wing cleavages, appropriate or capitalise on social and ecological issues pertaining to agriculture, and how their thin ideologies present false solutions that fail to meet the needs of neither human nor non-human strata.

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