

## Hauntology and Brexit: Britain's Lost Future

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Hauntology, a term coined by Jacques Derrida and popularised by Mark Fisher, describes how we can be 'haunted' by the apparitions of lost futures. An ontological and temporal disjunction through which images of the past can be projected in our present and onto the future. While used by both in a Marxist and socio-cultural sense, I will overlay the framework of hauntology upon the issue of Brexit. My analysis demonstrates how Britain is currently in the throes of a crisis of political imagination; engaging in nostalgia for its imperial past and thus a lost future of heightened global relevance and glory. Through areas of political discourse and policy we can witness this appeal to the dislocation of the British psyche which prevents us from truly re-imagining our politics. My research intends to investigate this societal neurosis and the extent of its influence. In doing so, perhaps we can find our way forward or at least be more aware of our trajectory as a nation, in whatever direction that may be.

I will begin by further defining hauntology and its relevance on British political history up until the present. To do this I will once again reference Fisher who, while writing in the capacity of cultural studies, comes to conclusions that naturally have political implications. His claim is that recently we have undergone a "disappearance of the future" and thus a "deterioration of [...] social imagination" (Fisher 2012). As a society we have lost our narrative. In a way we have reached the famous "end of history" (Roth and Fukuyama 1993) that Fukuyama proclaimed but not in the sense that we have reached some ideological peak, instead we can simply imagine nothing to replace our current system. Thus forcing the Hobson's choice of either stagnation and conservatism, or a look to the past. In British politics a sense of the past extending into the present or a "nostalgia for lost futures" has always been a consistent theme but it co-existed with the progressive forward-looking narratives of the day. An example being a sense of capitalist competition and improvement in an ideological struggle with the Soviet Union. There are numerous examples of this which I won't detail in the interests of brevity, but you only need to glance over some Thatcher speeches to see the atavistic conjuring of empire and national myth that British politics so often falls into ("Speech to the Conservative Political Centre Summer School ('The Renewal of Britain') | Margaret Thatcher Foundation" n.d.).

The Leave campaign was no different. However, it was unique in that hauntological discourses were no longer a mechanism for success but rather the ideology itself. This is emphasised by the

Leave campaign's relation to what the opposition represented, namely globalisation and, more broadly, modernity. Campanella and Dassù note Boris Johnson's admiration and frequent references toward Churchill, Farage's celebration of imperial naval greatness, and Jacob Rees-Mogg acting almost as a metaphor for the stereotypical antiquated Englishman (Campanella and Dassù 2019). They hanker back to a Britain long passed with the hope that it would capture the political imagination of the masses, and to the Remain campaign's dismay they read the room perfectly. You could even argue that the Brexit vote is mirrored in a recent YouGov poll that investigates the public view of the UK's colonial past with 59% claiming it was something to be "proud of" and 49% believing former colonies are better off for it (Dahlgreen 2014). A separate study also saw that particularly the older English population view the young with disdain on the basis they don't respect British values enough (Henderson et al. 2017). Among the same demographic that voted for Brexit it appears there lies a similar nostalgia. Even when one hadn't lived in these colonial times, having experienced the dizzying "runaway world" where many felt shirked by the immigration that the EU came to represent within the campaign, when presented the choice of staying the same or a fictitious return to a romanticised past they chose the latter (Cox 2018).

## Bibliography

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