

# Brexit Britain in Troubling Times

resources and reflections, spring 2019

Insted Consultancy ([www.insted.co.uk](http://www.insted.co.uk)), London

---

Remainers and leavers, republicans and democrats, women and men, older and younger, gay and straight, cosmopolitan and native, Muslim and non-Muslim, comfortable and left-behind, insiders and outsiders, them and us, ingroup and outgroup, self and other, losers and winners.

All these binaries, all this dualism, these polarisations.

So much either/or thinking, so little both/and.

So much zero-sum, so little win-win.

Trolling, snarling, impatience, mockery, curses, rudeness.  
Below-the-line, and along the lines too.

What are the causes and exacerbating factors?

What are the opposites, the alternatives?

What constructive ways ahead are worth considering?

Here are links to readings and video clips on these questions, most of them dating from 2018. Most from the UK but also several from the United States or elsewhere.

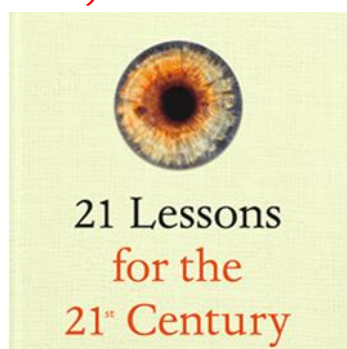
The authors and characters include a historian, a rabbi, several journalists, a political theorist, social psychologists, members of parliament, teachers, various researchers and observers, several activists and campaigners, an orchestra, and a choral society.

---

The links and thoughts here are clustered under 12 headings:

- 1) What we human beings get up to
  - 2) The two Englands
  - 3) Hate in the media
  - 4) The current demeaned other
  - 5) The denial of death
  - 6) Wot u lookin @?
  - 7) New positive narratives
  - 8) Faith in us
  - 9) Democratic renewal
  - 10) Repairing our humanity
  - 11) More in common
  - 12) Joy in the public square
- 

## 1) What we human beings get up to



Yuval Noah Harari is the author of three international bestsellers: *Sapiens* – brief history of humankind (2014), *Homo Deus* – a brief history of tomorrow (2016), and *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* (2018). They are concerned with what he describes as three major revolutions in the history of humankind: a) the cognitive revolution that occurred roughly 70,000 years ago, when Homo Sapiens developed language skills and structured societies; b) the agricultural revolution that took place around 10,000 years

ago; and c) the scientific revolution of the last 400 years which now seems, amongst other things, to threaten the fundamental principles of liberal democracy.

Hariri's work offers a challenging but stimulating context in which to begin looking at the themes of this paper – dependence and interdependence within and between countries, the rise of populism in the UK and US, the tension between hatred and hope.

Hariri's central concerns and questions were vividly introduced during 2018 by a series of lectures and interviews all over the world, and many of these are available on Youtube. In the UK, discussion was conducted at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) in London and was chaired by Lord (William) Haig.

RUSI is essentially concerned with issues of conflict, security and defence and Harari, said Lord Haig, is 'one of the newest and deepest thinkers about what we human beings get up to'. The discussion is at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HYqonHGLhGo>

## 2) The Two Englands



“The divisions exposed by the EU Referendum,” writes Lisa Nandy MP, “were stark. In cities, younger middle-class voters came out overwhelmingly for remain while in nearby towns and villages older, working-class voters turned out in similarly large numbers to leave. We are divided by more than just attitudes to Brexit.”

“Over the last 40 years, as our towns have aged and our cities have grown younger, social attitudes on immigration, social security and civil rights have diverged. Steadily but increasingly there are now two Englands that sit unhappily side by side.”

Fear, Hope and Loss was written by Rosie Carter and published in October 2018 by the Hope not Hate Charitable Trust with an introduction by Lisa Nandy. It contains a wide range of statistics and research findings about the two Englands, and challenges and opposes narratives of hatred and fear. It is illustrated with many photographs, charts and maps, and can be accessed at <https://www.hopenohate.org.uk/fear-hope-loss/>

## 3) Hate in the media



“History has shown us time and again,” warns the Stop Funding Hate campaigning organisation, “the dangers of demonising foreigners and minorities ... The United Nations has accused certain British newspapers of publishing decades of sustained and unrestrained anti-foreigner abuse, misinformation and distortion.” The majority of people in the UK, Stop Funding Hate points out, don’t buy The Sun, Daily Mail or Daily Express. But indirectly, it maintains, nearly all people in Britain are funding these papers, since most shop with a company that advertises in them.

The campaigns that Stop Funding Hate organises are described on its website. The concerns underlying them are presented in a series of succinct and forceful video clips, including the following:

What if goodwill wasn’t only about Christmas  
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVywWDUKcDw8yNXMa87ducw>

Cuteness and anger: cat videos and hate speech  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HODllsSiu\\_A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HODllsSiu_A)

Whipping up fear: a form of entertainment  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vyeyvquPzqk>

People like you: what it's like to be demonised

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRZ4AgJs24g>

The impact of Islamophobia: talk by Baroness Warsi

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=idBt1jcjLnU>

Stop Funding Hate works with the Conscious Advertising Network (<https://www.consciousadnetwork.org/>), an industry-led initiative supported by a growing number of brands. The network's manifesto on hate speech ([https://www.consciousadnetwork.org/manifestos/hate\\_speech.pdf](https://www.consciousadnetwork.org/manifestos/hate_speech.pdf)) commits companies to endeavour to avoid advertising with media outlets that fuel hatred and includes measures for tackling hate speech on social media. Its own website is at <https://stopfundinghate.info/>

#### 4) The current demeaned other



"Anger," wrote Rabbi Michael Lerner a few hours after a horrendous antisemitic attack at a synagogue in Pittsburgh in October 2018, "often masks deep sadness so acute that many people would rather blame some other than heal themselves. The more people feel inadequately respected and recognized, the more that childhood

rejection hurts, the more they avoid feeling that sadness by directing their anger at whoever is the current demeaned other in their society.

"If we are ever to reverse all this, it will require millions of us to approach these broken and hurting people with compassion and empathy that at the moment are in short supply on all sides of the political divide – even as we vigorously reject the racism, sexism, homophobia and antisemitism through which that pain gets expressed.

"Our efforts to build a peaceful world require us to act peacefully now and always – to break down walls of separation with bridges of connection, to crack open aching hearts with fierce love and compassion, to critique and challenge evil behaviour without diminishing the humanity of the actor. We stand in solidarity with all the 'others' of our society whose lives are threatened and endangered by acts of violence, and continue to commit to loving the stranger, the 'other.'"

<https://www.tikkun.org/nextgen/solidarity-after-the-massacre-of-jews-in-pittsburgh-and-how-best-to-defend-ourselves?fbclid=IwAR1uzHwSiARb5GOz6fDEtzRNMpnhpTrsc-HGD1X5G1N6cOcIGTVjNgObqvA>

## 5) The denial of death



The ideas of Ernest Becker (1924—74) about what he called terror management theory (TMT) and the denial of death are applicable to understanding current trends in attitudes towards multiculturalism and immigration in western countries. They are especially helpful, declares the Ernest Becker Foundation created in his memory, for understanding current events in the United States

such as the proposed wall on the Mexican border, the travel ban forbidding visas to be issued to people from predominantly Muslim countries, and the strong resistance to accepting refugees from war-ravaged countries in the Middle-East, most notably Syria. They are also relevant to analogous issues in Europe.

For Becker, the main function of culture, including religion, is to help humans suppress the anxiety that comes from their unique human awareness that an individual's life is not only fragile but also finite. Culture mitigates that anxiety by symbolically raising human beings above the merely physical realm and offering them hope that the individual self can transcend the impermanence of the mortal body in ways that manage the feeling that life, in Macbeth's words, is 'a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury yet signifying nothing'.

The most recent newsletter from the Foundation (November 2018) contains an interview with Jonathan Bassett (professor of psychological science at Lander University) about political, cultural and moral issues since the election of President Trump.

<http://ernestbecker.org/projects/becker-and-criminal-justice/jonathan-bassett/>

Becker's theories are explained at length with a wealth of research findings in *The Worm at the Core: on the role of death in life* by Sheldon Solomon and his co-authors, Allen Lane 2015. There's an engaging and informative university lecture about them, given by Sheldon Solomon and published on 29 May 2018, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wVTyVGCbAXE>.

## 6) What U Lookin @?



'What are you looking at?' asks the title of this lecture, published in autumn 2018. Human beings first started asking each other this question about 70,000 years ago. But the language in which it is formulated here – 'what u lookin @?' – is the language of tweeting and text-messaging, which is currently less than 25 years old.

Young people have always grown up in an anxious world, and have always needed to learn how to stand there, take stock, look. But nowadays looking has certain distinctive new dimensions, symbolised by the international conventions of youth culture and social media.

The lecture was delivered by Robin Richardson in Leeds, London and Oslo to mark the twentieth anniversary of the publication in 1997 of the Runnymede Trust report entitled Islamophobia – a challenge for us all. Its themes were illustrated by a series of symbolic images and icons and it can be found at <http://www.insted.co.uk/lookin2018.pdf>

## 7) New positive narratives



The Countering Islamophobia Toolkit, published in autumn 2018, arose from a European-wide two-year project covering Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Portugal and UK. It was led by the Centre for Ethnicity and Racism Studies at the University of Leeds and had many practical implications for education systems, and for the work and training of journalists throughout the western world.

It focused on (a) dominant Islamophobic narratives across Europe and (b) the corresponding counter-narratives that need to be developed in order to challenge and replace them. Its final report is authored by Ian Law, Amina Easat-Daas and Salman Sayeed, and can be accessed [at https://cik.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/36/2018/09/2018.09.17-Job-44240.01-CIK-Final-Booklet.pdf](https://cik.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/36/2018/09/2018.09.17-Job-44240.01-CIK-Final-Booklet.pdf).

There is a useful introduction by Amina Easat-Daas at <https://theconversation.com/how-to-tackle-islamophobia-the-best-strategies-from-around-europe-106092>.

## 8) Faith in Us



Produced and published by the Equaliteach consultancy in the UK, Faith in Us is a substantial handbook for teachers in both secondary schools and primary. There are over 20 lesson plans and activities, and also sections dealing with background information and starting points; frequently raised topics; the definition and nature of Islamophobia; and recognising and responding to Islamophobic incidents. It is introduced at <https://www.equaliteach.co.uk/faith-in-us/>

There are also two very watchable short videos, the one for use in primary schools and the other for use in secondary:

Faith in Us – primary: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GqsLij1ak4>

Faith in Us – secondary: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2JxjCIWFMu8>

## 9) Democratic renewal



"We shall never build a progressive internationalism on the basis of a democratic fix," writes Neal Lawson. 'We need democratic renewal at both UK and European level. When thinking about Brexit and Europe, we should remember the words of Hans Magnus Enzensberger: 'short term hopes are

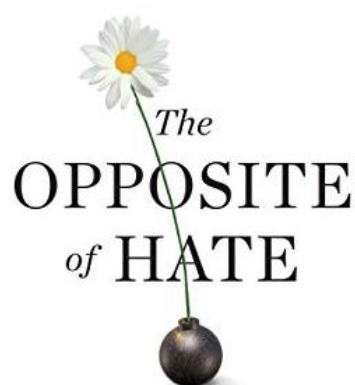
futile long term resignation is suicidal."

"Over two years on from the vote," Lawson continues, "and now heading fast for the Brexit door, progressives are still in a mess when it comes to Europe and are in danger of turning a crisis into a terminal democratic and political catastrophe. How did we get here – and what do we need to consider before we make any future moves, in particular a second referendum? ... More than anything the process that gets us there has to:

- 1) examine fully the deep causes of the Brexit vote
- 2) understand the deep and probably abiding cost of a second referendum
- 3) build a deeper democratic path to that vote
- 4) construct a reform agenda for the EU and not just press the rewind button
- 5) put in place a domestic reform agenda which speaks to the causes of the explosive Brexit vote."

Lawson's important article was published in September 2018 and is at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/uk/neal-lawson/people-s-vote-on-brexit-be-careful-what-you-wish-for>

## 10) Repairing our humanity



The Opposite of Hate is by the American commentator Sally Kohn. Published in April 2018 and subtitled A Field Guide to Repairing Our Humanity, it ranges widely from bullying in schools to voting for Donald Trump, from white supremacy to troublesome trolls, from terrorism to genocide. 'Alongside the hateful history of the world,' writes Kohn, 'are stories of transcending hate: finding peace after genocide, granting liberty after oppression, even just inching toward equality in the wake of horrific injustice. Hate is no more hardwired into our world than

it is into our brains. Change is possible.'

'The opposite of hate,' she says, 'is the beautiful and powerful reality of how we are all fundamentally linked and equal as human beings. The opposite of hate is connection.'

Looking back on her career, Kohn offers a rueful self-description:

'I was sort of trained to hate. Before I became a television commentator, I worked for fifteen years as a community organiser, fighting for policy reform on issues

like lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights, health care, criminal justice and immigration.

'Right-wingers were my enemies, and I hated them.

'... Donald Trump's election to the presidency of the United States of America made my blood boil. I couldn't believe the level of hate he so readily and proudly spewed against Muslims, women, immigrants and African-Americans.

'I remember feeling dumbfounded when George W Bush was re-elected in 2004 ... I may not have consciously categorised Bush voters as less than human, but I certainly thought they were less than American and certainly less than me – less smart, less understanding and, ironically enough, less compassionate.

'I didn't think any of that was particularly hateful.

'I just thought I was correct.'

The book's themes are attractively and vividly introduced by the author in two talks on Youtube:

The Culture of Hate (18 minutes, 10 April 2018):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BzeTjn0R2VY>

Insiders and Outsiders (three minutes, 19 June 2018):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RCLn0YAOrM0>

## 11) More in common



Jo Cox was elected to the House of Commons in the UK's 2015 General Election to represent the constituency of Batley and Spen in Yorkshire. She made her maiden speech on 3 June 2015 and began by describing the constituency itself:

"Batley and Spen is a gathering of typically independent, no-nonsense and proud Yorkshire towns and villages. Our communities have been deeply enhanced by immigration, be it of Irish Catholics across the constituency or of Muslims from Gujarat in India or from Pakistan, principally from Kashmir.

"While we celebrate our diversity, what surprises me time and time again as I travel around the constituency is that we are far more united and have far more in common with each other than things that divide us."

At 12:53 pm on 16 June 2016 Jo Cox was fatally shot and stabbed outside a library in Birstall, West Yorkshire, where she was about to hold a constituency surgery. Her assailant had links to the US-based neo-Nazi group National Alliance and at his trial a witness stated that, as he killed her, he shouted, 'This is for Britain. Britain will always come first'.

A phrase Jo Cox used in her maiden speech – 'more in common' – became the title of a book about her life and of a piece of dance drama about her values. Also it features as a motto in a coat of arms in her memory, shown above, and is the



name of an international charity devoted to working for partnership and reconciliation. It aims to develop and deploy positive narratives that tell a new story of 'us', celebrating what all people have in common across lines of difference and division.

The charity works in partnership with a wide range of civil society organisations, and with philanthropy, business, faith, education and the media. It has national hubs in France, Germany, the UK and the US. Its first publications include the following:

Hidden Tribes: a study of America's polarised landscape by Stephen Hawkins, Daniel Yudkin, Miriam Juan-Torroes and Tim Dixon, published in October 2018, <https://www.moreincommon.com/hidden-tribes/>

The Psychology of Authoritarian Populism: a bird eye's view by Daniel Yudkin, published in June 2018, <https://www.moreincommon.com/the-psychology-of-authoritarian-populism>

Both these publications are academic social psychology. But also both are intended for, and readily accessible to, non-specialists. With regard to current issues in the UK, practical and readable articles about mediation, meeting and dialogue include:

The imperatives of mutual recognition by Alice Thwaite, Open Democracy, 19 February 2019 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/transformation/alice-thwaite/imperatives-of-mutual-recognition>

The trip from London to Lincolnshire showed me Brexit divide's depth by Ian Jack, 16 February 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/feb/16/trip-london-lincolnshire-brexit-divide?CMP=share>

National dialogue: post-Brexit, we need a UK-wide coming together by Gabrielle Rifkind, 26 January 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/uk/gabrielle-rifkind/post-brexit-we-need-uk-wide-dialogue>

Where next? How to cope with Brexit anxiety by Susie Orbach, 26 January, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/jan/26/which-way-next-how-to-cope-with-the-psychological-uncertainty-of-brexit>

A People's Vote won't heal Brexit divisions – we need a People's Debate by Rosemary Bechler, 5 December 2018, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/rosemary-bechler/rest-and-west-thoughts-on-brexit-and-migration-part-two>

Helping people find common ground about Brexit by Perry Walker, 23 October 2018 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/transformation/perry-walker/helping-people-to-find-common-ground-on-brexit>

## 12) Joy in the public square



That famous dream of shared humanity and world community, adopted as the anthem of the European Union. Transformatively performed here in a city that has an infamous place in the histories of Europe's dark times.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a23945btJYw>

Freely translated, Schiller's poem says joy or bliss is like a shower of sparks from paradise –

As if drunk with fire  
we enter your sacred presence,  
and your magic binds together  
what custom and convention  
hold strictly apart.  
All mortals are members of a single family,  
a single web of kinship,  
wherever and whenever  
your soft wings hover.

---

This miscellany was compiled by Robin Richardson in December 2018, and was revised and expanded in February 2019.

To return or go to the home page of the Insted website, click [www.insted.co.uk](http://www.insted.co.uk)